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Editor  
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## SOME RECENT TRENDS IN WESLEYAN-ARMINIAN THOUGHT

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### I. INTRODUCTION

For the past ten or fifteen years a revival of careful scholarship and courageous theological inquiry has been observable in holiness circles. One explanation, perhaps, has been the great increase in the number of trained holiness scholars, both in educational centers and in administrative positions. The resurrection and revitalization of the National Holiness Association conventions, with their emphasis on study seminars in the conventions, has had much to do with these overall healthy trends.

Especially to be commended is Dr. Kenneth Geiger who, while president of the NHA, sponsored high level seminars in strategic locations, the cream of which he edited in three significant volumes, *Insights Into Holiness*, *Further Insights into Holiness*, and *The Word and the Doctrine*. A subsequent fourth volume has been published, *Protecting Our Heritage*, compiled jointly by Myron F. Boyd and Merne A. Harris.

The rise of three Arminian-Wesleyan graduate seminaries has undoubtedly contributed largely to this situation. I refer to Asbury Theological Seminary at Wilmore, Kentucky, Nazarene Theological Seminary at Kansas City, Missouri, and Western Evangelical Seminary at Portland, Oregon. Another factor has been a large expansion in the holiness publishing enterprise, producing a new and fresh, this-generation holiness literature. For many years we were in the doldrums of majoring on reprints of 19th century classics, but they did not challenge and convince the younger generation as we had hoped. This stopgap device is no longer needed, for numerous holiness books have been written within the last fifteen years which have not in any sense been stale rehashes, but which have broken new ground. In addition, two complete new Bible commentaries have been produced, *The Wesleyan Bible Commentary* and *The Beacon Bible Commentary*, plus some volumes of a third, *The Evangelical Bible Commentary*.

From this immense activity many new insights and original contributions have sprung into print. In some areas certain new ideas have been sufficiently advocated as to constitute at least incipient trends.

To isolate these trends and to precisely state them is not easy; and in seeking to discuss them I shall not attempt to document them thoroughly. I shall only pinpoint certain emphases which have impressed me, in my general reading and listening.

## II. THE CONCEPT OF EXPERIENCE

There seems to be a trend toward playing down an emphasis on Christian experience as an emotional event and to direct attention to experience as a personal relationship with God. This relationship begins in a crisis of the new birth, is clarified and confirmed in the crisis of entire sanctification, but remains valid only as it is an ongoing dialogical relationship with the Lord as friend with friend. This emphasis is not really new but seems to have found more vigorous articulation in the last two or three years. Representative, possibly, is the position of Harvey J. S. Blaney in the *Asbury Seminarian*, entitled "Wesleyan Theology Today." He speaks of "...a diminishing tendency to seek for a standardized type of experience."<sup>1</sup> Again he insists: "Christian experience encompasses far more than the two crises of justification and sanctification... the effects of which we strive to maintain." He further describes the "sanctified life" as the "daily perpetuation of the crisis of sanctification."<sup>2</sup>

## II. RETURN TO BIBLICAL TERMINOLOGY

There is a significant trend in the area of terminology. A few years ago there was a hue and cry for the replacement of traditional terms such as holiness, sanctification and perfection, with new, more modern and more acceptable equivalents. Against this demand J. B. Chapman wrote *The Terminology of Holiness*.<sup>3</sup> Even as recent as 1962 the issue was alive, and Roy S. Nicholson discussed it at the NHA convention, stating that he too had once been enamored by the allure of new terms, but had come to see that any gains would be more than counter-balanced by the losses.

In the last few years the pendulum seems to have swung. Now, younger scholars especially, who possibly are reflecting the revival of biblical theology, are insisting that the emphasis not be upon rigid doctrinal statements, but upon strictly biblical categories and terms, such as sanctification and holiness to be preached in their biblical context.

## III. NEED-CENTERED APPROACH

Closely allied with the desire for biblical terminology has been a noticeable trend toward a decrease in insistence on doctrinal precision in favor of greater attention to a need-centered approach. Perhaps this trend is the theological counterpart of the swing in education away from subject-centered teaching to pupil-centered teaching. Be that as it may, it does seem that many professors and pastors are not overly concerned to prove argumentatively and doctrinally a second crisis experience. Instead there

is the emphasis on biblical exegesis , noted above, and with it a concern for the individual at the point of his need, irrespective of technical categories. The aim is victory, i.e., a satisfactory and satisfying experience with God now. The approach is: instead of stressing the fact that there are two works of grace which it is the duty of everyone to seek and profess, it is better to help every struggling Christian face up to his particular problem, his recurrent point of defeat, and teach him to look to Christ for victory at that point. The thought seems to be that sooner or later the honest Christian will reach a point of complete yieldedness and establishment on a high level of spiritual sensitivity and reality. Then he should be helped to understand this as heart holiness.

## V. DEFINITIVE ISOLATION OF THE CARNAL MIND

What is the difference between carnality and human infirmity? This question has challenged profoundly the best thinking of holiness leaders for some years. And the end is not yet. Out of this struggle has come an attempt toward a sharper definition of eradicable sin. For Wesleyans the problem is acute, for they do not find in the Bible any concessions made to sin, either actually or by means of a system of imputed righteousness. The practice of sinning must be stopped and the state of double-mindedness terminated.

But what is the sin nature which makes a Christian carnal? I have said the question is acute because we find no compromise with sin in the Bible. That is only one reason for our concern. The other is the seeming failure of many holiness people to demonstrate any great superiority in the realm of grace as a result of a second experience. In some cases we find obstinacy, irritability, forms of neurosis, apparent selfishness, inconsistency, unreliability, and race prejudice. Sometimes these faults are so glaring as to seem like sins in their manifestations, and to evidence a state which is suspiciously like carnality. It would be easy to write all these poor examples off by saying that they are false professors, and have either never been truly sanctified, or have lost the blessing. This would unquestionably be true in many cases . But what about those who seem to be spiritually minded—who give evidence of loving the Lord with all their heart, sacrificially: who testify clearly to a second crisis experience which they are sure has made—and still makes—a difference in their lives? Should their testimony be discounted entirely because people who know them—maybe even live with them--wish their experience had made much more difference?

There are some who may be tempted to surrender the theological ship of Wesleyanism altogether, and retreat to the position that we can really have only an imputed holiness, and that the sin-

ful nature is so much a part of human nature that only at death can we be delivered. But the more thoughtful theologians in the holiness movement are not willing to go in that direction for two very simple reasons: it is neither scriptural nor reasonable. Therefore they have chosen to pursue a more difficult, though more realistic and fair course. This is to carefully divide between sin and the scars of sin. Psychology had helped us here by showing us that the roots of behavior are complex and may be physiological as well as moral and spiritual. Poor hearing, high blood pressure, and such ailments will influence the tone of one's personality and the nature of one's spontaneous reactions. Temperament plays its part, as do also cultural background, maturity, and general intelligence.

We must be faithful in affirming that man apart from grace has a bias toward selfishness and an aversion to God, and that the residue of this keeps up a running warfare (perhaps we would call it a "cold war"—though it sometimes gets rather warm) after conversion. But we need to be equally quick to affirm that a cure in a second crisis experience is not a "cure-all." There remain scars and faults which are amoral, but which have moral potential. In other words, a man's deepest inner bias in God's sight may be wholly Godward, yet he may show less than ideal poise under pressure. His love may be strong, but his nerves weak, and his judgment even weaker.

Consequently there can be observed in the literature of recent years an increased tolerance and understanding on the part of holiness people, and a greater reluctance to brand as carnal everything that needs correction. With this is developing rapidly a greater emphasis on the dynamics of growth in grace. Wesleyans who have written in this vein include Delbert Rose, L. T. Corlett, Leo Cox, Roy S. Nicholson, Everett Cattrell, and W. Curry Mavis. Perhaps the consensus could be summarized thus: There is a core of eradicable sin at the heart of a larger depravity. This core is a positive bias toward self-idolatry, which constitutes a constant and abnormal drive toward pride, unbelief, and self-will. The self may be rid of this. In its place may be a deep inner core of unrestricted and undivided devotion to God. But this may not always be evident to others. There may remain possible subconscious complexes and phobias, prejudices, and physical and mental infirmities which will still prompt less than ideal reactions at times in the rough and tumble of everyday life. If the heart is sound at its core, the Holy Spirit will gradually discipline and perhaps modify this peripheral depravity. Some of it may indeed have to wait until at death we are delivered from this body, with its infirm brain, nerves, and circulatory system.

## **VI. TOWARD TREATING FAILURE AS SIN**

While Wesleyan scholars have been busy seeking to differ-

entiate more precisely between carnality and humanity, there are signs of a movement to take a stricter view of what constitutes an act of sin needing repentance and forgiveness. This is not widespread, perhaps, but there are pockets here and there of this concern. The feeling is that obvious failures in Christ-likeness should be frankly labeled as sins and dealt with as such, even though they fall short of deliberate wrongdoing. It is believed that to disguise them as innocent infirmities is to lead to hypocrisy, hardheartedness, and pride, resulting in a spiritual stalemate. The opinion is that the humility and sensitivity which weeps over failure as sin far safer than the defensive stance which passes off the failure as an innocent fault.

One might pause to ask whether the real cause of such defensiveness is an overly tolerant concept of sin or a faulty understanding of sin and holiness. I refer to the widespread misunderstanding that any act of sin prove the existence of a prior root of sin. In other words the position is that “if this is sin, then I must not have been sanctified. But I know I was sanctified, therefore this can not be sin. And I dare not call it sin, lest I deny what God has done, and cast away my confidence.”

We can well agree that people do need to be emancipated from a fear of calling sin by its right name because of a misguided loyalty to a past—or even present—experience. A single act of sin does not prove a prior root of sin; it does not prove a defective experience of entire sanctification; it does not even prove that one did not begin the day, this morning, in the fullness of the blessing. It only proves that as a human being one is still a free moral agent, still on probation, and that in this situation or temptation he made a wrong decision, or permitted a wrong reaction. Without doubt a man free from the root of sin is less apt to sin; any failure will be out of character, and entirely contrary to the moral momentum of his life. But sin is always possible. And to camouflage it, when it happens, as something less than sin, is to compound gravely the offense, and this could be even more devastating than the sin itself. It needs to be confessed, amends made where possible, the efficacy of Christ’s atoning blood claimed and lessons learned; then the believer should go on, avoiding both a light-hearted flippancy which belittles the event, and the opposite error of brooding which so demoralizes that one is even more vulnerable the next time.

However, while this concern is surely a needed and overdue corrective, it is a corrective which must be guarded against over-compensation, which could produce a new distortion. Previously we discussed the trend toward greater charity in labeling human flaws, insisting that a clear distinction must ever be maintained between carnality and infirmity, sins and mistakes. Now

we are talking about what seems to be a move in the opposite direction, an advocacy of a greater willingness to call our failures and mistakes sins.

Whatever gain there may be in the trend toward greater understanding and charity could easily be lost if *this* trend should carry the day, and then be pushed too far; all of this forces us back to our fundamental doctrine of sin. If the element of moral demerit in God's sight must be present for a moral event to be sin in the most normative biblical sense, then it is still true that some failures may not be sin in God's sight. Therefore, while we should be quick to agree with the diagnosis of the Holy Spirit when He condemns us, there is no virtue in trumping up charges against ourselves, or in calling an action sin if it really was not. That can be a false humility and a false honesty, which can play straight into the hands of the "accuser of the brethren."

Let us be honest both ways. If our impulsive, un-ideal reaction or action was really only poor judgment mixed with sick nerves, then honesty does not demand that we label it anything more than that. This is not to say that we should not take it seriously. We may still need to apologize. We should by all means try to correct the cause and prevent a recurrence. And we should strive to learn our lesson. But taking it seriously does not demand that we call it sin unless it is. There is nothing to be gained by letting self-recrimination exceed the condemnation of God, who sees the motives and intents of the heart.

## VII. TOWARD A MORE DYNAMIC CONCEPT

Some of our teachers have sought to express holiness concepts wholly in dynamic and relational terms. Perhaps some measure of the influence of psychological behaviorism and philosophical positivism can be seen here. Carnality, it is pointed out, is wholly a wrong willing; its correction is in a surrender of the will. Sin is held to be totally a wrong relationship; its purging is seen to be the correction of these relationships. The merit in this view is, of course, its emphasis upon the growing and progressive nature of holiness, and its avoidance of the peril of a "static fixed-state purity." But if we are not careful we will reduce what has been traditionally thought of as a definite work of grace to a mere work of man, and thus fall into the Pelagian trap. This does not do justice to the full biblical concepts of either sinfulness or holiness, which sees both as what a man is, not just what he does. We cannot totally discard the terms "state" and "nature" without doing violence to the Scripture.

May I suggest that there are some basic foundation stones in holiness thought, as understood during the last 100 years. According to Delbert R. Rose,<sup>4</sup> Joseph H. Smith summarized these

as follows:

The depravity or carnality of man's nature.

The imperative necessity of regeneration in every case to begin... the Christian life.

That carnality, though subdued and subjugated, remains after regeneration.

That the Blood of Christ provided for its complete removal in this present life.

That this removal connects with the promised baptism with the Spirit.

That the baptism with the Spirit is not the same as, but is subsequent to, the birth of the Spirit.

That it is instantaneous.

That it is to be earnestly sought.

That it is conditioned on entire consecration.

That it is received by faith.

That it results in the abiding presence of God.

In the *Wesleyan Theological Journal* (1970), Roy S. Nicholson's summary is very little different:

The principal elements of the doctrine of Christian Perfection are: it is distinct from and subsequent to regeneration; it is a Spirit-wrought experience of God's grace; it is by faith, and consequently the salvation which it produces is said to be instantaneously wrought within; it cleanses the heart from all sin, whether sin be called "original" or "inbred"; it perfects one in love, so that he loves God supremely, and his neighbor as himself; and it empowers the soul to do the whole will of God.<sup>5</sup>

May I be so bold as to suggest that within this framework of standard Wesleyanism there are five especially indispensable principles by which every trend must be judged:

1. A real inherited depravity in the moral nature.
2. The continued presence of this depravity in the regenerate.
3. The unitary, contravolitional, and dynamic nature of this sin principle.
4. The necessity of the direct and supernatural action of the Holy Spirit for its cleansing-hence a "work of grace."
5. The provision for this cleansing as central to New Testament soteriology.

Let us be cautious about any psychological interpretation,



revised terminology, popular understanding, or theological reformulation, which would tend to bleed holiness of its super-natural and distinctive nature as a work of grace. This would be too great a price to pay for our commendable desire to avoid either a static concept of holiness or a Calvinistically conceived effectual grace, sovereignly infused. We want to underscore the responsibility of the believer to maintain a volitional moment by-moment responsiveness to the on-going leadership of the Spirit. But in stressing this we do not wish to obscure the biblical and empirical truth that until God the Holy Spirit has sanctified one wholly, he has in his moral nature a foe which is both subvolitional and contravolitional and will prevent a fully normal or satisfactory experience of the Christian life.

#### DOCUMENTATIONS

1. Harvey J. S. Blaney, "The Wesleyan Message Today," *The Asbury Seminarian* (Wilmore, Kentucky: Pub. by Asbury Theological Seminary, Oct. 1, 1968), Vol. XXII, No. 4, p. 16.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 14.

3. J. B. Chapman, *The Terminology of Holiness* (Kansas City, Missouri: Beacon Hill Press, 1947).

4. Delbert R. Rose, *A Theology of Christian Experience* (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship Pub., 1965), p. 227.

5. Roy S. Nicholson, "The Holiness Emphasis in the Wesley Hymns," *The Wesleyan Theological Journal* (Concord, Michigan: Pub. by the Wesleyan Theological Society, 1970), p. 51.

# A HERMENEUTICAL APPROACH TO JOHN WESLEY<sup>1</sup>

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## **I. INTRODUCTION**

### **A. The Methodological Problem**

John Wesley's theological and religious contribution to the church has been honored by numerous interpretations, all called Wesleyan, but differing in more or less important ways from Wesley's total thought and/or from other "Wesleyanisms." Just as there are several Calvinisms, Lutheranism, Augustinianisms and Arminianisms, Fundamentalisms and Evangelicalisms, Liberalisms and Conservatism, so there are several Wesleyanisms.

The problem lies in the realm of methodology. Almost any system of theology can be derived from Wesley, as from Luther or Augustine. But each is built on a selection of passages from his works congenial to the basic philosophic assumptions of the author. The choice and organization of ideas, then, may be consciously or unconsciously selected on the basis of a prior point of view which is seldom questioned. The result can be an Aristotelian Wesley, a Platonic Wesley, a Schleiermacherian Wesley, a Whiteheadian Wesley, a Social Gospel Wesley, a Second Blessing Wesley, or any number of other kinds of theology termed Wesleyanism, depending on the personal orientation of the author. None of this is necessarily wrong, good or bad, it must at least be recognized and acknowledged.

The present author, convinced that Wesley can become contemporary, is not unaware of the problems involved in interpretation. Wesley was a man of his day. He spoke out of the thought forms of his day and to the peculiar problems of men in that day. If he is to speak to us in our day, some method of interpretation will be needed to bridge over the historical changes that separate us.

The theology which is presented in this study is hopefully and frankly a Wesleyan theology: but which Wesleyanism? This theology is not Wesleyan in the sense that it is assumed that Wesley is its final authority—or even that his interpretation of the Bible is considered authoritative for it in every instance. Wesley was orthodox in the traditional sense, yet he called himself a man of one Book—the Bible. Here are creed and Scripture, two authorities for Christian faith, neither yielding its autonomy to the other. Systematic theology and biblical theology have not yet merged. There is a dilemma here which Wesley never solved nor did he attempt to do so. It was an "openness to the future" which urged

him on into creative insights and which urges us on into further discoveries in the same spirit. Only in the sense of Wesley's openness to the depths of truth do we consider this to be Wesleyan, though we do share in the dynamic insights which we understand were his.

## **B. Preliminary Observations About Wesley's Major Emphasis**

Wesley's concern was the relating of God's grace to human experience, theology to religion, logic to life, the church to society. Nothing can define sanctification in practical terms any better than that which is involved in such relations. Belief in salvation, "in principle but not in fact," was to him the major weakness of the church of his day and most particularly an interpretation of the contemporary Calvinism of his day which advocated a concept of freedom from the consequences of sin which did not grant freedom from sin itself.

Wesley's profound and dynamic religious insight was the power of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Christian. This Power was a real, Spiritual Energy linking the divine reality to human experience. It was the Personness of God touching the personness of men. It was an actual moral transformation of human life. It engaged all that the human person is in grace. It put the individual believer into the Church—the corporate fellowship. It put the Church in the midst of society with a task to do in transforming the world in which men find themselves.

The lure of Wesley is not primarily his theology. That was traditional enough. He was not an innovator. The contribution of Wesley is in his ability to put theology into flesh and blood. The goal was theology incarnated in mere man. And herein lies the power, and the problem, of Wesleyanism. The *power* of the Spirit-filled life is not limited to the Wesleyan segment of Christianity. One does not have to believe in any "Wesleyan" position to experience that. The problem lies in that attempt to articulate the perfection of theological absolutes as often expressed in theology to the imperfections of human nature and yet to be able to honestly witness to a Christian experience of total love to God and man.

## **C. Wesley's Theological Foundation**

Authentic Wesleyanism would have to take at least three factors into consideration: (1) Wesley in the context of his own world and task; (2) his basic theological positions relative to God and man; and (3) his theological conclusion about the nature of full salvation with these matters in view. In a word, we seek a hermeneutic which will fairly interpret all Wesley taught.

## **II. WESLEY - THE MAN**

Wesley's personal attitudes, important as they are to an understanding of his entire religious legacy to us, can only be suggested here.

### **A. Wesley Was A Man of His Time**

Wesley spoke of his day. He was caught up in the cultural milieu of his generation and the ritual of his Church. He was marked by the prejudices, beliefs and biases of eighteenth century Britain. Though he transcended England's moral "ideals," the essential historical conditioning of the man must be taken into consideration as we interpret him.

### **B. Wesley Was A Man in Controversy**

This fact alone should alert us to a pair of truths. (1) He could transcend his environment. His convictions set him apart as a leader. He had convictions significant enough to challenge men and raise worthy controversy. (2) But, too, what Wesley said was largely polemic in nature. We ordinarily hear but one side of the conversation and often make judgments of him as if that were his well-rounded and considered opinion. It takes some patience and care to get around the full circle of theological debate and find the true center of his thought.

### **C. Wesley Was Subject to Change**

Stemming from the above observations is the uncomfortable discovery (which we may conclude is a weakness) that Wesley changes his mind. He does not always "stay put." This can be somewhat disturbing until a little deeper observation reveals interesting things. Wesley is not afraid to alter his position when circumstances demand it. He even reverses his stand; e.g., from the conviction that one who has found "perfection" could never lose it, to the reluctant concession that it could be lost—and regained—but need not be lost, or may not be regained. He altered his opinion about the relative importance, and the timing, of crisis over process, at times stressing growth and at other times the crisis aspect of sanctification.

But when one sorts out the subjects about which he allows himself the luxury of change (in the face of the unchangeable), it becomes obvious that he is discovering the difference between the "substance" of doctrine and the "circumstance" of it, a category of analysis which he considers of real importance. In other words, some truths are firm, and biblical study and experience continue to prove them firm. They are the "fundamentals," such as the truth that men may be saved from all sin in this life. The method, time,

adaptation to imperfect humanity and a host of other questions having no direct scriptural word, yield their truth to us as to Wesley, only in experience. As important as these truths may be, they are not revealed truths, but historical and in that sense peripheral. Wesley did not consider any question relative to faith beneath his dignity or unworthy of his concern. But he did not fall into the trap of confusing the circumstance with the substance of Truth. Though he spent some time discussing the peripheral issues he did not permit them to become central and divisive or distracting. How wise would his professed followers be were they to emulate this rare quality.

“Wesleyanisms” which aspire to a more authentic Wesleyanism would explore again and again those areas in holiness theology and practice which are biblically central and unchanging, and those areas which are tentative and subject to constant openness of mind and careful attention to “circumstance.” Listen to Wesley:

I have again and again, with all the plainness I could, declared what our constant doctrines are; whereby we are distinguished only from heathens, or nominal Christians; not from any that worship God in spirit and truth. Our main doctrines, which include all the rest, are three —that of repentance, of faith, and of holiness. The first of these we account, as it were, the porch of religion; the next, the door; the third, religion itself.<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps the greatest “weakness” in Wesley was his greatest strength.

### **III. WESLEY’S BASIC THEOLOGICAL POSITION REGARDING GOD AND MAN**

Whatever a Wesleyan theology may be, it cannot honestly be limited to anyone aspect of Wesley’s own many-faceted teachings and life emphases. To abstract from the rich grasp of truth, which was Wesley’s genius, any single line from the complex of truths is to distort his truth and caricature his teachings. When “holiness” is presumed to be his central message (which is the presupposition of this study), it must be the totality of what he conceived to be holiness and not some one aspect of it which neglects or is blind to the full-orbed scope of holiness.

#### **A. God**

The key to Wesley’s theological emphasis was his concept of God (which is, incidentally, true of any approach to theology or Christian thought). He refused to speculate about God. What God has revealed is what we need to know. What we need to know about

Him has to do with man's salvation, therefore knowledge of God will be in respect of those who need salvation, namely, mankind. In this way Wesley avoids the pitfalls of a philosophic approach to God which results in ideas about Him often very far from that revealed in Scripture and which react back on soteriology to its hurt. Since God has revealed himself in Christ, through the Holy Spirit's ministry, then it is in the relationship of man to God, at the point of revelation and response, that his major theological emphasis is to be found.

Without losing anything of the biblical concept of the sovereignty of God, Wesley could come to terms with the idea of man in relation to God which does full justice to his true dignity as man, and to his sin as the truly serious and deadly thing that it is. However inadequate Wesley's philosophical presuppositions may have been in the light of contemporary understanding of reality, his insights into the nature of the human situation were sound. Wesley was fully aware of the theological implications of his own insights. But as rational as Wesley was, he was less embarrassed by philosophical inadequacies than he was about a possible surrender of the religious insight which he believed to be biblical. And it was because the more he knew about human nature and the more practical the Bible seemed to him to be that he was willing to be "a man of one book" rather than to be merely logical for the sake of logic.

## **B. Man**

Wesley's concept of holiness lay between what he understood about God (His creatorship and governorship) and His grace, and what he postulated about man and his humanness (created in God's image, yet made of dust). Man as a person is (1) historical, (2) personal, (3) dynamic, (4) paradoxical-fallible, very human and often irrational and neurotic, and (5) social. Whether Wesley would itemize these particular features or not, or list them in this order, is not only problematic, but essentially irrelevant. The fact is that his major affirmations "make sense" when understood in the light of these insights, and do not make sense otherwise.

## **C. Historical**

Wesley had a sound sense of history. Man participates in history. He has roots in the past, profound involvement in the present, and from this "pad" he launches himself into the future. He is not a mere observer "out there" but a part of the happening here and now. He is, in a real sense, influenced by his environment, shares in its ideals and prejudices, understands and communicates

in its idioms, is limited by its structure, thinks in its terms. Christian man is not discrete from human life but lives as a vital and participating element in it. But he is not, by the grace of God, hopelessly imprisoned by this environment, unable to make contrary choices and embark on creative enterprises. But his choices, understandings, progress and prejudices must take his relativity to history into account.

Wesley did not seek to pattern any man's religious experience. No one under Wesley's ministry could seek for, with his approval, an experience like Wesley's or to conform to any psychological format said to be normative or to be anticipated. Wesley's concern was a deep moral and spiritual renewal, not a patterned emotional response. Is it possible that Wesley's reluctance to describe his own experience of sanctifying grace was to prevent such superficial understanding of God's way with man? Or was his running comment in letters and *Journals* about himself, from virtual despair to rejoicing, and back again, the real theology he was preaching so that he did testify to the grace he preached but in a way not recognized by those of us who think in more absolutistic and stereotyped terms?

History, too, meant to him personal participation in God's grace. We may use the term "experience" if we understand by this, not an emotion but a real living involvement in grace that makes a difference in actual life situations. In fact, it was Wesley's insistence that holiness be experienced that contributed a wholly new connotation to the word as used then. When he said that holiness is love, the whole concept of holiness did a radical retake, and could and did create problems in theology not settled to this day. Holiness that could fit a man who is in history without taking him out of history seemed like a denial of the absoluteness of holiness; and it is a denial of any abstraction in the name of holiness. Love is not and cannot be abstract. It bears the biblical responsibility for "historicizing" holiness or putting holiness into history, or into life.

#### **D. Personal, i.e., Person-Centered**

Whatever else may be said of man, it is his personal relationships with which Wesley was concerned because he felt that this was what the Bible predicated about man. "Personal" means anything and everything about man having a bearing on his moral, intellectual, emotional, spiritual, volitional responsible self. It is opposed to man considered as an "it." Man is responsible down to the core of his being and in this responsibility relates himself, rightly or wrongly, to God and man. Personness excludes the notion of sin as a thing, as a "bad tooth," which is to be pulled out. Holiness is not a thing, a new mechanism, which is implanted in-

to the sum total of personality after the subtraction of sin has been accomplished. Less than this concept would make room for an amoral, even antinomian idea of man, destroying the high and holy thing sanctification is all about. Holiness and sin are religious terms. Holiness as love to God and man, not a state (a term Wesley was reluctant to employ because of its mechanical implications), emphasized the personal aspects of all steps in soteriology and when consistently applied as an interpretive principle of Wesleyan theology, clarifies most of its difficult features. Man is both in history and is a personal being sustaining religious relationships to God and man. Legal, mechanical and numerical figures of speech are just that—figures by which a spiritual, and dynamically personal, religious truth is symbolically portrayed.

### **E. Dynamic, i.e., Oriented Dynamically**

If a man is a historical being and a person, then dynamic is a proper way to characterize him. Man is not a lump of clay upon which is written the events of his life. He is, rather, a rational being reaching out, searching, reacting to, desiring, loving, changing, selecting and rejecting, reorganizing, maturing, making choices between alternatives—in short, a thoroughly dynamic entity. He has in some way a continuity of identity throughout the transformation, yet he is in the process of radical recreation (at least potentially) so long as he maintains rational life. Wesley was not shackled by a static concept of man, whatever his philosophical bias might have been. Hence, terminology which would seem to refer to a static, passive being is not typical of him. Wesley left a literature filled with ideas of man as one “in process.” Yet this process was not mechanical or determined but very dependent upon man’s own response to life, his fellows and to God.

### **F. Paradoxical, Human, Often Irrational and Neurotic**

Terms which are used to describe holiness and the victorious Christian life may sound too idealistic for the fallible, ignorant, weak, prejudiced, temptable thing men know themselves to be. (1) Racial effects of sin haunt the best of saints; prejudice limits the usefulness of the most dedicated Christians. Possibly no one is really free from some sort of handicapping neurosis or personality quirk. (2) The impulse to express love is not always strong or wisely exhibited. It is not always clear just what love is or ought to do in a given situation. (3) Self concern often seems to overshadow love for others—even God. (4) Wesley himself, he tells us, suffered debilitating depressions in which he doubted he had ever been a Christian. He was wise enough to know that all of this is not inconsistent with the kind of perfection of love he



tried to describe as the fulfilling of the whole law.

Holiness, in Wesley's mind, was not the "possession" of any man, but the continued, total humble reliance of each Christian on the mercy and merits of Christ. Nor, on the other hand, are we to live in fear and torment lest in our weakness, temptation and depression God should leave us. Somehow the superb, unchangeable and unchanging love of God, crowning us with its sufficiency and support, supplies the grace needed when the level of human fallibility sinks to impossibly low reserves. In fact, it is precisely a character of true holiness that it is ever more sensitive to deviation from God's perfect law and to any wrong and failure in one's own life. Holiness is the moment-by-moment impartation of the life of Christ to the human heart. From Him, not from us, is holiness. This treasure is in earthen vessels—"pots of clay," Wesley concurred.

The humanness of men is not the real handicap, not a matter for apology, certainly not something to be discarded, either in this life or in the next. It is the human which is the basis for fellowship, the means for communication, the arena for displaying the reflection of the glory of God. Jesus was man, God incarnate as the ideal man, not idealized man. In his own person, he brought God and man together and showed us what man ought to be and can be by the grace of God.

## **G. Social**

The historical, personal, dynamic, human entity outlined above culminates in the most fundamental thing that can be said about man because it includes all the rest; namely, that he is a social being. In emphasizing the need to be in right relationship to God as an element of holiness it is all too easy to forget the equally imperative matter of being in right relationship to men. Wesley never forgot this, at least after his "heartwarming" experience, and no Wesleyanism is authentic which loses this truth. Holiness, to Wesley, could not ignore or become insensitive to or withdraw from one's fellows. Here again, the nature of love as the meaning of holiness prevailed over any ascetic and defective concept of holiness. The evidence for holiness, to Wesley, was the recognizable social fruits of love. He expressed it thus:

Directly opposite to this [mysticism] is the Gospel of Christ. Solitary religion is not to be found there. "Holy Solitaries" is a phrase no more consistent with the gospel than holy adulterers. The gospel of Christ knows of no religion, but social; no holiness, but social holiness. Faith working by love is the length and breadth and depth and height of Christian perfection.<sup>3</sup>

#### IV. THE DYNAMIC OF WESLEYANISM

The third, and summarizing point—Wesley’s real hermeneutic—cannot be developed here for lack of time and space. It must, however, be identified. Love is the Wesleyan hermeneutic principle. Every strand of his thought, the warm heart of every doctrine, the passion of every sermon, the test of every claim to holiness was love. So central is love, that to be “Wesleyan” is to be committed to a theology of love. We must let Wesley say the ultimate word in the following passage which must, for the moment, bear the weight of the bold contention made in this study.

It were well you should be thoroughly sensible of this, ‘The heaven of heavens is love.’ There is nothing higher in religion; there is, in effect, nothing else; if you look for anything more than love, you are looking wide of the mark, you are getting out of the royal way, and when you are asking others, ‘Have you received this or that blessing?’ ‘if you mean anything but more love, you mean wrong; you are leading them out of the way, and putting them upon a false scent. Settle it then in your heart, that from the moment God has saved you from all sin, you are to aim at nothing more, but more of the love described in the thirteenth of the Corinthians. You can go no higher than this, till you are carried into Abraham’s bosom.’<sup>4</sup>

#### V. CONCLUSION—The Clue—Holiness as Personal Relationship

These are some of the insights regarding man’s nature under grace which made it possible for Wesley to “Preach holiness,” and thereby to make the mark on the Church and in his world which has transcended his own denomination and age, and which continues to challenge the Church to explore the deeper depths of the possibilities of grace and, in this new day of renewal, to lead the way to a valid theology of mission. No Wesleyanism should be judged negatively or positively without recognizing something of this approach to an interpretation of this great man.

Theology infused with a personal experience of God’s grace—this is Wesleyanism. We cannot account for Wesley by viewing him through his theological background, but we may understand his theological journey (for such it was) through his experience of grace. The new dimension of the possibility of a personal appropriation of the benefits of the atonement gradually reacted back on formal theology and, in Wesley’s case, there was neither time nor desire to iron out all the details of theology into a neat system. Wesley’s “heartwarming” was not the fruit of a theological concept of regeneration and sanctification, but **regeneration** and sanctification re-

ceived a fresh meaning as the warmed heart partook of the reality of which theology spoke.

The warmed heart provided that new dimension to theology which we are calling the personal dimension, and the five aspects described above form a unit—a principle of interpretation—which should help in defining Wesleyanism and interpreting it. These insights and points of view lie as a foundation for investigation of the Wesleyan presentation of the gospel—a theory of criticism. In it lies the conviction that man's relation to God and God's relation to man is a personal relation and that all facets of theology and life partake of this personal element and must be interpreted accordingly. If holiness and sin are religious matters and "religious" is the relation of man to God, then the conclusion that holiness is a right personal relation to God is meaningful.

#### DOCUMENTATIONS

1. This study is a shortened form of a section of a forthcoming book by the author which tentatively bears the title of *Love—The Dynamic of Wesleyanism*, to be published early in 1972 by the Beacon Hill Press, Kansas City, Missouri.
2. John Wesley, *Works*, "The Principles of Methodist Fathers Explained," 1/III, 472.
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# IMPLICATIONS IN WESLEYAN THOUGHT FOR A CRITIQUE OF EXISTENTIALISM <sup>1</sup>

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## INTRODUCTION

A difficult word to pronounce or spell, existentialism is even more difficult to define. This is true because there is a decided absence of any real system of thought on the part of those who wish to be classified as existentialists. In fact, for the existentialist, to define is to destroy. Existentialism is a life of questioning. Over a period of several years this word has occasionally been associated with the bearded Bohemian with unkempt clothes, with the long haired cafe singer plunking on an ancient guitar, with the beatnik poet reading his esoteric creations to espresso coffee-drinking listeners.

Existentialism has also been associated with an atheistic movement centered in France, propelled by a brilliant one-time resistance fighter turned essayist and dramatist, Jean-Paul Sartre. The term existentialism has further been associated with an attempt on the part of certain contemporary theologians to remake the Christian faith in terms of the culture in which we are now living.

As a distinguishable movement, existentialism can be seen as emerging from the life and the writings of a melancholy Danish gadfly, Søren Kierkegaard. With some amazing flashes of insight, he alternately jibed and cajoled the church and the society of his day until his contemporaries resented him bitterly. It is just his pungent criticism and biting sarcasm which has led many of Kierkegaard's twentieth century disciples to arise and call him blessed.

Existentialism is in reality more of a mood and an attitude than it is a system of thought. As such it can hardly be reduced to a set of tenets. Yet there are several characteristics which seem to be indicative of this expression of life which may aid in clarifying it.

## SUBJECTIVE MAN

One general feature is an emphasis upon the individual, along with a hostility toward all *systems* of thought. Existentialism seeks to exalt the personality and the personal experience of individuals. In fact, it is just this primacy of the existing individual that has suggested the name "existentialism." Each man is construed as his own point of intellectual departure. Jean-Paul Sartre put it: "... first of all, man exists turns up, appears on the scene,

and, only afterwards, defines himself.”<sup>2</sup> For the existentialist, man is primarily what he is or what he is becoming by means of his own action. It is in his own search for truth and meaning that man is himself caught up and involved.

John Wesley’s life and writings do of course antedate the contemporary existentialist movement. Yet, there seem to be certain implications and overtones in his works which are relevant to this modern intellectual mood. A cursory glance through Wesley’s writings might cause one to think that his emphasis upon the solitary man who stands condemned as a result of his own rebellion against God would show Wesley’s kinship with the existentialists.

What Wesley does, however, in contrast to the existentialist mood, is to declare that human personality as such is incomplete apart from a recognition of the Divine. Wesley has suggested that the Scriptures describe man as in a “state of sleep. He is gross, stupid, ignorant of whatever he is most concerned to know,”<sup>3</sup> he declared. Wesley was convinced that in man’s natural state it is not possible for him really to know anything, especially himself. For this reason, the Wesleyan consideration of man cannot comprise, first and foremost, a purely subjective study. Rather, it must center on an awareness of the fact that he is a contingent creature dependent upon something outside of himself. Yes, man is a solitary creature, Wesley would say, but his solitariness is meaningless apart from a relation to his Creator. He would insist that the proper understanding of man must begin with an understanding of his relationship to God, for apart from God man is nothing, accomplishes nothing, and arrives nowhere.

John Wesley seems to have suggested that if one were to attempt to begin with man’s subjectivity, he could not really do so, for apart from God man cannot understand who or what he really is. He poignantly wrote, “What a fool, what a blockhead, what a madman is he that forgets the very end of his creation.”<sup>4</sup> Full self-realization is not possible apart from God. In fact, there can be no self-realization; there can be, in reality, only the realization that one was made like God and needs to have that image restored. Man does not find himself unless and until he finds God. Dr. Paul Scherer has well phrased it:

For 400 years and more, ever since the dawn of modern history... man has struggled to know himself as man—it is almost impossible to assess the gains that have come by way of that struggle—only to have such catastrophe overtake him at last as would seem once and for all to underscore the fact that he cannot even know himself as man unless he knows himself under God. Where there is no God there is no man.<sup>5</sup>

This means that since one is notable to begin with his own subjectivity, he needs another fulcrum. This point of departure, for John Wesley, was the historic Jesus. Wesley would have declared that without the Christ of history any existential brooding or subjective analysis would be a futile venture, devoid of meaning.

This is in sharp contrast to the contemporary existential emphasis upon man's religious life; what he himself experiences is not necessarily related to the historical career of Jesus. For many of the more subjectively inclined existentialists the Gospel record was written to present not so much the life of Jesus as to reveal the experiences of the followers of Jesus. With such an understanding of the New Testament record, who Jesus himself was must be forever shrouded by the pall of the unknown and the unknowable. So it is that often the existentially oriented theologians suggest that to speak of Jesus in terms of any degree of demonstrable reality is totally irrelevant to contemporary man.

The influence of existentialism upon Christian theology has led to an emphasis upon individual man's subjective confrontation with the biblical "message" rather than with the truth of an historical person. A glance at the annotated New Testament published by John Wesley will demonstrate that, to him, Jesus of Nazareth was not an unknown or unknowable personality. Wesley accepted that the preaching of the New Testament had its foundation in fact - - that is, in the One who lived and died and rose again according to the Scriptures. For Wesley, it was the historic Jesus who gave meaning to man rather than man's religious experience which gives meaning to Jesus.

### **III. ABSOLUTE FREEDOM**

A second constitutive feature of existentialist thought is the emphasis placed upon' the absolute freedom of the individual man. Man alone, among all other beings, is a decision-making creature, blessed or cursed with the freedom to choose among a variety of possibilities in an absurd and mysterious existence. To be truly human, man must accept his freedom and thus conquer the despair which threatens him by a commitment to a way of life. He is said to need no authority beyond himself - - past, present, or future. He repudiates any and all bodies of beliefs as having no validity in his life. Morality is not *so much conformity as it is creation*. Man does not ask what he *must* do; man asks rather what he wants to do. Thus as in Freudianism desire determines destiny. It is existential man's exercise of his freedom which makes his action right.

In *The Flies*, Sartre has Orestes say:

Suddenly freedom crashed down upon me and swept me

off my feet. Nature sprang back, my youth went with the wind, and I knew myself alone, utterly alone in the midst of this well-meaning little universe....And there was nothing left in heaven, no right or wrong, nor anyone to give me orders.<sup>6</sup>

To exist in this absolute freedom means to exist “authentically,” to exist as man. For Sartre, there can be found no excuse for one’s action in the past nor is there any authentic meaning for existence to be discovered in the future. His only justification is *his choice* to act. Man is not; he is *becoming*. That is to say, he is what he is not; he is not what he is. The nihilistic implications of Sartrean existentialism are clear. One’s existence is a striving to become, but never a reaching; it is the striving after an illusion, a search for a phantom. Life is, in the final analysis, an encounter with nothingness.

Sartre would agree with Friedrich Nietzsche who taught that to accept God and to strive to do *His* will is actually to abandon freedom. It would not be sufficient for the existentialist to say that God *gave* man freedom, for this would be implicit essentialism. And any belief in a God, from the perspective of Sartre, is detrimental to human nature; it is construed as “bad faith.”

Some of Wesley’s bitterest opposition was to certain Calvinists of his day who insisted that a divine determinism destined those who were to be saved, with man’s choice playing no part in the scheme of salvation. One might assume that Wesley’s insistence upon man’s ability to *choose* would put him in close affinity to existentialism. However, the freedom which John Wesley espoused was not a freedom to do as one pleased. There is no justification for the assertion that Wesley was an antinomian, throwing over any firmly established moral order so that he could ascribe freedom to man. On the contrary, throughout his entire life Wesley was adamant in preaching that there were objective rights and wrongs, that it was not just man’s ideas which made for moral correctness.

Wesley believed that God gave to man certain immutable and perfect laws which are binding and can never be abrogated. These laws were written on the very hearts of men. “It pleased God,” wrote Wesley, “to make (men) with understanding, to discern truth from falsehood, good from evil....” “It is a spokesman for Satan who ‘speakest evil of the law.’”<sup>7</sup> Wesley believed that man’s freedom did not mean a freedom to ignore this distinction according to one’s own whim or fancy. On the contrary, Wesley would have said without equivocation: adultery is wrong, sedition is wrong, drunkenness is wrong. They are wrong, he would have argued, because there is a fundamental difference between divine commandment and human behavior. Man himself has not the

capacity to determine for himself what is right and wrong.

Another aspect of Wesleyan teaching relevant to man's freedom is his advocacy of the disciplined life. In fact, his adoption of the name "Methodist" for his societies suggests a disciplined life. The Oxford "Holy Club" was comprised of disciplined young men who denied themselves—not ascetically but majestically—for the glory of God. His own strictly regulated day which began at four or five o'clock in the morning set Wesley in sharp contrast to many men of his time. Nor did Wesley cease his stern moralizing, following his Aldersgate experience. The rules drawn up in 1739 for his "Societies" continued to remain in effect.

Does that then imply that man is not really free, but that he is bound by divine fiat? Hardly that, Methodism's Founder would respond. Wesley would suggest that it is prior to his conversion experience that man is bound, not by God but by his own sinful state. It was salvation which set a man "free indeed." A Wesleyan verse expresses this thought:

He walks in glorious liberty,  
To sin entirely dead;  
The truth, the Son hath made him free,  
And he is free indeed.<sup>8</sup>

Wesley would grant no quarter to any theory which might suggest that only in man's tingling desire for freedom from restraint and in his renunciation of accepted standards is he truly free. One who dares to believe that as a Christian he has suddenly been set free from all objective restraint is a "child of the devil."<sup>9</sup> Such a one, Wesley declared, is a man of "muddy understanding," with his mind in "a mist."<sup>10</sup> To define human freedom as freedom from restraint indicated what Wesley designated a "fatal numbness of the spirit, the stupid insensibility of a seared conscience."<sup>11</sup> True freedom is rather a voluntary bondage to that which is greater than oneself.

#### **IV. PESSIMISM**

A third generalization descriptive of the existentialist movement is an emphasis upon despair, anxiety, death. The prevailing mood is one of pessimism, a mood which seems to be related to existentialism's understanding of the human situation as one filled with contradictions which cannot be resolved. Existentialism's man, wrote Norman Greene, "must carve a slow and painful path through achievement and frustration toward a transcendent perfection which he will never reach."<sup>12</sup> Indeed, as Sartre has suggested, man is forlorn because neither within him nor without does he find anything to which he can cling. Existentialism places a per-



sistent emphasis upon man's corruption and his total incapacity for improvement.

John Wesley also looks upon man as corrupt. But, for Wesley, man's life is not ultimately futile, for man can rise to great heights of joy. This is indicated by Wesley's acceptance of Christianity's fundamental teaching regarding the "new birth." In fact, his own conversion experience that memorable May evening on Aldersgate Street sounds a resounding "no" to gloom and despair as the last word upon man's life.

Even more than Wesley's teachings on the new birth as indicative of his hopeful outlook on man's future was his persistent emphasis upon what came to be called "Christian Perfection." He was firmly convinced that perfection—"the main doctrine of the Methodists"<sup>13</sup>—was not merely an ideal but a reality, attainable in this life. He used biblical texts from the Gospels of Matthew and John, the Letters of Paul, the Letter to the Hebrews, and the Letter of James to substantiate his teachings about his doctrine. It was not only biblical support, however, but his own conviction that he had actually witnessed perfection in the lives of certain of his followers that convinced Wesley of its reality.<sup>14</sup>

Wesley makes clear, first of all, what he does not mean by Christian Perfection. It is not to be equated with perfect freedom from ignorance, mistakes, infirmities, or temptations. Beyond these negative suggestions, it seems possible to suggest two positive approaches toward an understanding of this Wesleyan doctrine. Foremost is his emphasis on love.<sup>15</sup> In addressing his brother, Wesley defined Christian Perfection as the "humble, gentle, patient love of God and man ruling... the whole heart."<sup>16</sup> In his tract, *Christian Perfection*, he sought to elucidate the meaning of the title by defining it as "that love of God and our neighbor which implies deliverance from all sin."<sup>17</sup>

These words suggest another emphasis by Wesley. He further understood Christian Perfection as the expulsion of sin, both inward and outward, from the heart of every man. It meant that man's heart had been "purified... from envy, malice, wrath, and every unkind temper;"<sup>18</sup> it meant that man could walk as Christ walked and be holy as the God who called him was holy. Wesley expressed himself clearly by stating that Christian Perfection is "that habitual disposition of the soul which in the sacred writings is termed holiness and which directly implies being cleansed from sin..."<sup>19</sup>

Whatever else this Wesleyan doctrine might mean, one certain implication is Wesley's high regard for the potential of man by the help of God. Man does have a meaningful future toward which he can press in anticipation that arrival is a real possibility. In contrast, consider Jean-Paul Sartre's *No Exit*. Three characters appear; they are assigned to a room for "eternity." This is their

“hell,” to be shut up together, to torture each other with their confessions, their accusations. There is no exit; there is no possible escape from the torments of life which constitute hell. There is no possible forgiveness, no possible eradication of their dismal pasts. For Wesley, on the other hand, God provided man the victory over despair. The believer in Christ may know here and now the joy of the transformed life. There are no limits as to what divine grace can do for and in a human life. To understand oneself fully, believed John Wesley, meant a recognition of what one could become as the result of one’s confrontation with the Christ whose actual life and death are relevant for modern man.

#### DOCUMENTATIONS

1. Sections of this essay originally appeared as “Wesley’s Answer to Existentialism.” Permission to reprint from the *Christian Advocate*, February 11, 1965, Copyright 1965, by the Methodist Publishing House, has graciously been granted.

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3. John Wesley, *Sermons*: “The Spirit of Bondage and Adoption (Standard Edition), I, 181.

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7. John Wesley, *Sermons*: “The Origin, Nature, Property and Use of the Law,” II, 42.

8. John Wesley, *Christian Perfection*, p. 39.

9. John Wesley, *Sermons*; “The Witness of the Spirit,” I, 215.

10. John Wesley, *Sermons*; “The Catholic Spirit,” II, 143.

11. John Wesley, *Sermons*; “he Witness of the Spirit,” I, 215.

12. Norman Greene, Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Existential Ethic* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1963), p. 72.

13. John Wesley, *Letters*, II, 64.
14. See *Sermons*; “Christian Perfection,” V.
15. See *Letters*, IV, 10.
16. *Ibid.*, V, 38.
17. *Ibid.*, V, 53.
18. John Wesley, *Christian Perfection*, p. 13.
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# WESLEY VERSUS PHOEBE PALMER: AN EXTENDED CONTROVERSY

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Since the time of John Wesley the doctrine of entire sanctification has received mainstream doctrinal consideration, but it has also been a subject shrouded with confusion as a result of varying interpretations of how the experience is obtained, and more specifically what are the evidences of its possession. This discussion begins with John Wesley and is confined to those who accept such an experience as scriptural.

## II. WESLEY AND HIS EARLY FOLLOWERS

John Wesley was positive that entire sanctification was the norm for Christian living. His statements on how it is obtained were also definite and clear, but he was ambiguous concerning the evidence of its possession. In answer to the question, “When may a person judge himself to have attained to this” (Christian perfection)? he answered:

When, after having been fully convinced of inbred sin by a far deeper and clearer conviction than that which he experienced before justification, and after having experienced a gradual mortification of it, he experiences a total death to sin and an entire renewal in the love and image of God, so as to ‘rejoice evermore, to ‘pray without ceasing,’ and ‘in everything to give thanks.’ Not that ‘to feel all love and no sin’ is sufficient proof. Several have experienced this for a time before their souls were fully renewed. None, therefore, ought to believe that the work is done *till there is added the testimony of the Spirit*, witnessing his entire sanctification as clearly as his justification.<sup>1</sup> (italics added)

Wesley further states that one knows he is sanctified by the same means as that by which he knows he is justified, or “by witness of the Spirit that He hath given us.”<sup>2</sup>

These statements alone are perfectly clear, but Wesley is equivocal, or at least confusing, in further elaboration of the evidences of the experience. In another statement he says there are times when the witness is weak or even completely withdrawn, and adds that the witness is not always clear *at first* nor is it after-

ward always the same.<sup>3</sup> With such statements he has implicitly contradicted his first assertion of the witness of the Spirit, or at least he has greatly weakened it. It is not difficult to understand why Wesley made these conflicting statements; his theological method was to accept Scripture as authoritative, but unless experience supported it he assumed that his interpretation of Scripture was faulty.<sup>4</sup> The point of emphasis here is that in the beginning of the Wesleyan teaching on entire sanctification confusion as to its evidences was present. Wesley held that the experience was obtainable immediately on the condition of complete consecration, and faith that God would give it; but he never allowed that one should claim its possession on the basis of faith in the Word alone.

Bishop Asbury, a son of Wesley in the faith, was a strong proponent of entire sanctification. The writer found no place in which Asbury discusses the evidences of the possession of the experience, but implicitly he gives ample evidence that he held with Wesley that only an inner consciousness of its possession was proof of its possession. Across perhaps the first twenty years of Asbury's ministry in America he was all too often uncertain concerning his own experience. In his Journal for March 20, 1784, he writes: "Sometimes I am ready to say, he hath purified my heart; but then again I feel and fear."<sup>5</sup> Asbury urged others to seek the experience<sup>6</sup> and seems to have been on a stretch for it himself, but the writer found no place where he definitely claimed to have obtained the experience; like Wesley he leaves no definite testimony. His lack of confidence in his relation to God until about 1790 makes one wonder how he accomplished all he did.

Adam Clarke, another of Wesley's contemporaries, amazes one with his strong emphasis on assurance of adoption<sup>7</sup> and virtually no mention of evidences of entire sanctification. He does, however, hold that entire sanctification is available immediately. He writes:

And as it is this moment our duty to love God with all our heart, and we cannot do this till he cleanses our hearts, consequently he is ready to do it this moment, because he wills that we should in this moment love him.<sup>8</sup> (cf. Clarke's comment on Acts 1:5.)

Richard Watson, a contemporary of Clarke, spends a minimum of space in his *Institutes* on entire sanctification. He agrees with Clarke that the promises presuppose the possibility of "an instantaneous work immediately following upon our entire and unwavering faith."<sup>9</sup> One would assume that both Clarke and Watson hold that the witness of the Spirit is the accepted evidence.

### III. NON-METHODIST PROPONENTS

Timothy Smith, in his volume *Revivalism and Social Reform*, points out the fact that entire sanctification had a large following at the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>10</sup> Several persons outside of American Methodism preached and wrote as proponents of the experience. William Arthur in *The Tongue of Fire* strongly emphasized the Spirit-filled life. He held it was obtained through persevering prayer and he implicitly emphasized that the experience carried its own credentials.<sup>11</sup> Charles G. Finney was a prominent proponent of entire sanctification, even though a Presbyterian, and later a Congregationalist. He had a strong emphasis on the will rather than the affections, and held that entire sanctification could be received at any time, whenever one appropriated Christ by faith.<sup>12</sup> He placed it subsequent to regeneration,<sup>13</sup> but he spent no time discussing evidences of the experience. It is safe to assume that to Finney a consciousness of having met the conditions was adequate evidence. W. E. Boardman, another Presbyterian, was a proponent of entire sanctification. He wrote the volume titled *The Higher Christian Life*. He seems to ignore any discussion of evidences, but holds the experience is available on full dedication and full trust in Christ. Counter to Finney, he feels that there is usually a period of seeking and waiting.<sup>14</sup> Still another promoter of entire sanctification outside Methodism was A. B. Earle. Earle was a prominent Baptist evangelist at the mid-century. He called the experience “The Rest of Faith.” His method of obtaining was to seek the experience with an undivided heart, trust God to give it, and wait for Christ to give the evidence of His acceptance. He specifically mentions that there may be a time of waiting in which one is to remain totally dedicated waiting for the evidence “with or without emotions.”<sup>15</sup> What he means by “with or without emotions” can only be conjectured. A safe assumption seems to be that he held the witness of the Spirit as the evidence of possession.

It is obvious that among non-Methodist proponents of entire sanctification there are wide differences as to what the evidences are of its possession. Finney demands no evidences, and Earle insists that one wait for conscious awareness of the Spirit.

Entire sanctification even in the mid-nineteenth century, nevertheless, remained primarily a Methodist doctrine. It is questionable if non-Methodist influences changed the usual interpretation.

### IV. PHOEBE PALMER

In the mid-nineteenth century, however, there arose within Methodism a proponent of entire sanctification who caused much discussion and who undoubtedly influenced its later interpretation.

This person was Phoebe Palmer, the wife of a physician in New York City. Phoebe Palmer held her “Tuesday Meetings” over a period of about fifty years. The influence of these with her writings undoubtedly made her the greatest promoter of entire sanctification in the century. Timothy Smith described her writing accomplishments as follows:

Mrs. Palmer’s many books spearheaded the popular propaganda of the perfectionist revival. *The Way to Holiness*, a narrative of her own experience, sold 24,000 copies by 1851 and appeared in thirty-six editions before the Civil War. In 1859 her publishers were advertizing a twenty-fourth edition of *Faith and its Effects*—a collection of her correspondence on the subject—a twentieth edition of *Entire Devotion*...and a ninth of *Incidental Illustrations of the Economy of Salvation*.<sup>16</sup>

Her influence was further extended by others inaugurating her “Tues - day Meetings.” They were started in half a dozen foreign countries and in every major city in the United States. By 1886, 238 such meetings were being held.<sup>17</sup>

Mrs. Palmer’s success was in a large measure due to her clarity in the method of obtaining the experience, and in the fact that she made Scripture the basic evidence. In brief her explanation was: When we as Christians give ourselves unreservedly to God and trust the promise, the work is accomplished. There is no need to wait for further evidence, although she allows that further evidence will follow. Feeling is no trustworthy index, but God’s promises are trustworthy and may be trusted. She writes:

What is the evidence of entire sanctification?...How might an offerer at the Jewish altar arrive at an evidence that his offering was sanctified? In the first place, God had explicitly made known just the sacrifice required, and the manner in which it should be presented. If the offerer had complied with these requirements, he, of course, knew he had done so.<sup>18</sup>

Again she writes:

Christ is the CHRISTIAN’S ALTAR. Lay body, soul and spirit upon his merits...Remember, that it is not left optional with yourself whether you will believe. ‘This is the command of God that ye believe.’ Believe stedfastly that the blood of Jesus cleanseth. Not that it can or will, but that it *cleanseth now*. Covenant with God that you will believe this, his revealed truth, whether

your feelings warrant belief or not. The just shall live by faith.<sup>19</sup>

In exhorting one who was seeking guidance on how to obtain entire sanctification Mrs. Palmer writes:

What you need, in order to bring you into this state, is an offering up of yourself through this purifying medium. Now do you still ask, How soon may I expect to arrive at this state of perfection? Just so soon as you come believingly, and make the required sacrifice, it will be done unto you according to your faith....When the Savior said, 'It is finished!' then this full salvation was wrought out for you. All that remains is for you to come complying with the conditions, and claim it...it is already yours. If you do not now receive it, the delay will not be on the part of God, but wholly with yourself.  
...

And now my dear K, if you will resolve to let faith depend on the word of God, and not upon your uncertain feelings, your difficulties will all be at an end.<sup>20</sup>

Mrs. Palmer, herself, was at times assailed with doubts and was quite frank in discussing her own personal temptations to doubt. She writes:

But you would hardly conceive how often he [Satan] tries to make me think my faith a mere *intellectual knowledge*. I meet him by saying, it is founded on principles laid down by the eternal Mind, and consequently immovable in faithfulness... I trust him, and on the authority of His *own word* declare in strongest testimony, in his faithfulness in fulfilling his promises. The fruits of holiness follow—I dare not doubt it.<sup>21</sup>

She writes further concerning temptation to doubt her experience:

I think sometimes I give a *stronger testimony* when tempted to doubt, than when all is quiet...I make it a point, when most powerfully tempted, to speak most *confidently*..At the Tuesday Meeting two or three weeks since, I practiced on this principle precisely....After I had finished, I felt such a conscious victory over the powers of darkness that my soul was filled with triumph. I afterward enjoyed...telling them, that the stronger testimony I had given in was not founded on any state of feeling I at that time enjoyed,...<sup>22</sup>



It is not surprising that Mrs. Palmer's teaching aroused antagonism. It was obviously contrary to Wesley, but it was also counter to the general teaching of Methodist advocates of the experience. Randolph S. Foster, prominent Methodist, criticized Mrs. Palmer's position as tending to delusion and to "spurious though sincere professions." He added, "Until the witness comes we will not say we are entirely sanctified."<sup>23</sup> Nathan Bangs also criticized her position.<sup>24</sup> The controversy reached such proportions that the General Conference in the Pastoral Address in 1852 said:

We advise you in writing of holiness, to follow the well sustained views , and even the phraseology employed in the writings of Wesley and Fletcher, which are not superseded by the more recent writers on the subject . Avoid both new theories, new expressions, and new measures on the subject, and adhere closely to the ancient landmarks.<sup>25</sup>

Mrs. Palmer was in no way dismayed. She defended her position with such clear reasoning and from a vantage point of such high esteem within Methodism that Timothy Smith asserts that "her views won out."<sup>26</sup> This is too strong a statement, for the years following show much confusion as to the method of obtaining entire sanctification, and also concerning its evidence.

## V. CONFUSION OVER THE EVIDENCES

Although Jesse Peck wrote in 1858 that the recent controversies had brought unity of opinion closer than ever before,<sup>27</sup> what one seems to find is a variety of conflicting views, with most of the various proponents being unaware that they differed with others.

Miner Raymond, systematic theology professor at Garrett in the latter half of the nineteenth century, holds to the witness of the Spirit as the evidence one is sanctified.<sup>28</sup> John Miley, systematic theology professor at Drew, cast strong doubt on Raymond's position declaring that the Scriptures give no promise of the witness of the Spirit to entire sanctification.<sup>29</sup>

Daniel Steele appears to agree with Mrs. Palmer. He expresses his position by posing the question and answering as follows:

How can I believe when I see no change? The ground of your faith must not be your feelings but the Word of God. When you make legal tender of yourself to him, it is your duty to believe that he accepts you, according

to his promise .<sup>30</sup>

S. A. Keen in *Faith Papers* holds the same view,<sup>31</sup> as does also Hannah W. Smith, a Keswickian, in her *Christian's Secret of a Happy Life*.<sup>32</sup>

As one moves into the twentieth century he finds a variety of views. Brengle,<sup>33</sup> Carradine<sup>34</sup> and H. Orton Wiley<sup>35</sup> regard the witness of the Spirit as the evidence of the experience. Joseph Smith taught that the experience was obtainable immediately by faith, but asserted that the Spirit generated the faith in the seeker when the conditions were met, and such faith is accompanied by the witness of the Spirit.<sup>36</sup> It appears that one finds proponents of both Wesley's and Mrs. Palmer's position , with little if any mention of the difference.

## VI. CONCLUSION

Present lack of recognition of the importance of the differences between Wesley and Mrs. Palmer would indicate the issues as trivial. Observation and reflections, however, lead the writer to hold them highly important. To make bad matters worse Wesley's views and Mrs. Palmer's views are combined at times in preaching in such a way that the seeker is assured of the immediate witness of the Spirit if he comes and seeks, and after a rather brief season of seeking he is told to take it by faith. Wesley never did this.

It seems to the writer that Dr. Richard S. Taylor voices a just criticism of much holiness preaching when he says, "The problem is not in the pew but in the pulpit."<sup>37</sup>

The writer's evaluation is that Wesley injected much confusion into the teaching when he held that the experience was obtained by faith, but that one should not witness to its possession *until he had the witness of the Spirit*. Moreover, Wesley himself never definitely testified to a specific time when he obtained the experience [i.e., by the witness of the Spirit], although he made strong inferential statements of its possession. But his method [i.e., of relying on the witness of the Spirit] failed under stress in his life. In 1766 [twenty-five years before his death, during a period of depression and discouragement] due to sickness, accident, and small accomplishments, he wrote his brother Charles:

I do not love God. I never did. Therefore I have never believed in the Christian sense of the word. . . If I ever have had that faith, it would not be so strange. But I never had any other (evidence or test) of the eternal or invisible world than I have now; and that is none at all, unless such as fairly shines from reason's glimmering ray. I have no direct witness . . .<sup>38</sup> [of the Spirit; how-

ever, the foregoing is not to be taken as the *norm* of Wesley's Christian experience].

Undoubtedly Phoebe Palmer's method of trusting wholly in the Word carries with it some dangers , but it appears to harmonize with the Scriptural command to "Reckon yourselves dead to sin but alive unto God" (Rom. 6:11).

#### DOCUMENTATIONS

1. John Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, "The Heart of Wesley's Faith" (Kansas City, Mo .: Beacon Hill Press 1961), p. 46.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 61.

3. Wesley in another place in his *Plain Account of Christian Perfection* in answer to how one may know he possesses entire sanctification says , "Indeed the witness of sanctification is not always clear at first (as neither is that of Justification): neither is it afterward always the same, but, like that of justification, sometimes stronger and sometimes fainter . Yea , and sometimes it is withdrawn." *Ibid.*

4. Concerning Scripture alone as a support for doctrine, Wesley said, "If I were convinced that none in England had attained.. , [entire sanctification] I should be clearly convinced that we had all mistaken the meaning of those Scriptures ." *Ibid.* p. 52.

5. Francis Asbury, *The Journal and Letters of Francis Asbury*, Vol. III, ed. J. Manning Potts, Elmer Clark and Jacob Payton (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press , 1958), p. 34.

6. He writes, "Seek, Seek it! Seek it now, in every means by faith, and in bearing every cross ! And doing every duty, be fervent in family and private prayer. Let your religion be God, let him be your home, your all!" *Ibid.* p. 405.

7. Clarke says of assurance of adoption, "I met with it everywhere, and met with it among the most simple and illiterate, as well as among those who had every advantage which high cultivation and deep learning .could bestow. Perhaps I might, with the strictest truth, say that during the forty years I have been in the ministry, I have met with at least forty-thousand who have had a clear full evidence, that God for Christ's sake had forgiven their sins..." Adam Clarke, *Systematic Theology* (New

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8. *Ibid.*, p. 208.

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15. A. B. Earle, *Bringing in the Sheaves* (Boston: Published by James H. Earle, 1869), p. 367.

16. Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 124.

18. Phoebe Palmer, *Faith and Its Effects* (New York: Published for the author at 200 Mulberry St., 1854), p. 242.

19. *Ibid.*, pp. 249-50.

20. *Ibid.*, pp. 52-53.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 112.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 312.

23. Randolph S. Foster, *Christian Purity* (New York: Eaton & Mains, 1869), p. 207.

24. Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 127.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 128.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 125.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 134.

28. Miner Raymond, *Systematic Theology* (Cincinnati: Cranston and Stowe, copyright by Hitchcock and Walden, 1877), p. 396.

29. John Miley, *Systematic Theology* (Eaton & Mains, 1894), II, 380.

30 . Daniel Steele , *Milestone Papers*\_ (Minneapolis , Minn .: Bethany Fellowship Publishers, rep. , original date 1878), p.138.

31. S. A. Keen, *Faith Papers* (Cincinnati: M. W. Knapp, 1888), p. 19.

32. Hannah W. Smith, *Christian's Secret of a Happy Life* (Westwood, N .J.: Fleming H. Revell Co. , 1952) , pp. 69-78 .

33. Samuel L. Brengle, *Helps to Holiness* (New York: The Salvation Army Printing and publishing house, 1920), PP • 13-14, 22.

34. B. Carradine, *The Sanctified Life* (Cincinnati: Office of the Revivalist, 1897), p. 17.

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# JOHN WESLEY'S VIEW OF THE SACRAMENTS: A STUDY IN THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF A DOCTRINE

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## **I. INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this paper is to present John Wesley's view of the sacraments from his own writings. It is not an attempt to expound the sacramental theology of the Anglican, Methodist, or Wesleyan Churches. The method of treatment is basically historical, since a gradual development can be discerned in Wesley's thought.

Wesley lived and served God his whole lifetime in the Anglican Church. He took communion three times a week [normally] during his lifetime and urged his American ministers to administer the Supper every Sunday.<sup>1</sup> He was convinced that the New Testament Church partook of the Supper daily<sup>2</sup> and believed that the primitive church should be a guide to the contemporary church.<sup>3</sup> The doctrines of the Church of England were one of Wesley's standards; he professed never to have left them or her ministry.<sup>4</sup>

Wesley was no systematic theologian; he left no carefully worked out dogmatic as did John Calvin. A different (and perhaps better) approach to his sacramental theology is by means of an historical treatment since it will show the development of Wesley's thought as it was molded by his religious experience, family and church background, theological debate and continuous study of Scripture.

## **II. THE SACRAMENTS AS INSTITUTIONS OF DIVINE GRACE 1675-1738**

### **A. The Sacramental Background of Wesley 1675-1720**

The Anglican Church just previous to Wesley's birth emphasized the sacraments, with regular observance enforced among her members. They were among the good works necessary to fulfill the conditions of justification.

The sacraments...must be understood, not in the sense of supernatural operations which in themselves confer on man the right to be justified by God regardless of his moral achievements, but rather as supernatural operations which enable man to perform moral acts and to achieve a quality of moral goodness which causes God to

appropriate unto him the merits of His Son and to pronounce him justified.<sup>5</sup>

The sacraments were the means for the release of supernatural power into natural channels and instruments for the achievement of moral goodness.

Concerning his family heritage, Wesley wrote that he was reared to love the Scriptures, the primitive church, the primitive fathers, and the Church of England “as the most scriptural national church in the world.”<sup>6</sup> This was true despite the fact that his great-grandfather, grandfather, father, and mother were non-conformists and dissenters. The latter two eventually returned to the Anglican church, but Wesley writes “...there was an obscurity on several great points of evangelical religion which hung over their minds...”<sup>7</sup> For his parents, the sacraments were divine instruments for the means of helping man work out his salvation.<sup>8</sup>

In terms of the above, when Wesley entered Charterhouse in 1714 he entered “in a state of grace.” His church and family provided the background for it.

### **B. The Sacramental Views of Wesley 1720-1734**

From 1713-1720, Wesley was a faithful adherent to the church which he attended regularly, including the sacrament.<sup>9</sup> Following his ordination he began to take communion every week and was joined by his brother, Charles.<sup>10</sup> The formation of the Holy Club in 1729 included the rule of taking communion as often as possible. Wesley urged members to frequent the sacrament; converts from the club were called “proselytes from the sacraments.”<sup>11</sup> From 1729-1732, Wesley communicated at least once per week.<sup>12</sup> The Holy Club was High Church in principle; communion was “a sacrifice, baptismal regeneration was believed...”<sup>13</sup> Wesley declined the offer of his father’s parish for this would not permit him to receive the sacrament two times per week which he thought would help his religious life.<sup>14</sup> He struggled greatly with sin before and after communion, which may mean that his sacramentalism was failing him.<sup>15</sup> In this era, we see Wesley as a faithful, punctilious observer of communicant worship in the Anglican church, believing that the more the sacraments were used the more grace they would confer.

### **C. The Sacramental Views of Wesley 1734-1738**

In 1735, just before leaving for Georgia as a missionary in order to save his own soul, Wesley in the Holy Club received the Supper every day.<sup>16</sup> Three days after embarking, he administered communion and began to carefully instruct candidates for baptism

and the Supper.<sup>17</sup> Two storms at sea, however, revealed his lack of assurance of salvation.<sup>19</sup> Upon arriving in Georgia, Wesley arranged for weekly communion<sup>19</sup> and emphasized the rules of the Church which must be followed for administering and receiving baptism and the Supper.<sup>20</sup> His conversation with Spangenberg intensified his spiritual anxiety about salvation.<sup>21</sup> Yet he further intensified his legalistic approach. The climax was reached in his repulsion of Miss Sophia Hopkey from the communion for her failure to obey communion law, and perhaps because of Wesley's unrequited love. The charges brought, and Wesley's response, show him to be a fastidious priestly administrator of the sacrament and a churchman obsessed with technicalities.<sup>22</sup> In 1737, he published his Charleston Hymnbook where he speaks of the sacrament becoming "a kind of sacrifice" and "an altar, whereon men mystically present to Him, the same sacrifice, as still bleeding and suing for mercy."<sup>23</sup> In 1737, he left Georgia for England still believing that until he was ten years old he had not sinned away the "washing of the Holy Ghost" given in baptism,<sup>24</sup> but still unsure of his salvation. Wesley had begun believing the sacraments to be guarantees of grace and had zealously practised them, but without assurance. A greater deliverance was necessary.

### **III. THE SACRAMENTS AS INSTRUMENTS OF DIVINE GRACE 1738-1754**

#### **A. The Significance of Aldersgate 1738-1740**

Wesley returned to England with the vow that he would seek justifying faith by adding prayer to the other means of grace he had fervently been practising.<sup>25</sup> He writes:

I continued thus to seek it (though with strange indifference, dullness, and coldness, and unusually frequent relapses into sin) till Wednesday, May 24...In the evening, I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther's preface to the Romans...I felt my heart strangely warmed, I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for my salvation: and an assurance was given me...<sup>26</sup>

The interpretation of this event in this study is that Wesley received an experience from which he never essentially departed, but that it clashed with his Anglican background causing him to act and speak inconsistently at times. Yet he basically elevated his evangelical experience above his sacramental heritage. After Aldersgate, John Wesley "...the awakened priest, while remaining fond of the liturgy of the Church was no longer bound by the sacer-



total influence.”<sup>27</sup>

Wesley did not over react; he did not abstain from the sacraments. Rather his conception of them changed. He still exhorted men to use the sacraments as means of receiving salvation. “In September, 1738, when I returned from Germany I exhorted all I could to follow after that great salvation...waiting for it in all the ordinances of God.”<sup>28</sup> However, salvation did not consist in using the ordinances of God.<sup>29</sup> God might work through the sacraments or apart from them; God was not limited. Nor was the grace of God irresistibly operative upon a man; a response was necessary. People were not to rest in them or omit them; they were to use them as means, for God had so intended them.<sup>30</sup> The new birth for Wesley was an inward thing, not to be equated with baptism as it was by many Anglican priests.<sup>31</sup>

Wesley broadened his concept of the means of grace to include prayer, reading and hearing Scripture, and the Supper as the ordinary means.<sup>32</sup> The covenant also was declared to be a means.<sup>33</sup> His sermon, “The Means of Grace” composed at this time, summarizes his views.<sup>34</sup> The means of grace are

...outward *signs*, words, or actions, ordained of God, and appointed for this end, to be the ordinary channels whereby he might convey to men preventing, justifying, or sanctifying grace.<sup>35</sup>

The inclusion of “preventing” grace shows that they were to be used by the seeker after God as well as the man of great faith. “The whole value of the means depends on their actual subservience to the end of religion.”<sup>36</sup> The effect of the means is dependent upon the Holy Spirit.

All outward means whatever, if separate from the Spirit of God, cannot profit at all...Whosoever, therefore, imagines there is any intrinsic power in any means whatsoever, does greatly err.<sup>37</sup>

Scripture is held to be the main means. Here is a shift from sacramentalism to a Reformation view of God’s presence with man. “This is the great means God has ordained for conveying his manifold grace to man.”<sup>38</sup> The presence of the Spirit, the Scripture, and the Sacrament point toward a real presence of Christ mediated through the means and received through faith.

Wesley had to answer objections to his new position. Some argued that a man could not use the sacraments without trusting in them. His answer was:

What do you mean by trusting in them?—looking for the

blessing of God therein?...So I do...I will believe that whate'er God hath promised, he is faithful also to perform.<sup>39</sup>

Others argued that to use the means was to seek salvation by one's works or by the Mosaic law. Wesley replied:

But how is either of these implied in my waiting in the way God has ordained, and expecting that he will meet me there, because he has promised so to do?<sup>40</sup>

Some complained that Christ only was a means of grace, but Wesley retorted that this was a play on words, for once terms are explained the objection vanishes.<sup>41</sup> Related to this objection was the one which argued for a quietistic waiting. Wesley answered that God has appointed special ways through which to wait.<sup>42</sup>

The effect of Aldersgate upon Wesley may be summarized as: 1) remember God is above means; 2) there is no automatic power in the means; 3) seek God alone in the means; 4) use the means as means, not for their own sake; and 5) do not use the means as a source of religious pride.<sup>43</sup>

## **B. The Fetter-Lane Controversy 1738-1743**

After his evangelical experience of May, 1738, Wesley went to Germany in June where he encountered among the Moravians the view that no one should receive the Supper until he was assured of a clean heart.<sup>44</sup> The same thinking he found in the Fetter-Lane Society of London upon his return. Wesley exhorted the Society to keep close to the church and the ordinances, for some were holding that one could not be justified unless he would leave the sacraments and church.<sup>45</sup> Wesley's post-Aldersgate view of there being no virtue in keeping the sacraments alone, and the Moravian influence, resulted in the extremism and gathered momentum. Quietism and mysticism reared their heads when the Society asserted that Christ alone was the means of grace, hence one was not to take the sacrament if he had doubt. Wesley disagreed and supported his view by a woman who had been found by grace in receiving the bread.<sup>46</sup>

In 1739 and 1740, the Society spoke against the sacraments and persecuted those who were using them. Wesley replied by asserting the inwardness of religion mediated through means. Under this theme he proclaimed that, 1) a man need have only seeking faith to use the sacrament; 2) he should seek faith through the means; 3) there are means of grace through which God gives grace to unbelievers.<sup>47</sup> The Society replied through a Mr. Molther that 1) Christ is the only means of grace; 2) there are no degrees of

faith; 3) believers need not use the ordinances; 4) unbelievers or unassured should not use them.<sup>48</sup> As the controversy moved to a climax, Wesley proclaimed: 1) the Supper gives preventing, justifying, or sanctifying grace; 2) the Supper is for all who want the grace of God; and 3) the only preparation necessary is a sense of worthlessness.<sup>49</sup> Wesley finally withdrew from the Society, but he had established his instrumental view of the sacraments. The sacraments and means are converting and confirming ordinances parallel to inward religion. Spiritual life then was Christ-centered and focused in the objective means of grace and centered in the life of the visible church. Again and again Wesley faced this position, even as late as 1776.<sup>50</sup>

### **C. The Biblical Exposition 1743-1754**

During the years 1743-1754, Wesley interpreted and elaborated the vast biblical knowledge he had amassed. He began his *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament* in 1743<sup>51</sup> and completed them in 1754.<sup>52</sup> His view of baptism centers about Ephesians 4:5, Galatians 3:27, Romans 6:4, Matthew 16:16, Acts 22:16, and John 3:5. There is one outward Baptism which is the sign of the visible church.<sup>53</sup>

There is one baptism...the outward sign our one Lord has been pleased to appoint of all that inward and spiritual grace which he is continually bestowing upon his church...a precious means whereby this faith and hope are given to those that diligently seek him....<sup>54</sup>

It is an outward sign and means of inward change wrought by the Spirit (John 3:5).<sup>55</sup> It is a dying and rising with Christ (Rom. 6:4).<sup>56</sup> Believers are to be baptized in token of their faith in Christ and are to testify to their faith in Christ by being baptized.<sup>57</sup> Wesley is here true to his evangelical principle of the sacraments as instruments of divine grace when inward faith is present.

Infant baptism is supported by Scripture, according to Wesley. Baptism and teaching or evangelism of candidates are to be determined by the nature of things. Children are to be baptized before they are taught as the Jews circumcised their children.<sup>58</sup>

The effect of baptism is to engraft into Christ through faith from whence a man draws new spiritual life (Rom. 6:3-4).<sup>59</sup> This is done in baptism if, with the outward and visible sign, the inward and spiritual grace is received (Eph. 5:26).<sup>60</sup> If God's Spirit has not operated powerfully in our souls our baptism has not reached its end (Col. 2:12).<sup>61</sup> Again the evangelical, instrumental character of the sacrament is evident in Wesley's biblical view of baptism; the sacrament is a means by which through faith the work of

the Spirit is accomplished.

Wesley never tired of emphasizing the early Church's daily use of communion.<sup>62</sup> For him, the Supper is a memorial of the death of Christ. The bread is a sign of Christ's body, broken for the sinner (I Cor. 16:24-25).<sup>63</sup> The wine is a sign and memorial of Christ's blood which purchases salvation (Mark 14:24).<sup>64</sup> Christ's use of the word "is" is figurative and not ontological. Just as the lamb was only figuratively the Passover, so the bread is not his real body. The blood of the New Testament is only the sign and seal of the New Testament, not the New Testament itself.<sup>65</sup> The bread and wine signify or represent the body and blood. For Wesley, the custom of Scripture is to call the thing signifying by the name of the thing signified. The effect of the Lord's Supper is to confirm the new covenant. The cup is the means of partaking of the blessings purchased by the blood of Christ. The bread is the means of partaking of the blessing won by Christ's body. Wesley then combines the Zwinglian symbolical view with the Calvinistic doctrine of the real, spiritual presence and remains evangelical and instrumental in his view of the sacraments.

#### **IV. THE SACRAMENTS AS AN INSOLUBLE DIFFICULTY 1754-179 1**

No man ever completely dispenses with his environment, and so it was with Wesley. Working beneath his conscious mind were the High Church views inherited from his background. These clashed with the evangelical invasion of 1738 so that despite the supremacy of the evangelical thrust, insoluble tensions and difficulties remain in Wesley's later theological development.

##### **A. The Treatise on Baptism 1754-1756**

In 1756, Wesley copied a tract of his father's, "A Treatise on Baptism," and retained elements which are at variance with his evangelical conception. Search as one will, the following words contain no trace of an inward, spiritual faith in Christ as the means of entrance into the church and kingdom.

By baptism, we enter into covenant with God; into that everlasting covenant... we are admitted into the Church, and consequently made members of Christ, its head... we who were 'by nature children of wrath' are made the children of God.<sup>66</sup>

The matter of baptism is the water which has the natural power of cleansing and hence is fit for its spiritual use in cleansing.<sup>67</sup> Just as Jews entered the covenant with God through circumcision, so Christians are admitted into the Church by baptism."

Baptism could be administered by dipping, pouring, or sprinkling, for: 1) there is no express precept for one mode apart from the other; 2) there is no conclusive example against one apart from the other; 3) the word, baptize, does not mean necessarily to dip, to pour, or to sprinkle in and of itself. The word is used in other ways in other instances.<sup>69</sup>

Wesley believed that infants should be baptized for the following reasons: 1) as taught in Deuteronomy 29:10-12, infants can make a covenant with God through their parents;<sup>70</sup> 2) circumcision as the sign of the Old Covenant has been replaced by baptism as the sign of the New;<sup>71</sup> 3) as Hebrew infants were circumcised, so infants of Christian parents being under the evangelical covenant should be baptized;<sup>72</sup> 4) infants are guilty of original sin; 5) baptism washes away original sin; 6) therefore infants should be baptized;<sup>73</sup> 7) the apostolic church baptized infants;<sup>74</sup> 8) infants can come to Christ by no other way than baptism.<sup>75</sup>

The above list reveals Wesley emphasizing the external, institutional, visible church as the means of the salvation of infants centering in baptism.

If outward baptism be generally, in an ordinary way, necessary to salvation, and infants may be saved as well as adults, nor ought we to neglect any means of saving them if our Lord commands.<sup>76</sup>

Wesley writes that “it is certain by God’s word, that children who are baptized, dying before they commit actual sin, are saved.”<sup>77</sup> This language is difficult to fit into an evangelical position of baptism as means of God’s grace effected through faith.

The effects of baptism also present to us an irresolvable tension and contradiction in Wesley’s thought. He declares that in baptism a man obtains the washing away of the guilt of original sin, by the application of the merits of Christ’s death. His high sacramentalism is nowhere more evident than when he proclaims that baptism is “...the ordinary instrument of our justification.”<sup>78</sup> Again he states that “...in the ordinary ways, there is no other means of entering into the Church or into heaven.”<sup>79</sup> Yet an evangelical note is sounded when he writes:

By water then, as a means, the water of baptism, we are regenerated and born again; whence it is called by the apostles ‘The washing of regeneration’...Nor does she [the Church] ascribe it to the outer washing, but to the inward grace, which added thereto, makes it a sacrament.<sup>80</sup>

The outer baptism is a means of inner grace and “saves” only when

a person lives in correspondence thereto, and repents, believes and obeys the gospel.<sup>61</sup> Here Wesley is the evangelically converted Churchman who has not yet cast off his sacramental background.

## **B. The Roman Catholic Controversy 1756-1770**

Throughout his life, Wesley was accused of having Roman Catholic inclinations. The High-churchmanship of the Holy Club, the strict enforcement of church law in America, the emphasis upon reason, the Catholic element in perfection, the argument for free grace—all made their contributions, among others. After Aldersgate, however, he emphatically objected to Roman doctrine;<sup>82</sup> the Fetter-Lane Society, as we have seen, accused him of Romanism with his sacramental emphasis.<sup>63</sup> His belief that works are a condition of salvation, but not meritorious, was interpreted as Romanist.<sup>84</sup> His asceticism and authoritarianism in ruling the societies was conceived by some as Roman.” In 1770, the Annual Conference emphasized works so much in the order of salvation that the Calvinists were offended. The Conference was moved then to state baldly that they did not believe in the Roman interpretation of faith and works.

Wesley was careless at times in his language in interpreting the Lord’s Supper. He was accused of Romanism and charged with encouraging a real, corporeal presence in the sacrifice of the mass.<sup>86</sup> He approved of the interpretation that if going to church and sacrament did not get people to heaven nothing would.<sup>87</sup> In the final analysis, he rejected the Roman Church and its sacramental interpretation, especially of the Lord’s Supper and transubstantiation. His objection was based on the following considerations: 1) the New Testament never teaches that the bread becomes the body of Christ; only the Church does; 2) the bread is called bread in the New Testament after consecration; 3) the mystical relation of the bread to Christ’s body is such that the bread is called His body; and 4) believers partake of the elements in a spiritual manner.<sup>88</sup> The evangelical experience of Aldersgate won out, but points of tension are present in certain aspects of Wesley’s theology.

## **C. The Conflict with the Church of England 1754-1791**

Wesley believed in the twofold nature of the Church: the invisible and visible. The properties of the latter are the preaching of the Word of God and the proper administration of the sacraments.<sup>89</sup> A problem arose in the Methodist Societies concerning the administration of the sacraments since only John and Charles Wesley were ordained and could administer. The original rule was that members were to receive the sacraments from the Church of England, unless they came from another denomination.” Many ministers of the Church of England would not minister to Society

members. As a result Wesley was asked to leave the Church, but he refused.

In 1744-45, Wesley at Conference declared his love for the Church,<sup>91</sup> and he refused to ordain men to administer sacraments when asked to do so because he believed in episcopal government descended through bishops to presbyters.<sup>92</sup> No one could administer the sacraments unless he had a commission from bishops in succession from the apostles. For Wesley, the bishop could ordain and administer the sacraments; the presbyter could only administer.

In 1746, Wesley's mind was changed by reading King's *Account of the Primitive Church* so that he came to believe that bishop and presbyter were the same office.<sup>93</sup> Other orders such as Reformed, were as valid as Anglican; but he refused to ordain men to administer the sacraments in order to maintain the unity of the Church.<sup>94</sup> Here is an evangelical emphasis above sacerdotalism.

In 1755, Wesley argued for not leaving the Church; in 1758, he agreed that it was not expedient but might become necessary.<sup>95</sup> Up to 1764, Wesley argued again for remaining within the Church. That year, the two Wesleys were left alone to administer. John asked Erasmus, whom he thought an Orthodox bishop, to ordain men. The Conference of 1765 rejected these ordinations, however, and the validity of Erasmus' episcopacy has been challenged.<sup>96</sup> Here may be noted a return to a sacerdotal, sacramental position.

When American Methodists ordained men through a presbytery, Asbury and Wesley invalidated the ordinations in 1775. A Few years before, Wesley had been asked to ordain men in England For his societies, but he postponed this. Here again his evangelism comes to the fore.

When Wesley asked Bishop Lowth to ordain men in 1780, he refused. In 1784, Wesley then ordained Coke as Superintendent in America with Whatcoat and Vasey as elders to administer the sacraments. Charles objected to his brother's act as rejecting the Episcopate,<sup>97</sup> but John replied:

I firmly believe that I am a Scriptural *episcopos* as much as any man in England or in Europe, for the uninterrupted succession I know to be a fable ....<sup>98</sup>

Hence John felt he could ordain as a bishop.

In 1788, however, Wesley seems to retract the above evangelical view in his "Dear Frankie" letter. Asbury had referred to himself as "bishop" in America. Wesley wrote:

How can you, how dare you suffer yourself to be called Bishop? . . . Men may call me a knave, or a fool, a rascal, a scoundrel and I am content; but they shall never,

by my consent, call me Bishop!<sup>99</sup>

Again the tension within him between free evangelicalism and sacerdotalism is evident.

In 1788 and 1789, Wesley preached two sermons. The preface to one stated that it was in essence his views of fifty-five years ago. Hence three years before his death we see him returning to the sacramental picture of 1732-33. In them he states that we procure pardon from God when we show forth the Lord's death.<sup>100</sup> Through the Supper we obtain forgiveness, confirmation, and strength.

Within two years of his death, in his sermon "The Ministerial Office," Wesley was again arguing for a sacerdotal position. Laymen could preach; they could not administer the sacraments. Bishops could ordain; pastors could not. The right to preach was not the right to administer the sacraments.<sup>101</sup> Yet he still was willing to argue that the bread and cup "...are the outward signs of the inward grace..."<sup>102</sup>

Wesley, the man laid hold of by Christ, was still in some degree the man reared by the Church.

What contributions can such a study of the above make to the contemporary churches of Wesleyan heritage? Let me suggest a few: 1) a man's theology involves the intersecting of his background, religious experience, and rational reflection; 2) a bare symbolical view of the sacraments may well be unfaithful to the Wesleyan heritage; 3) the Church must go through the Church to Holy Scripture (the contemporary through the historical Church) for illumination; 4) the best of men are theologically weak in places; and 5) Scripture should be the final authority in theological confession.

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# SHAME VERSUS GUILT: A NEW FRAMEWORK FOR EVANGELISM AND FELLOWSHIP IN WESLEYANISM

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## I. INTRODUCTION

This study arose out of the writer's work in missions and anthropology. His interest in the subject of shame was stimulated by a statement by Eugene Nida, translations secretary for the American Bible Society. Nida, from a cross cultural perspective, states:

We have to reckon with three different types of reactions to transgressions of religiously sanctioned codes: fear, shame, and guilt...This sentiment of guilt is far less common than might be supposed...Fear and shame are much more convenient attitudes for self-centered people.<sup>1</sup>

Western psychology and Western theology have largely ignored the shame dimension and over emphasized guilt. Shame has usually been regarded as little more than a superficial reaction on the level of embarrassment, whereas guilt has been thought to be a profoundly significant internalized reaction.

The following are a few assumptions regarding shame, although they can not be fully developed here.

A. Not all cultures are as guilt oriented as our own. In fact, Western culture seems to be an exception to the rule. Anthropologists formerly categorized cultures as either shame or guilt oriented. This dichotomy was overdone, but most certainly, cross culturally, shame is more common than guilt.

B. Surprisingly, the Bible confirms this anthropological impression. On the basis of a word count of guilt and shame in the King James Version (and the changes made in the Revised Version of 1881-1885, *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance*) guilty is found 19 times in the Old Testament and 6 times in the New Testament. Guilt occurs twice in the Old Testament. Shame and *ashamed* occur 178 times in the Old Testament and 42 times in the New.

In *Nelson's Complete Concordance of the Revised Standard Version* a somewhat different analysis occurs. Guilt and its derivatives occur 145 times in the Old Testament and 8 times in the New. Shame and its derivatives appear 297 times in the Old Testament and 45 times in the New. Shame is commonly related to sin in the Scriptures.

C. Although some contrasts will be made between guilt and shame, no attempt will be made to draw precise distinctions between the two concepts. The primary focus will be upon elucidating

the nature and importance of shame. Some weaknesses of an overreliance on the guilt complex will be pointed out.

Herein lies a serious communication problem. As was previously indicated, Western psychology and theology are primarily guilt oriented. Little research has been done in the area of shame. The guilt concept has been extended to cover part of what the Bible and other cultures label shame. Therefore, most Western definitions and distinctions between guilt and shame (both common sense and scholarly) are inadequate from a cross cultural perspective.

D. The emphasis of this paper will be upon the *psychological* reactions of persons when they violate religiously sanctioned codes. To say that not all men feel guilty when they sin is not to deny the biblical fact that all men outside of the Savior are sinners; therefore all such men are theologically guilty before God.

E. The following distinctions should be made between guilt as transgression and shame as failure. Two types of failure often occur in the Christian's life. They are: a) Failure as sin—*harmatia*: missing the mark or failing to measure up to a standard of truth. "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). This would be guilty shame. b) Failure as mistake, unintended, or close identification with someone who has sinned. No guilt is connected with the foregoing even though the shame might be intense and might be confused with guilt by the sensitive Christian. This would be innocent shame.

## II. THE NATURE OF SHAME

An increasing concern of psychology is the individual in interaction with others, or in interpersonal relationships. There appears to be increasing disillusionment with the intrapsychic perspective characteristic of a psychoanalytic approach to personality. The intrapsychic approach focuses too much on individual analysis; not enough recognition is given to the fact that man the individual is a *social* being.

Guilt, whether real or false, is a central concern of the overly individualistic approach to man. The writer proposes that the concept of shame better fits the new interpersonal approach to behavior. Shame handles the social dimension better than guilt. *Shame is at the same time profoundly personal and significantly social.*

Traditional distinctions between shame and guilt have emphasized the personal or subjective aspect of guilt and the social aspect of shame. Thus most people think of shame as more superficial than guilt; shame is conceived as primarily embarrassment in the presence of others while guilt is deeply internalized. But shame, if allowed to run its full course, is also deeply personal. Other people serve as a mirror and reflect what we really are.

Guilt is essentially a legal term; we are guilty because we have transgressed the law. Guilt can easily degenerate into an impersonal legalism concerned more with the law and the act rather than with the person.

Shame may also be involved in the act of transgression, but it is more concerned with *failure to be* what one should be than the act of transgression. Gerhart Piers observes:

Whereas guilt is generated whenever a boundary (set by Super-Ego) is touched or transgressed, *shame occurs when a goal* (presented by the Ego-Ideal) *is not being reached*. It thus indicates a real “shortcoming.” Guilt anxiety accompanies transgression; *shame, failure*.<sup>2</sup>

Paul Tournier states that “true guilt is precisely the *failure to be* oneself...from showing ourselves as we really are” (Italics added). Tournier’s definition of “true” guilt is actually a good definition of shame.

While a rigid either/or distinction cannot be drawn since shame and guilt may be present in the same experience, shame is more closely related to what one is, whereas guilt is more closely related to what one has done.

Helen Lynd detected that the guilt approach was inadequate to explain much which surrounds the human search for identity. So she turned to an analysis of shame and wrote the book *On Shame and the Search for Identity*. When one experiences shame one tends to hide or cover oneself because the exposure of the shame experience threatens to reveal what one really is. Lynd declares:

It is no accident that experiences of shame are called self-consciousness. Such experiences are characteristically painful. They are usually taken as something to be hidden, dodged, covered up—even, or especially, from oneself. Shame interrupts an unquestioning, unaware sense of oneself. But it is possible that experiences of shame if confronted full in the face may throw an unexpected light on *who one is* and point the way toward who one may become. Fully faced, *shame may become not primarily something to be covered, but a positive experience of revelation*.<sup>4</sup> (Italics added)

### **III. SHAME AND HONOR**

The ultimate function of shame is to reveal what is wrong and to prod a person to do what is honorable. Most people do not allow the shame experience to go this far. Shame is painful so we usually regard it negatively and cover ourselves up again.

Shame seems to be closely related to honor. The shameless person has no sense of honor or right. To be able to feel or experience shame indicates that some sense of integrity still exists. Positively, shame's function is to keep a person doing that which is honorable. The relationship of honor and shame is clearly seen in Greek, Chinese, and Japanese cultures.

#### **IV. SHAME AS EXPOSURE**

The root meaning of shame is to uncover, to expose, to wound. Others are usually involved in a shame experience and start the process of exposure, but the essence of shame is not simply exposure to others. A full experience of shame is an *exposure of oneself to oneself*. The state of shame is one of covering; an experience of shame uncovers.

#### **V. SHAME DEMANDS TRANSFORMATION**

Lynd notes that shame involves the whole self when she comments:

Separate discrete acts or incidents, including those seemingly most trivial, have importance because in this moment of self-consciousness, the self stands revealed. Coming suddenly upon us, experiences of shame throw a flooding light on what and who we are and what the world we live in is. This gives at least a partial answer to the question as to whether shame is something that one voluntarily brings on oneself or something that comes upon one from without. It is both. One does not, as in guilt, choose to engage in a specific act, a sin. Guilt frequently involves a sort of haggling anxiety, a weighing of pros and cons over a period of time. The shameful situation frequently takes one by surprise. *But one is overtaken by shame because one's whole life has been a preparation for putting one in this situation.*<sup>5</sup> (Italics added)

If one's whole life is involved in a shame experience, how can one be freed from shame? Lynd concludes: "Guilt can be expiated. *Shame, short of a transformation of self, is retained.* This transformation means, in Plato's words, a turning of the whole soul to the light"<sup>6</sup> (Italics added).

#### **VI. SHAME AND TRUST**

"He who believes in me will not be put to shame" (Rom. 10:

11). It is a shattering experience to learn that someone in whom you have put your complete trust has let you down. You take a *risk* whenever you commit yourself to another in trust and love. They may leave you exposed—hanging on a limb. You look like a fool. Life has betrayed you. It is not because of anything you have done, but their betrayal makes your trust in them look foolish. You have identified yourself with them. When a father commits a crime and is sent to prison, the whole family experiences shame because they are so closely identified with the father.

Thus appears the significance of Romans 10:11. God is utterly trustworthy. He will never let one down. Complete trust in Him will never leave one exposed as a fool (although at times it might appear this way to others and possibly to oneself).

One of the reasons we all wear masks, cover our real selves up, is because we have learned the hard way that it is not safe to trust and love too freely. It is painful to be betrayed, rejected, or not reciprocated in kind. So we partially withdraw from life to avoid the pain of shame. The essence of life consists of meaningful personal relationships; therefore, Lynd says that “even more than the uncovering of weakness of ineptness, exposure of misplaced confidence can be shameful...the greater the expectation, the more acute the shame.”<sup>7</sup>

## VII. SCRIPTURES AND SHAME

It appears that the Scriptures use the term ‘guilt’ primarily in an objective theological sense—a state of guilt rather than a feeling of guilt. ‘Shame’ is used in both a subjective and objective sense.

In the account of the fall in Genesis 3 neither of the words guilt or shame are used. Adam and Eve were undoubtedly theologically guilty, but their immediate reaction was not one of feeling guilt. Instead they reacted with a profound sense of shame as is indicated by the repeated reference to the term nakedness. Nakedness is commonly used as a symbol for shame in the Scriptures (Isa. 3:18; Lam. 1:8; Nah. 3:5; Rev. 3:18). Genesis 2:25 makes the connection crystal clear. “And the man and his wife were both naked and not ashamed,” before the Fall.

Immediately after Adam and Eve sinned, the Genesis account states: “Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew they were *naked*; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves aprons” (Gen. 3:7). No other human beings were around to see their state of nakedness, so they did not cover themselves because of what other human beings would think.

In this brief discussion on the nature of shame, it has been stressed that in its profoundest sense the experience of shame exposes oneself to oneself; from the Christian standpoint this exposure



is related to a *failure* to measure up to God's ideal or goal for man. For Adam and Eve the immediate result of their act of sin was an exposure of themselves to themselves of what they had done. With sin comes shame, and shame must be covered. Shame is too painful to remain exposed. Thus the symbolism of nakedness being covered with fig leaves is highly expressive.

Their act of sin had broken the loving and trustful relationship they had experienced with their Creator. Immediately they were exposed as ungrateful, unloving, distrustful rebels. They had as it were, slapped God in the face for no good reason. Erich Fromm says, "the awareness of human separation, without reunion by love, is the source of shame. It is at the same time the source of guilt and anxiety."<sup>8</sup> Helen Lynd states: "A person who is unable to love cannot reveal himself."<sup>9</sup> So he covers himself. And before long the process of continually covering oneself becomes a way of life, and only at sporadic intervals does one see oneself as he really is.

The Genesis account continues: "And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden" (Gen. 3:8). Here we have the second attempt to conceal their shame by *avoiding* the Person offended. It might be argued that hiding indicates a feeling of guilt, and possibly this is involved, but the context clearly indicates that shame is the primary reaction.

"But the Lord God called to the man and said to him, Where are you? And he said, I heard the sound of thee in the garden, and I was afraid, *because I was naked*; and I hid myself" (Gen. 3:9,10). God did not tell Adam he was naked. Adam already knew it. Adam confessed this to God. God said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" (Gen. 3:11)—the test of love, loyalty, and trust.

Then comes the inevitable attempt to cover up through aversion, to try and dodge responsibility. If someone or something else can be at least partially blamed, the intensity of shame will diminish. Adam replied, "The woman whom thou gayest to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate" (Gen. 3:12). This was true, but it was also an attempt to dodge his own responsibility. Even though others - our parents, our friends, our society - may greatly influence our lives toward evil (and may have to bear some responsibility for their actions), still this does not excuse one for his deeds.

## **VIII. GUILT-FORGIVENESS MODEL VS. SHAME-RECONCILIATION MODEL**

E. Mansell Pattison, a Christian psychiatrist, has written

an article on morality in which he demonstrates the inadequacy of a superego-guilt basis of morality. While the superego and guilt have a proper place in morality, an over reliance on the superego- guilt approach tends to focus too much on prohibitions and rules and thus often leads toward a semi-legalistic Christianity.

Morality, according to Pattison, is not primarily “a question of prohibitions, but rather the values and definitions of appropriate behavior by which man governs his behavior.”<sup>10</sup>

The key aspect of the personality which contributes to a positive and personal standard of morality is the ego ideal. Pattison defines the ego ideal as “that agency of the self which produces shame” and as the “various aspects of the affirming, loving, approving counter-parts to prohibitive superego functions.”<sup>11</sup> A failure to live up to the values of the ego ideal results in shame.

Pattison continues:

*The resolution of guilt feelings does not change the basic violation of relationship which is existential guilt. Patients would quite willingly settle for pacification of their superego, but are reluctant to undergo the pain of changing their pattern of relationship so that they no longer need to feel guilty!...One needs to face up to one's existential guilt....Only when one has come to grips with the sort of person that one is can one hope to be a responsible moral person instead of merely evading or placating one's superego.*<sup>12</sup> (Italics added)

Pattison asserts that forgiveness for guilt feelings tends to fit a punishment model. To complete the picture, a reconciliation model is needed to cover the area of existential ego guilt or shame. Theologically guilt is primarily a legal term related to the Old Testament law. Justification by faith continues this legal orientation. It is a correct and helpful way to express the gospel to a mind oriented in such a direction. Reconciliation is an equally biblical term which is more personal, stresses relationships, fits the ego ideal-shame (or existential ego guilt) framework better.

Passed over reliance of a guilt framework for the gospel may be related to a rather low quality Christian life of a typical convert. While there are numerous exceptions to the restricted love of evangelicals, the best empirical data available tend to confirm that many evangelical Christians have warped attitudes towards issues. Pattison asserts:

The data reveal that evangelical Christians tend to (1) allege humanitarian ideals yet consistently have low scores on scales measuring humanitarian concern, while scoring high on scales of rejection and hostility toward

others; (2) claim superior moral conduct, but in tests actually behave the same as agnostic and atheist peers in situations of moral choice; (3) proclaim an ethic of love, but on measures of social control; and (4) in studies on personal conscience reveal that for them morality is a matter of hostile demand instead of positive affirmation.<sup>13</sup>

A recent study of Mexican Protestant social attitudes reveals the same sense of constricted morality.<sup>14</sup>

## **IX. FELLOWSHIP AND SHAME**

Paul Tournier stresses the crucial role of the psychiatrist in creating the right atmosphere for the patient. Tournier in *The Person Reborn*, writes:

But these people who need your help are very shy. They are all afraid. Perhaps you too are afraid that conversion may go too deep, and you try to keep it in conventional channels. In order to become a confessor it is above all necessary to maintain one's own contact with God through practicing confession oneself. I was the recipient of many confidences, but I heard few confessions until I myself had started along the road of complete confession. We practice confession ourselves, not only so as to be forgiven, but also so as to be ready to hear other people's confessions without feeling uneasy. For when the confessions we are hearing call to our minds the thought of a sin we have not confessed, we start thinking about ourselves, instead of devoting our wholehearted attention to the person who is confessing.... One ought to choose one's confessor from among a thousand, or even ten thousand.<sup>15</sup>

Tournier reveals his own painful struggle of self-examination in grappling with his pride of being a champion of the truth rather than a lover of men. One of Tournier's patients wrote to him:

It is terribly hard to reveal to one's doctor the things that really lie at the roots of one's trouble, even when one knows what they are...The slightest breath of criticism on our part stops a person in his progress toward liberation.<sup>16</sup>

According to Tournier, the church at its best does proclaim the grace of God in a way that deals effectively with the guilt of

being. This is especially true during the periodic revivals of church history. But in between these revivals the church gradually moves from grace to conformity to a standard.

Judgment appears. Anyone who does not subscribe to certain standards is suspected of infidelity and hypocrisy....everyone...seeks to appear better than he is and begins to *hide* his faults instead of confessing them.... Moralism has returned and with it the breath of the Holy Spirit is stifled.<sup>17</sup> (Italics added)

In order to have healthy Christian fellowship, the church must give priority to creating and maintaining situations which promote openness and honesty in daily Christian living.

It is only through open relationships that we really get to know each other. Knowing is a full exposure of oneself to another, a personal sharing in full trust. Such openness has a risk involved for if such a relationship is not governed by love it can be brutal. Francis Shaeffer declares that “genuine love, in the last analysis, means a willingness to be entirely exposed to the person to whom we are talking.”<sup>15</sup>

## **X. REVIVAL AND SHAME**

In the early 19 50's Norman Grubb wrote an account of the continuous revival that had been going on in East Central Africa for sixteen years. Grubb indicates that he formerly believed that revival could come only through sovereign outpourings of the Holy Spirit. All that man could do was pray. Now, however, Grubb realizes that God is always ready to pour out His Spirit. The key to revival is man's willingness to allow a horizontal moving of the Spirit from his life to others. Grubb declares that an attitude of *brokenness* towards both God and man is the key to revival.

Continued revival is continued brokenness, but brokenness is two-way, and that means walls kept down as well as roof off. But man's most deep rooted and subtle sin is ... pride: self-esteem and self-respect; and without hardly realizing it, while we are careful to keep the roof off between ourselves and God through repentance and faith, we soon let those walls of respectability creep up again between ourselves and our brethren.<sup>19</sup>

Grubb<sup>20</sup> insists that a person has a more vivid sense of shame about sin when that sin is confessed before fellow Christians than when it is confessed only before God. When the Christian confesses and also tells of the victory God now gives him, the

Holy Spirit uses this to expose sin in the lives of other persons. Shame moves them to confess and seek victory. Thus public self-exposure and testimony of deliverance can, under the Holy Spirit, have a catalytic effect on others. It appears that this is how the Asbury revival in 1970 started and spread to half a hundred campuses or more throughout the nation, as well as many churches.

Norman Grubb states:

We have now replaced fellowship by preaching in modern church life, and the reason is not hard to find. Fellowship necessitates a real flow of life in the fellowship, for each has to be ready to contribute their share of what the Lord is really saying to them: preaching is an easy way out for a not-too-living fellowship.<sup>21</sup>

Grubb further suggests that the early Methodists had a fine balance between preaching and fellowship.<sup>22</sup>

A more recent account of revival in East Africa is given by missionary Dorothy Smoker. Mrs. Smoker recounts some of the strains of missionary living. Then she says:

God began to break through to me one day when I became angry with an elderly African man who brought us milk. When I looked around at those who were watching my performance, I suddenly saw what God saw....As soon as I could get on my face before Him, God showed me much much more: the pride, hatred, jealousy, impurity, and the basic self-centeredness of my whole life. All my defenses were breached so that I had to acknowledge myself to *be* full of sin and then almost at once I knew for the first time the exhilaration of the blood of Jesus at work. Love came...<sup>23</sup>

Unfortunately this glorious victory turned out to be only a temporary experience. This is all too common in the Christian life. Later Dorothy Smoker and her husband learned from African Christians how to keep victory on a continuous basis. In Uganda they found

that God could do a work that not only continued bright and fresh in isolated Christians, but which drew whole groups of people together in a sort of corporate sharing of joy and spontaneous sharing....Among them we saw a sort of transparency and matter-of-fact honesty about sin and dealing with it that shocked us. They were going back to pay debts and return stolen things beyond anything we had ever seen.<sup>24</sup>

As a result of being in such a live spiritual atmosphere, both Mr. and Mrs. Smoker began to see things in their own lives that were hindering their marriage relationship. Mrs. Smoker writes:

One night we both collapsed. God gave us the grace of repentance and helped us *bare everything before each other* in the presence of God. It was a *stripping* indeed. I think now we know a little bit of what the Lord meant when He said about Adam and Eve, ‘They were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.’ What a honeymoon began then; *I no longer had a shadow husband but a real person, and we felt safe with each other.*<sup>25</sup> (Italics added)

The author wrote Mrs. Smoker about her article and asked her to comment upon the relative roles of guilt and shame in her experience. She replied:

No doubt both are involved in our separation from God. This is the first time I’ve thought about it this way, but I am wondering if the first major encounter I had with God at the age of fifteen was not a dealing with guilt. That knowledge of freedom from judgment was a great thing, but not to be compared with the release that came later in Africa—His dealing with shame. Could it be that guilt is dealt with once for all normally, but that honestly exposing oneself to [oneself], to God, and to others, has to be repeated often in order to keep spiritually fresh?<sup>26</sup>

Is it possible that a shame framework could add new dimensions of vitality to our psychological and spiritual lives?

## **XI. SOME PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR WESLEYAN THEOLOGY AND PRACTICE**

There emerges from this study, “Shame vs. Guilt: A New Framework for Evangelism and Fellowship in Wesleyanism,” certain important practical implications for contemporary Wesleyan theology and practice.

First, while the crisis experiences of regeneration and sanctification for Wesleyan theology and preaching are necessary and crucial, a greater emphasis must be put upon the maintenance and development of *dynamic*, growing relationship with Jesus Christ or the result will be stagnation and stultifying legalism. A small group atmosphere of love and trust is a safe place for open sharing and exposure of one’s innermost self. Large relatively impersonal

worship services seldom provide this climate. The genius of the early Methodist movement lay in the weekly class meeting which provided the fellowship of the small group with its open, honest sharing of personal religious experiences through confession, forgiveness, and mutual witnessing to the efficacy of divine grace (cf. James 5:16-20).

Second, the Spirit filled life—God intoxication—helps release one from a self oriented life primarily concerned with covering or protecting the self from feared shameful exposure. The Spirit helps one to live an open life released from shame domination, an over-concern for one's self and what others think of him, liberating him to experience the true perfect love which Wesley so ardently emphasized.

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# A WESLEYAN VIEW OF CHRISTIAN IMMORTALITY

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Millenniums ago Job voiced the curiosity of the human mind concerning the future life in his immortal words: “If a man die, shall he live again?” (Job 14:14). Throughout the history of the human race men of all nationalities, religions and philosophies have sought, in one way or another, to find the answer to that question. There are but two exceptions to this attitude of mind toward man’s future life. The one is represented by the ancient Jewish sect of the Sadducees and the other by certain sophisticates of every enlightened age. The first is organizationally dead and the second is intellectually and spiritually so. The significant lines of Pascal bear testimony to this fact.

The immortality of the soul is a thing so important that only those who have lost all feeling can rest indifferent to it, can be content to know if it is not, or if it is.<sup>1</sup>

On the survival of the soul after physical death S.E. Frost writes significantly:

...the human mind has never been content to let the matter rest here. Throughout the history of mankind there has persisted a conviction, sometimes divine and at other times very vivid, that death cannot be the end, that the grave is not a victory of man’s foes, that death does not inflict a cosmic sting. In every age there have been millions firm in the belief that what is truest in humanity persists in some form or state after death.<sup>2</sup>

The idea of immortality is one of those fundamental concepts of the human mind that forbids it to rest until it rests in a valid answer to this age-old question raised by Job.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer<sup>3</sup> argues that atheistic unbelief is the ultimate of sin which so completely excludes God from man’s life that it embraces in itself all other sins and thus even suicide or any other act adds nothing to the guilt of such a man outside of God’s claims upon his life (see John 16:7-9; Rom. 14:23).

The words of Christ are highly significant at the outset of any consideration of Christian immortality. Said He: This is life eternal, that they should know thee the only true God, and him whom thou didst send, even Jesus Christ” (John 17:3); and again “I

came that they may have life, and may have it abundantly” (John 10: 10b ); and yet again- “I give unto them eternal life” (John 10: 28a; see also John 3:16, 36; 6:54; Rom. 6:23; John 1:1-14; I Thess. 5:23).

The sincerely concerned, wealthy young Jewish ruler who came to Jesus “by the way” voiced his quest in the words, “What shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?” (Mark 10:17b). The conceited Jewish lawyer, with the purpose to ensnare Jesus in His own words, voiced the question, “What shall I do to inherit eternal life?” (Luke 10:25b).

## **II. IMMORTALITY DEFINED**

In his *Dictionary of Philosophy* Runes states that the word immortality is derived from the Latin negative prefix in (not) plus the Latin root *mortalis* (mortal). Taken together the result is “not mortal,” or not subject to death. Runes then proceeds to give the following formal definition of immortality.

The doctrine that the soul or personality of man survives the death of the body. The two principal conceptions of immortality are: (a) *temporal immortality*, the indefinite continuation of the individual mind after death and (b) *eternity*, ascension of the soul to a higher plane of timelessness.

Immortality is, properly speaking, restricted to post- existence (survival after death) but is extended by the theory of transmigration of souls.<sup>4</sup>

It is the purpose of this study to treat the idea of immortality *per se* in the more restricted sense. Thus the idea will be regarded, in accordance with Rune’s definition in part, as that “doctrine that the soul or personality of the man survives the death of the body,” and as the “ascension of the soul to a higher plane of timelessness.” Again the idea of immortality in this study will be “restricted to post-existence, survival after death,” as opposed to pre-existence. Thus the soul will be regarded as everlastingly conscious and identical, but not eternal, in the sense of being uncreated.

## **III. IMMORTALITY ORIGINATED**

The problem of the origin of souls or self-conscious personalities is very old and difficult. The traditional Roman Catholic position, and a position held by some Protestant thinkers, maintains that all souls are directly created by God at conception. God then, according to this position, cooperates in the human act of procreation by furnishing a directly created soul for the humanly

produced body. Thus, in this view, the soul, as an entity, is divinely created and added to the body at conception. Paul J. Glenn<sup>5</sup> a Roman Catholic scholar, makes clear this position.

Glen's position, called *creationism*, is fraught with many insurmountable difficulties. Of the many, only two of the most important will be considered here.

The first problem, the inheritance of "original sin," or depravity, is not the least of the difficulties involved in the theory of *creationism*. St. Augustine, in his later years, saw the difficulty and concluded that in some manner the soul of the child must proceed from the souls of the parents. Augustine's position is known as *traducianism*. Glenn objects seriously to Augustine's position and attempts to evade the dilemma by substituting a third factor which he designates "human nature" as a scapegoat for inherited depravity.

The second serious problem in the theory of *creationism* is that of involving God in objectionable ethical implications. Ethically forbidden cohabitation in extra-marital relations is frequently biologically productive. If God is the creator of each soul directly at conception then it becomes quite clear that He cannot retain His moral integrity while cooperating with his creatures in the commission of an immoral act. Since God's moral integrity would be thus called into question, the idea of God would be necessarily degraded and the holiness of God would be thereby cancelled. The far-reaching implications of this embarrassing situation are not difficult to imagine.

What then is the origin of the soul? There seems to be but one satisfactory answer to the question. That answer is found in the book of Genesis. There it is stated that "God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them" (Gen. 1:27). Then further, the writer of Genesis explains, "Jehovah God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul" (Gen. 2:7). Following this account of creation the author of Genesis appears to strive to make clear God's plan and purpose in the human procreative process.

And God blessed them; and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the heavens, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth (Gen. 1:28; cf. Ps. 8:3-8).

Obviously, when God created man he endowed him with the higher spiritual principle of everlasting conscious personality, and then committed to him the tremendous responsibility, but also the challenging and glorious privilege, or procreating himself, body

and soul, or personality, as a unitary being, functionally. Man was quite evidently a divinely effected synthesis of *dust*, and the *breath* of God. God “breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and *man became a living soul*.” It is not to be overlooked that this conclusion implies the necessity of the “bodily form” for the identity of the person. However, Paul’s argument is clear and convincing in favor of the necessity of a bodily resurrection for *personal identity* as also for divine victory over physical death (*see* I Cor. 15). Then is it not logical to conclude that at conception there emerges a new entity from the synthesis of the parents, and that each *new* emergent is an everlasting self-conscious spiritual personality? Thus man is endowed with the power of procreating the soul or personality as well as the body, and thus the unsolvable problems inhering in the theory of *creationism* are eliminated and man is dignified by self-creative powers. His responsibility for the right use of those powers also becomes very great. In the light of these considerations, the only logically consistent position seems to be that of *traducianism* as advocated by St. Augustine, notwithstanding the fact that Augustine failed to make clear the “how” of this unitary procreation of man. Thus the first spiritual unitary personality had its origin in the creative act of God. But all subsequent personalities have had their origin in man’s divinely delegated procreative powers, as unitary persons, functionally.

#### **IV. CHRISTIAN IMMORTALITY DIFFERENTIATED FROM OTHER CONCEPTS OF FUTURITY**

First, the concept of Christian *immortality*, in the restricted sense, must be clearly differentiated from the idea of *eternal*. *Immortality* looks to a blissful, endless, future existence of conscious personality in relation to and contingent upon God. *Eternal* conveys the idea of timelessness, both in the past and in the future. Eternal, as applied to immortal conscious personality, would imply that such personality was uncreated. If it were uncreated it would not be contingent. If it were not contingent it would be self-existent, and if it were self-existent it would be divine.

Second, the Christian concept of immortality must be clearly differentiated from the idea of *pre-existence*, *transmigration of souls*, and the doctrine of *Karma*, all three of which doctrines are inseparably linked together. Pre-existence of souls has taken different forms in various schools of thought. The best known and most representative doctrines of pre-existence are those of Plato and of the Hindus of India. To these two views it may be of interest to add the Mormon view, which differs from the foregoing only in certain respects.

A third idea that must be clearly distinguished from the Christian concept of immortality, as the idea is used in this study, is

that of a *temporary life after death*. This view would be, in the very nature of the case, eventual mortality rather than immortality. It is a view that was held concerning the souls of both the gods and men by certain of the Greek and Roman thinkers, and it is a view held by many primitive pagan peoples in the world today.

Again, the Christian doctrine of immortality must be clearly differentiated from *conditional immortality* as taught by the religious philosopher William Earnest Hocking of Harvard University. And it must be disassociated from the doctrine of *annihilationism*, usually applied to the complete extinction of the wicked or impenitent at death, or as held by some, at the final judgment. But by some, especially certain materialists such as Bertrand Russell, it has been applied to *all* future existence. The Russellites and the Seventh Day Adventists have been strong advocates of the former view, i.e. for the wicked.

Finally, while it is not the purpose of this study to treat the Old Testament views of immortality, those views do indeed lie back of the Christian doctrine as found in the New Testament. The early Hebrews and later Jews of the Old Testament appear to have progressively grasped the doctrine of immortality—often very faintly understood, but at other times with remarkable insight they anticipated the Christian doctrine. Except for a few notable insights, such as Job, Isaiah and Daniel, this doctrine appears to have reached its clearest understanding by the Jews during the Intertestamental period just prior to the Christian era.

## **V. CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE OF IMMORTALITY *PER SE***

The orthodox Christian doctrine of immortality stands alone and unique among the many other ideas of the soul's destiny in its teaching concerning the future of redeemed men. There appear to be three significant advances in Christian thought over the Jewish concept of a future life: (1) The emphasis upon individual immortality becomes clearer, though individual relation to the group or nation is also important, (2) the idea of the resurrection becomes more evident, and (3) the nature of the future life becomes more distinct and explicit.

Jesus taught the idea of the *Kingdom of Heaven* as a community of the redeemed on earth, but so constituted as to be capable of everlasting continuance. However, although the individual is a member of this Spiritual Kingdom, he stands also in direct personal relation with God. Indeed, Christ perfected the idea of the individual and brought it forth into a clearer light than at any previous time. Here there emerges the provision of both an immortal spiritual individual and an immortal spiritual community of the redeemed.

Second, while Job, Ezekiel, Daniel and Isaiah all caught

faint glimpses of immortality through a bodily resurrection, it remained for Christ and Paul more clearly to explicate this great doctrine.

Logically, a future life of everlasting bliss could be realized only through the reconciliation of man with God. Since God only, and not the human personality, is infinite, it follows that for immortality, as herein defined, the finite human person is contingent upon the infinite. The experience of sin had made such a relationship impossible of attainment for man, except for divine intervention. A Mediator was required for the reconciliation of alienated, guilty man with the pure and holy being of God. Such a Mediator must be, in the very nature of the case, both divine and human. Hence the necessity of the incarnation of God in man, the God-Man, Christ Jesus. The incarnation and atoning death of Jesus Christ would have been incomplete for redemptive purposes without the resurrection and ascension. The assumption of human nature by divinity, the substitutionary death of Christ, and His bodily resurrection and ascension bridged the great gulf between man's soul and God; and thus Christ afforded a way for alienated man to return to an everlasting blissful relationship with God. Christ said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life: no one cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6). Again Christ said, "I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth on me, though he die, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth on me shall never die" (John 11:25, 26). Paul makes this doctrine of the "resurrection unto life" explicit in I Corinthians 15. It was also the very heart of the message of the apostolic Christians, as that message is recorded in the Acts of the Apostles. In Christ was furnished the means for the realization of the individual and personal immortality toward which the mind of man had ever fretfully striven, but to which it had never been able to attain. The ascended Christ's words as recorded in the Revelation are significant at this juncture. "I am the living one; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades" (Rev. 1:17, 18). Christ's authority over death and hell is the assurance of believing man's immortality.

Third, while there remains much unrevealed concerning the nature of immortality in the Christian teaching, it becomes evident that this future life is unending; that it is entirely free from the experience of sin with its woeful consequences; that it is characterized by personal identity and consciousness, and that a *bodily form* is provided for the personal identity of the immortal spirit. This later fact is made clear in Paul's letter to the Corinthians. It is further evident, from the teachings of the apostles especially, that the finite redeemed and immortal soul will experience a continual progressive development toward the infinite character of God throughout the aeons (see Heb. 12:22-24).

Although the idea of immortality may not be empirically demonstrable, it may and has been courageously believed by millions of people since the days of Christ.

## **VI. NECESSARY GROUNDS FOR IMMORTALITY**

The necessary grounds for a satisfactory concept of immortality may be considered in a sixfold division. They will be but briefly noted here.

First, the everlasting freedom of human personality is requisite to personal immortality. Since only spiritual persons are morally free, and since moral freedom is requisite to spiritual personality, then it follows that if spiritual personality is to experience immortality it must remain everlastingly free. To deprive a person of moral freedom would mean the cancellation of an essential note of human personality which would reduce man to a robot.

Second, intelligent consciousness must ever characterize the immortal person. Since intelligence is an essential characteristic of spiritual persons, differentiating them from all lower forms of life, it follows that if personal immortality is to be experienced, intelligence must ever characterize the person. This is that “something” in man closely akin to God. Says Paul concerning the new man of redemption: he “is being renewed unto knowledge after the image of him that created him” (Col. 3:10).

A third necessary ground for immortality is moral responsibility. Moral responsibility is the direct consequent of personal freedom and intelligence. Therefore, while personality remains intelligent and free it will be morally responsible.

The fourth necessary ground for personal immortality is the indestructibility of the soul. Plato argued the indestructibility of the soul on the ground of its simplicity. If it has no parts, said Plato, then it cannot be dissolved. Although Plato’s argument has been challenged, it will be evident that if the soul is to be immortal it must be indestructible. Perhaps the greater weight of evidence for the indestructibility of the soul rests in the fact that spiritual personalities are ends in themselves, though contingent upon God. Therefore, as ultimates in God’s plan, they are in the very nature of the case indestructible. (Could personalities—individuals—possibly be the true atoms of the universe?)

A fifth ground of personal immortality is improvability. Personality is spiritual. Spirit is always active. Activity bespeaks purposeful progress, for an intelligent, free, and moral person could not remain active without purposeful progression. Cessation of activity would result in spiritual annihilation, and annihilation is not a tenable idea. Morality requires purposeful or worthy ends, and therefore the activity must be directed toward a worthy end. That end is the further development of immortal personality. Paul

seems to have grasped this idea in the close of his master-work on love. Said he, "But now abideth [continueth] faith, hope, love; these three: and the greatest of these is love" (I Cor.. 13:13). One has observed that by faith comes anticipation, by hope apprehension, and by love appreciation, or enjoyment. Thus considered, these are the three virtues necessary to the unending progressive enrichment of personality.

The sixth and final necessary ground for immortality is the existence of a moral sphere. If a moral sphere is presently necessary for the self-realization and continuance of moral personality, then in order for the continuance of moral responsibility in the endless future the universe must of necessity afford an infinite moral arena. Such a moral universe inhabited by free intelligent moral persons, in relation to and dependence upon God, cannot be logically a realm of closed moral probation. The absence of evil and temptation does not imply the absence of man's moral freedom. Thus Keyser has said: "Sin is an eternal possibility, but never an eternal necessity."<sup>7</sup> Should it be objected that such a position would allow for a "second chance Fall" of redeemed man after death, let it be noted that the following factors would preclude such an eventuality. 1) All actual sin and temptation, in the sense of enticement by a Tempter, will be absent; 2) redeemed man will live in the light of the total effects of the Fall and God's redeeming love that provided his deliverance from sin and its consequences with reconciliation to God; 3) his love and devotion to God will be not only a personal, historically decided factor, but a continuous choice of love, devotion and service to God. It may be considered somewhat analogous to the happy and continuous marriage relation. At a point in history the man and woman made their mutual choice of each other, sealed that choice by matrimony, and then throughout life continue to choose one another momentarily. Divorce is always possible, and while much as it may be deplored, few if any would wish it to be legally prohibited. Certainly the marriage relation is more meaningful by reason of the continuous mutual choice of the partners throughout life, growing in mutual appreciation and enrichment with the fuller and deeper mutual knowledge and understanding of each other, than were they compelled legally or otherwise to remain together. Likewise, it would seem reasonable that redeemed man's continuous loving choice of God, both here and hereafter, would be more meaningful to both God and man than if man were deprived of his moral freedom and thus reduced to a redeemed robot. Nor does there appear to be any valid support in the Scriptures for the age-old teaching that redeemed man will have no power of moral choice in the hereafter. Indeed emphasis upon death as the closed door of probation has been highly effective in decision getting in evangelistic preaching. However, such emphasis does not of necessity make the teaching reasonably or scripturally



valid. The part played by death in relation to the “fixedness” of man’s destiny may be illustrated, in full consideration of the limitations of such an illustration, by the photographer’s chemical bath that sets the image in the print. However, it is the decision of man’s intelligent will that sets the image, or determines his destiny, either for heaven or hell, rather than the arbitrary will of God. Adam Clarke has well said: “A Christian goes to heaven because Christ died for him; a sinner goes to hell because he deserves to go there.” However, in either case his destiny is the result of his moral, or immoral, choice and not the arbitrary will of God. And in either destiny man’s moral choice will be so self-determined as to preclude any possibility that he will ever change his mind or course. Both the redeemed and the unredeemed are so constituted personally as to be indestructible individuals. The redeemed will experience continued progressive enrichment and development of their finite personalities in relation to the infinite personality of God, both here and hereafter. The unredeemed will, on the contrary, progressively degenerate into lower and lower stages of depravity without the ability to ever experience annihilation in the world to come.

## VII. THE VALIDITY OF IMMORTALITY

Certain fundamental reasons for the necessity of immortality to satisfy the human mind are noteworthy.

First, nothing short of immortality, with its implications for the present and future life, will satisfy the demands of man’s moral nature for a sense of justice not realized in the present life.

Second, immortality is requisite to the fuller realization of the development of personality not possible of attainment in the present life. The awakening of man’s mind to the vastness and richness of an infinite universe within the brief *span* of a lifetime cannot logically terminate with a sudden cessation of personal existence. Such a consideration would be disillusioning and destructive of the value and worthwhileness of man’s present life.

In the third instance it is evident that immortality is necessary to the very nature of personality. The personalities of God and men created in His image are the only ultimates in the universe. They are the only things that exist of and for their own ends. All else is contingent upon personalities and exists for those personalities. In other words, all else besides personality possesses only instrumental value. Personality has intrinsic value. Thus finally to destroy all personalities, including God, would mean cessation of all existence. The fallacy of this argument is self-evident.

Again the reason that immortality is essential to the nature of personality grows out of a consideration of the creativity of hu-

man personality. What man creates in the realm of social and moral values through constructive thinking and activity enriches life, and in a sense the universe itself. However, as the universe created by God is contingent for its existence upon the Creator, so are the values created by men contingent upon their creators. Thus, the cessation of existence would be destructive of all values inhering in the creative personalities. Such a disposal of good would not be worthy of the character of God.

A third reason the nature of personality does not admit of destruction is that it is spiritual, and as such it is ever active. While it remains spiritual it cannot become inert and thus cease to exist.

Hence, the nature of personality as ultimate, creative and active, logically establishes the necessity of its immortality. Fourth, the immortality of human personality stands on the necessity of the fulfillment of the purpose of creation. To say that man was created good is to say that there was a good end in view for him. Otherwise there would be the dilemma of a morally good, spiritual personality existing for no good purpose in the universe. Furthermore, such a purpose as would be worthy of the free moral personality of man could not be logically realized within time. Only the contemplation of timelessness could possibly satisfy such an intellectual and spiritual demand.

Fifth, the validity of immortality is attested by the demand for the fulfillment of the purpose of redemption. When the cost and the intricacy of the divine plan of redemption are contemplated the mind revolts at the thought of an ultimate cessation of the existence of spiritual personalities redeemed at such great cost and care.

Sixth, and finally, the immortality of man is necessary to the satisfaction of the divine desire for personal companionship. Love is the very essence of God. But love demands an object upon which to bestow itself, an object which must be capable of response to its overtures. Impersonal creation is incapable of thus responding. Therefore God requires personal beings for the full satisfaction of His own nature. Paul speaks of “the riches of the glory of *his* [God’s] *inheritance* in the saints” (Eph. 1:18). Anything short of such a conception of God would resolve itself into something comparable to Aristotle’s idea of God as the “unmoved mover.” A personal, loving God could have no pleasure in a lonely self-existence. Nor could he have pleasure in the temporary enjoyment of the fellowship of His redeemed creatures only to snuff out their existence eventually. If God is personal His nature demands the everlasting personal companionship of human personalities whom he has lovingly redeemed and who have freely chosen Him for their everlasting companionship.

## VIII. THE SOURCE OF ETERNAL LIFE

Eternal life, or immortality, was resident in man before the Fall through God's indwelling Spirit, but it was lost through the greatest of all world tragedies -the Fall. The Genesis account informs us that "Jehovah God...breathed into... [man's] nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul" (Gen. 2:7). However, when man disobeyed God and separated himself from Him he lost this divinely endowed immortality of the soul. God then set a boundary upon him by removing him from the Garden where he had access to the tree of life, lest he should eat of that tree and live forever in his sins (Gen. 3:22).

Jesus Christ, as God incarnate, is now the only source of eternal life open to man. Paul declared that God "*only hath immortality*, dwelling in the light unapproachable." J.B. Phillips translates this passage thus: "God ... the only *source of immortality*" (Tim. 6:16; cf. Rom. 6:23). Jesus Christ is man's only access to this divine immortality, or eternal life. Paul states that "the free gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 6: 23b)

Wesley states that

... God hath given us, not only a title to, but the real beginning of, eternal life: And this life is purchased by, and treasured up in, his Son; who hath all the springs and fullness of it in himself, to communicate to his body, the Church. This eternal life then commences when it pleases the Father to reveal his Son in our hearts; when we first know Christ, being enabled to 'call him Lord by the Holy Ghost.'... Then it is that heaven is opened in the soul, that the proper heavenly state commences...our knowledge and our love of him increases, by the same degrees, and in the same proportion, the kingdom of an inward heaven must necessarily increase also; while we 'grow up in all things into Him who is our Head.'<sup>7</sup>

On the necessity of the impartation of the divine life, as opposed to mere imputation, for the realization of the eternal life or immortality of the believer, Wesley is very specific and emphatic. He declares that

...none shall live with God, but he that now lives to God; none shall enjoy the glory of God in heaven, but he that bears the image of God on earth; none that is not saved from sin here can be saved from hell hereafter; none can see the kingdom of God above unless the kingdom of God be in him below. Whosoever will reign with

Christ in heaven, must have Christ reigning in him on earth.<sup>8</sup>

## IX. THE MEANING OF ETERNAL LIFE OR IMMORTALITY

Eternal life is primarily qualitative, though it is also consequently quantitative. Geddes MacGregor<sup>9</sup> observes that there are three words used in the Greek New Testament to express the various kinds of life. The first is *bios*, which refers to the life span, the temporary vitalizing principle of a natural organism, and from which we get our word biology. The second word is *psychē*, which indicates the animating principle, and from which we get our word psychology. Third, there is the word *zoē*, which signifies a higher quality of life, and is the principal word used for immortality in the New Testament, especially in John's writings. In the New Testament this *Zoē*, or *eternal life*, is declared to be the result of one's having been born again (John 3:3). It is the consequent of putting on Christ in Galatians 3:25; it is the result of being quickened together with Christ in Ephesians 2:5; it is the consequent of being in Christ in II Corinthians 5:17; it results from *putting on the new man* in Ephesians 4:24; and of being a new creature in Christ in Galatians 6:15. It is significant that *zoē* is generally used with the definite article in the Greek New Testament, and thus indicates that the readers must have been quite familiar with the concept and what is signified.

This *zoē*, or *eternal life*, in the New Testament is the supreme blessing of God mediated to men by Jesus Christ. It is the *very quality* of God's life given to believing man by Jesus Christ. Wesley<sup>10</sup> regards the "spirit" of I Thess. 5:23 as something adventitious, or added to man's "natural constituent parts" of body and soul, rather than indicating that man is a trichotomy. The Old Testament is concerned primarily with life as "length of days on earth"—such as "three score years and ten." The New Testament and Christianity are concerned primarily with the quality of the life that lasts, rather than the span of years during which one may exist through animation by the life provided in nature. Christ said that he came that men might have life, and "that they may have it abundantly" (John 10:10). The life of Christ is an infinite, divine energy which transcends all forms of empirical or sensible manifestations. It is God's life in Christ imparted to the true believer. "I give unto them eternal life," said Jesus, "and they shall never perish" (John 10:28).

Quantitative life could never be adequate for man's fullest self-realization. George Paget Thompson, Nobel Prize winning scientist, suggests that natural life may be extended, or old age may eventually be postponed indefinitely through improved medical science. Should this scientific achievement be realized the fol-

lowing conditions would result. First, all death would be either accidental or voluntary. Second, life insurance would have to be converted to immortality insurance. Third, sickness or disability might be prolonged indefinitely. Fourth, if man lived 500 years there would be no reason to believe that he would be any nearer to the realization of his life's goals at 499 years than he is now at seventy-nine or eighty years of age. Fifth, on the other hand, the longer span might give some men more time to make a greater shipwreck of life, and incidentally, it might considerably increase the tax burden to provide social security for man from the present retirement age of sixty-two or sixty-five years to the 500-year mark.

MacGregor observes<sup>11</sup> that there are many noted witnesses to the value and superiority of qualitative over quantitative life. Benjamin Franklin said in *Poor Richard*, "Wish not so much to live long as to live well." Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "It is the depth at which we live and not at all the surface extension that imports" (*Society and Solitude*, "Works and Days"). Crabbe stated: "Life is not to be measured by the time we live" (*The Village*, Book II). Sallust, the Roman historian, said, "No parent would wish for his children that they might live forever, but rather that their lives might be good and honorable" (*Jurgurtha*, Chap. 85, Sec. 50). Seneca said, "The wise man will live as long as he ought, and not as long as he can, for he is always thinking about the quality of his life" (*Epist. ad Lucilium*, 70, 4).

## **X. THE EFFECTS OF ETERNAL LIFE**

Eternal life has exceedingly large and significant effects on the present life of man. First, it awakens the natural life (*bios*) and the innate potential of man and causes them to germinate and grow, just as the warmth of the sun produces germination in the seed and causes it to spring into new life and fruition. Second, it unites the eternal life of God (*Zoē*) in Christ with the natural life of man in the conversion experience, and thus lifts man to a higher level of life and living here and now, but which will continue forever.

As an illustration of the foregoing principle, one might consider a box of seed placed in the dark basement where there are objects painted with luminous paint in each of the four corners of the room. With the box in the center of the room, as the seed sprouted and grew, the plants would bend in four different directions, depending on their proximity to the luminous objects which would pick up and reflect such light as existed in the apparent darkness. However, should the window *blind be slit* to let in a narrow ray of sunlight the plants would all then turn toward the sunlight. Just so, there are many natural objects in the world that reflect the sunlight of God's revelation (see Ps. 19), and that appeal to man's

natural aspirations and drives, but when Christ shines forth on men He is the true light of God that brings to them spiritual illumination and eternal life (John 1:9), unless they turn willfully away from Him into outer darkness. If they do so they will die in their natural sinful state devoid of this essential quality of eternal life, the life of God in Christ, though they will continue to exist in endless progressive degeneracy.

Eternal life has the effect for the future of an unbroken continuity of the presently experienced eternal life. Jesus said, on the occasion of the raising of Lazarus, "Whosoever liveth and believeth on me shall never die" (John 11:26b).

Finally, there will be the continued development of the redeemed personality as it moves forever toward the infinite divine perfection, even in the future life (cf. Matt. 5:48). The author of the letter to the Hebrews says concerning the redeemed in the life to come: "Ye are come...to the spirits of just men made perfect" (Heb.12:22a-23b).

## DOCUMENTATIONS

1. Quoted by Fredrick D. Kershner in *Horizons of Immortality* (St. Louis: Bethany Press, 1926), p. 12.
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3. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, Eberhard Bethge, ed. (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1965), pp. 166-172.
4. Dagobert D. Runes, *The Dictionary of Philosophy* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1942), p. 142.
5. Paul J. Glenn, *An Introduction to Philosophy* (St. Louis: B. Herder Book Company, 1944). pp. 314, 315.
6. L. S. Keyser, *A System of General Ethics* (Burlington, Iowa: The Lutheran Literary Board, 1934), p. 138.
7. John Wesley, "Sermons on Several Occasions," *The Works of John Wesley* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, rep. n.d.), p. 430.
8. Robert W. Wartner and Robert E. Ch. 1, *A Compend of Wesley's Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1957), p. 278.
9. Geddes MacGregor, *Introduction to Religious Philosophy* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1959), pp. 192 ff.
10. John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament* (London: The Epworth Press, 1954, rep.), p. 763.
11. MacGregor, *op. cit.*

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