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# **RESPONSIBLE GRACE: The Systematic Perspective of Wesleyan Theology**

by  
Randy L. Maddox

An essay investigating the systematic nature of John Wesley's theology must strike many readers as misconceived. The conventional wisdom is that Wesley was primarily an evangelist and the organizer of a renewal movement within Anglicanism, not a systematic theologian. This opinion has been voiced as loudly by Wesleyan theologians as by outside observers. Consider, for example, Carl Michalsen's assessment that "preaching and not theology was the main concern of John Wesley."<sup>1</sup> As Rupert Davies notes, even Wesley's strongest defenders are often willing to concede that, far from being a creative and systematic thinker, he was a third-rank theologian.<sup>2</sup>

A pointed example of the hesitancy concerning Wesley's stature as a systematic theologian was provided at the Bicentennial Consultation on Wesleyan Theology held at Emory University in August, 1983. In the section dealing with systematic theology, major papers were presented on the theme of the contribution of Wesleyan theology for the future. The theses of several of these papers are revealing. Durwood Foster listed several assets of the Wesleyan tradition, focusing on its ability to preserve a tension between such themes as grace and freedom. However, his central judgment was that Wesley's own theology ultimately lacked a unifying perspective.<sup>3</sup> Thomas Langford located the major significance of Wesley in the fact that he inaugurated the first major religious movement after the inception of the Enlightenment. As such, Wesley presented one of the first models for mediating biblical theology to a "secular" world. However, given the drastic changes between our setting and Wesley's, Langford concluded that Wesley offers contemporary theologians more bases than conclusions.<sup>4</sup> M. Douglas Meeks located the central contribution of Wesley's approach to theology in his emphasis on relating theology to the praxis of the Church and the situation of the poor. Meeks then suggested a similarity between Wesley's approach and that of contemporary liberation theology. In that light, he argued that Wesleyan theologians should no longer be chagrined at the charge that Wesley was a "peoples' theologian."<sup>5</sup>

Meeks' assessment of Wesley's contribution to theology is clearly the most positive. However, even it concurs implicitly with the conventional perspective that Wesley's main contribution is not to be found in the area of systematic theological reflection.

There are two basic reasons behind the conventional evaluation of Wesley. Albert Outler notes the first when he suggests Wesley was not a "theologian's theologian." That is, Wesley did not pursue theology primarily in dialogue with and in the scholarly language of professional theologians. Rather, he developed what Outler calls a "folk theology," expressing the Christian message in its fullness and integrity in "plain words for plain people."<sup>6</sup> Rupert Davies expresses the second reason when he notes that Wesley never composed a Summa: i.e., a system that embraced the whole range of Christian revelation and related it to the other departments of human knowledge.<sup>7</sup> As Wood summarizes both of these points, "Wesley's theology was practical and occasional rather than theoretical and systematic."<sup>8</sup>

No doubt, the preceding observations are basically correct. However, the condescending value judgments implied in them are subject to question. Such questioning may help to uncover the organic unity in Wesley's own theology, which Outler notes is missed by so many.<sup>9</sup> It may also provide a theological norm for contemporary Wesleyan theology.

## **NEW PERSPECTIVES ON THE NATURE OF SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY**

Perspective for evaluating the conventional assessment of Wesley as a theologian can be gained from the contemporary debates about the scholarly and systematic nature of theology. This subject has been most seriously debated by European theologians. However, it has also received significant consideration in the Americas. The most common format for the discussion has been the use of a particular philosophical conception of the nature of scholarly inquiry (Wissenschaftstheorie) to either critically evaluate the nature of theological reflection or to construct an ideal model of theological reflection.<sup>10</sup>

One of the most helpful contributions of this recent discussion has been the overcoming of the dominance of a model of scholarly theological activity which has reigned through much of medieval and modern Christian thought. Whether in the form of an Aristotelian Summa or an Hegelian Encyklopadie, this dominant model has functioned under the premise that the ideal approach to theology is one concerned with: (a) the systematic investigation of the entire range of Christian revelation and (b) the rational demonstration of the truth claims of Christian faith in view of the breadth of human knowledge. Within such a model, the theological reflections of Wesley (or Luther!) would obviously be second-rank at best. The claim to a truly scholarly and systematic theology would be limited to the likes of Aquinas and Calvin.

What has characterized the recent discussion is the development of alternative conceptions of the nature and goal of theology based on some recent philosophical +reconceptions of the nature of scholarly activity.<sup>11</sup> In particular, there is a significant and growing group of theologians who have drawn on such perspectives as analytic philosophy and the critical theorists

of the Frankfurt School to develop an understanding of scholarly theology that is "practical" or integrally related to the life and practice of the Christian community. An understanding of the basic conception and implications of one of the most helpful such approaches can be gained by considering its main proponent-Gerhard Sauter.<sup>12</sup>

Sauter argues explicitly against the Hegelian tendency to judge the scholarly nature of an activity such as theology by its ability to construct a comprehensive system that can be clearly integrated with the large: system of all human knowledge. Instead, Sauter follows Karl Popper in claiming that the true test of scholarship should be that any particular discipline proceed about its activity in light of critically-assessed methods.<sup>13</sup> Thus, a theologian would be considered scholarly if she or he proceeded according to critically-assessed methods, even though they never constructed an embracive theoretical system of thought.

Building on this point, Sauter asserts that the primary task of theology is a practical one; namely, critical reflection on the life and practice of the Church. The ultimate value of theological reflection is not found in its abstract theoretical moments, but rather in the use of the results of such moments for critiquing and norming contemporary church discourse and life.<sup>14</sup> The overarching goal of theology is to bring the tradition of Christian doctrine and the skills of disciplined thought to bear in solving the practical problems of the contemporary Christian community.<sup>15</sup> As a corollary, the goal of theological education is not primarily the memorization of a system of theology, but rather the formation of an ability to make theologically responsible judgments.<sup>16</sup>

The question, of course, is "What constitutes a theologically responsible judgment?" Two basic sets of considerations become evident in Sauter's discussion. The first set deals with methods of theological investigation. Included here would be consideration of the sources consulted for relevant insights (Scripture, tradition, psychology, etc.) and the manner in which these sources were consulted (e.g., historical critical method).<sup>17</sup> The second set of considerations deals with the methods and structure of theological judgment. Included here would be consideration of how the various relevant insights are related to each other and to the problem being addressed.<sup>18</sup> Accordingly, a responsible theological judgment is one which uses critically appraised methods of theological investigation and judgment to address the practical problems of the life and thought of the Christian community.

So far, our discussion of Sauter has focused on his understanding of how theologians should make particular theological judgments. While this is the heart of Sauter's approach, it must not lead to a misperception of Sauter as unconcerned with the systematic nature of theology. While he does reject the idea that the primary goal of theology is to construct intricate theological systems, he is very concerned with systematic theological reflection.<sup>19</sup> One of his most basic requirements for responsible theological judgments is that one investigate the relationship of other problems and the various themes and concepts of Christian doctrine to the situation under consideration. For example, an adequate theological evaluation of glossolalia would include not only considerations of biblical and historical precedents, but also, consideration of the implications of

such a practice for one's understanding of the nature of the Imago Dei, the finality of the revelation of Jesus Christ, etc.

It is in the context of this last point that one of Sauter's most important contributions, for our purposes, is found. A perennial frustration of Christian theologians is the fact that representatives of different theological traditions can often consider the same issue or problem, drawing on the same theological sources and using the same critical methods of investigation, and arrive at significantly different conclusions. Sauter's analysis of the nature of theological argumentation and systematization provides a convincing explanation of this phenomenon. He notes that the various concepts of theology (revelation, justification, law/gospel dialectic, etc.) should be distinguished into at least three categories.<sup>20</sup> The crucial category, for our purposes, is what he calls "orienting concepts." Orienting concepts play a unique role in theological argumentation. They are not utilized as one topic among others to be organized. Rather, they provide the integrative thematic perspective in light of which all other theological concepts are understood and given their relative meaning or value.<sup>21</sup> Sauter's point is that the difference between rival theological traditions lies not so much in their differences over particular doctrines as in their choice of orienting concepts.

This point can be illustrated by a comparison of Luther and Calvin. By Sauter's standards, Luther would be a systematic theologian if it could be shown that his attempts to address the practical problems of the Church of his day were guided by a consistent orienting concept (or set of related orienting concepts). In recent Luther investigation, it has become quite clear that the concept of justification by faith (and the related concepts of a theology of the cross and the law/gospel dialectic) function as such an orienting concept in his theological reflection.<sup>22</sup> In the case of Calvin, the mere fact that he developed a comprehensive handbook of Christian doctrine would not in itself qualify him as a systematic theologian. To be considered as such, it would be necessary to show that his system of theology evidenced the influence of a consistent orienting concept. (We are all painfully aware that summaries of Christian doctrine abound which have no such consistency). Again, it is widely agreed that the concept of the sovereignty or majesty of God functions as the chief orienting concept in Calvin's theology.<sup>23</sup>

The point of Sauter's analysis is that the crucial difference between Luther's theology and that of Calvin lies not in individual doctrines but in the perspective and selectivity exercised on all doctrines by their respective orienting concepts. To take just one example, both Luther and Calvin endorsed a doctrine of personal predestination. However, this seeming point of agreement between the two theologians is also a key example of their differences because they each opt for and understand predestination from the perspective of their chief orienting concepts. For Luther, the doctrine of predestination is primarily a safeguard against any form of works-righteousness. By contrast, for Calvin, it is an expression of the final sovereignty of God and hence, the certainty of salvation.<sup>24</sup>

This example has important implications for any contemporary claim to express, for example, an authentic Calvinist theology. The crucial criterion for deciding such a claim would not be the number of direct

quotations from Calvin. Neither would it be the mere fact that one endorsed the doctrine of predestination. Rather, it would focus on whether one's theological perspective was guided throughout by Calvin's distinctive chief orienting concept.

## WESLEY AS A SCHOLARLY AND SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGIAN

What would be the effect on the conventional evaluation of Wesley as a scholarly and systematic theologian if Sauter's reflections on the nature of systematic theology were accepted as valid?

In the first place, the fact that, far from being a Summa, Wesley's theological writings and reflections were nearly all occasional and directed to specific problems in the Church of his day would no longer be viewed with disdain. It would merely indicate that Wesley departed from the then dominant theoretical model of theological activity because of his concern for the vital task of rendering theological judgments on the life and practice of the Church.<sup>25</sup>

In that case, the pertinent question would become: "Did Wesley pursue these judgments in a theologically responsible and systematic manner?" As we have seen, an adequate answer to this question involves both consideration of Wesley's methods of theological investigation and consideration of his approach to theological argumentation. Regarding the former, it has been repeatedly demonstrated that Wesley pursued his theological reflection with a self-critical awareness of the various sources of theology—the famous Wesleyan quadrilateral—and in light of the most responsible methods of research of his day.<sup>26</sup> This particular aspect need detain us no longer.

The more pressing considerations pertain to Wesley's approach to theological argumentation. On one level, this would involve an analysis of the relative role and authority Wesley gave to the various sources of theology in formulating a theological judgment. Paul Hoon has provided a summary of this aspect of Wesley, emphasizing its practical or experience-related character.

The procedure by which Wesley arrives at a doctrine consists, first, in deriving it from and formulating it on the basis of Scripture; second, in testing and modifying it in accord with experience; third, in testing it by reason; fourth, in testing it by tradition. . . . The distinctive feature of this method lies in the high place given to experience and in the manner in which Wesley systematically appeals to experience.<sup>27</sup>

This summary is helpful both in regards to stressing the primary role of Scripture and the important role of individual and corporate<sup>28</sup> experience in Wesley's theological reflection. However, in light of Sauter's analysis of the systematic nature of theology, it is obvious that a further question must be raised about Wesley's theological argumentation.

This further, and in our opinion most crucial, question is whether one can discern an orienting concept (or set of related concepts) that provided a consistency to Wesley's various theological judgments. This question has rarely been addressed, even by those involved in the recent renewed consideration of Wesley's theology. The major reason is that this recent work has largely limited itself to expositing and defending Wesley's

understanding of "the way to heaven."<sup>29</sup> Most of the research has dealt with individual aspects of salvation such as justification<sup>30</sup> and sanctification.<sup>31</sup> The few more comprehensive introductions to Wesley have been presented as summaries of his order of salvation.<sup>32</sup> Even the two seeming exceptions to this characterization, a treatment of Wesley's Christology<sup>33</sup> and one of his doctrine of the Holy Spirit,<sup>34</sup> deal with their subjects primarily in terms of their relation to the order of salvation.

Without denying the immense contributions to this recent work, it can be argued that Wesley's contribution to theology goes beyond his reflections on the order of salvation. It is true that Wesley himself understood the core of his theology to lie in the order of salvation (cf. VIII 46; X, 72).<sup>35</sup> However, he did not restrict himself to this narrow group of topics. Within his works, one can find treatments of almost every major issue of theology-sovereignty of God, omniscience, atonement, etc.-and many of the secondary topics-angels, devils, nature of hell, etc. Moreover, the topics and arrangements of his second series of sermons resemble the classical Protestant "salvation history" model of a dogmatic.<sup>36</sup> With some license, it could be considered a lay-level theology handbook.

In this light, a re-evaluation of the conventional low regard of Wesley as a systematic theologian seems appropriate. As suggested above, the outcome of any such re-evaluation would hinge on whether it can be demonstrated that Wesley utilized, at least implicitly, a central orienting concept in rendering his various theological judgments.

### **RESPONSIBLE GRACE-WESLEY'S ORIENTING CONCEPT**

The major thesis of this essay is that there is such an orienting concept in Wesley's theology; namely, the concept of responsible grace. To substantiate this thesis, it will be necessary to first define this orienting concept and then illustrate its influence on Wesley's theological reflection.

The orienting concept of responsible grace is not simply a doctrine discussed by Wesley. It is a fundamental conviction about the nature of divine-human interaction which provided the distinctive slant to all of Wesley's theology. The most succinct expression Wesley gives of this concept is actually a quote from St. Augustine: "He that made us without ourselves, will not save us without ourselves" (VI, 513). That Wesley quotes Augustine in this regard is ironic for, as Outler notes, "(Wesley's) driving passion was to find a third alternative to Pelagian optimism and Augustinian pessimism with respect to the human flaw and the human potential."<sup>37</sup> Wesley found this third alternative in a concept of responsible grace, whereby salvation is clearly a gift of God (we cannot save ourselves), but a gift that calls us to respond and to take responsibility (God will not save us without ourselves).

In the first place, Wesley is utterly convinced that human beings have neither the existing moral purity to merit salvation nor the power to achieve such purity on their own (VIII, 49). If we have even one good thought or one good desire, we should be careful to give the honor to God because it is a gift of grace (VI, 398). Salvation, indeed even the desire for salvation, is fundamentally a free gift of God offered to undeserving human persons (V, 7-8). Far from meriting this gift, we can only accept it in faith. Moreover, even the faith by which we accept salvation is a gift of God (V,

62). Clearly, the theme of grace was central to Wesley's preaching and theological reflection.<sup>38</sup>

The theme of responsibility was just as central and provided a type of dialectical balance to the theme of grace. It was Wesley's conviction that, while God may on occasion irresistibly constrain a person to perform a specific task in fulfilling divine providence, such was never the case in relation to personal salvation (X, 210). The gift of grace upon which salvation depends operates such as to empower us to respond without compelling us to obey.<sup>39</sup> By means of prevenient grace, God acts upon every human person to enable them to enter into a saving relationship with God. However, "God does not continue to act upon the soul, unless the soul reacts upon God" (V, 233; cf. VI, 49). We must respond to God's grace and ultimately, we bear the responsibility if we do not do so.

This theme of responsibility is not limited to the initial acceptance of salvation. Indeed, Wesley's most characteristic stress is on the continuing responsibility to put the grace of God to work transforming our lives, lest it be received in vain (V, 144). Concerning this transformation, Wesley is quite clear that even the most saintly Christian still stands in the tension found between two confessions of Scripture: "Without me you can do nothing" and "I can do all things through Christ strengthening me" (X, 478). Wesley gives a detailed description of this tension in his sermon "On Working Out Our Own Salvation."

(Firstly), inasmuch as God works in you, you are now able to work out your own salvation. . . . You can do something, through Christ strengthening you. Stir up the spark of grace which is now in you and (God) will give you more grace. Secondly, God worketh in you; therefore you must work . . . otherwise (God) will cease working (VI, 512-13).

In brief, Wesley understood the essential Christian message to be one of grace, but grace which both called for and empowered human response thereby preserving human responsibility. This, in his opinion, inescapable dialectic between grace and responsibility became the criterion by which Wesley judged the adequacy of the various theological positions of his day. For example, while Luther's writings had played a key role in helping Wesley clarify the primacy of grace in Christian life,<sup>40</sup> he sensed in Luther's formulation of "justification by faith alone"<sup>41</sup> an overemphasis on the imputed nature of holiness (solifidianism) which severed the taproot of human responsibility (I, 186,315-16). He was convinced that this imbalance leads ultimately either to an ethical and spiritual quietism like that of the Moravians (I,315,257) or to an enthusiastic antinomianism (XI, 430-2).

Calvin's theology was also found wanting by Wesley. It is true that Calvin is often mentioned with appreciation regarding subjects such as the imputation of Christ's righteousness to Christians (V, 240) and the lack of all natural free-will (VIII, 285). However, Wesley's final judgment is that Calvin emphasizes the sovereignty of God to the point of the logical and practical denigration of human responsibility (VII, 373-86; VIII, 337; X 211-59; XI,493-4).

On the other side, Wesley was just as critical of those theological positions which defended human responsibility in any way which obscured the fact that salvation is always of grace, apart from any human merit. In



particular, he was critical of the traditional Roman Catholic understanding of salvation which made justification contingent upon infused holiness (V, 58). He also found it necessary to part ways with his early mentor, William Law, when the latter denied justification by faith and imputed righteousness as doctrines that undermined Christian piety (III, 308; V, 245). For Wesley, it is precisely our awareness of the unmerited nature of God's grace that calls forth responsible Christian living.

It is this dialectic between grace and responsibility that we are terming "responsible grace." It should be evident by now that the theme is present in Wesley's theology. The claim that it functioned as an orienting concept guiding Wesley's various theological judgments remains to be shown.

### **THE ORIENTING CONCEPT AT WORK**

A brief review of the method of systematic theology suggested above will help clarify the next step in our argument. In making theological judgments, a responsible or scholarly theologian is obliged to consult the appropriate sources and develop a critical awareness of the various alternatives. They must then either choose between the alternatives or find a way of reconciling the apparent differences.<sup>42</sup> The mark of a "systematic" theologian is that a basic continuity can be discerned in these various theological decisions and formulations. The remaining task of this essay is to demonstrate that there is such a basic consistency in Wesley and that it is an expression of his fundamental conviction about "responsible grace." This demonstration will begin with an analysis of Wesley's doctrine of God. Then programmatic remarks on the other major areas of Wesley's thought will be given. In each case, it will be argued that the concerns embodied in the concept of responsible grace guide Wesley's formulations and decisions regarding theological options.

#### *1. Doctrine of God*

Wesley's position regarding the various aspects of the doctrine of God has been chosen for primary consideration because it provides the theological basis for his more extended discussion of the order of salvation. Also, it has been cogently argued that the most basic differences between Wesley's theology and that of Calvin (as one example) lie at the level of their respective doctrines of God.<sup>43</sup>

The major focus of Wesley's reflection on the doctrine of God was the nature of God's sovereignty. His main point, directed at Calvin (as he understood Calvin) was that God's sovereignty should always be related to the other divine attributes (X, 220). Failure to make this relation would ultimately lead to an abstract and deterministic view of sovereignty which undermined both God's justice (X, 216,363) and God's love (X, 229). It would also destroy human responsibility (VI, 318; X,362).

Moving beyond critique, Wesley provided several constructive proposals for understanding the nature of God in a way that held divine sovereignty, mercy and justice together. In the first place, he refused to follow the Nominalists in making a distinction between God's will and God's nature (V, 440-1). This removed the possibility of vindicating God's sovereign decisions by placing God above the divinely-established moral law. In the second place, Wesley located the primary expression of God's sovereignty

in the bestowal of mercy rather than in the abstract concept of self-sufficiency and freedom.<sup>44</sup> This move purged the notion of sovereignty of its frequent overtones of arbitrariness and domination. Finally, Wesley argued at length that a conception of God wherein God could interact effectively and providentially with human beings while still allowing a measure of human free-agency does not detract from God's glory. On the contrary, it immeasurably deepens our sense of God's glorious wisdom, justice and mercy (X, 230-4; VI, 317-18), without, at the same time, undercutting human responsibility.

This basic stance regarding God's nature as loving and just finds expression in Wesley's judgments regarding several related issues. To cite just one example, it led him to opt for a conception of divine foreknowledge that did not imply determinism. Wesley found such a conception in the notion of eternity as above time. From this perspective, matters related to personal salvation do not take place because God knows them. Rather, God knows them because they take place (VI, 227).

Clearly, Wesley's judgments concerning the nature of God are congruent with the notion of responsible grace outlined above. The more crucial point, which must now be argued, is that Wesley's strong convictions about responsible grace played a decisive role, albeit often implicitly, in arriving at these judgments. As evidence for this assertion, consider the following passage concerning the Calvinist conception of God's sovereign predestining will.

It destroys all (God's) attributes at once: It overturns both His justice, mercy and truth . . . You represent God as worse than the devil; more false, more cruel, more unjust. But you say you will prove it by Scripture. Hold! What will you prove by Scripture? that God is worse than the devil? It cannot be . . . better to say (Scripture) has no sense at all, than to say it had such a sense as this . . . No Scripture can mean that God is not love, or that His mercy is not over all His works (VII, 382-3).

Note how Wesley's convictions about the mercy and justice of God become criteria for determining the meaning of Scripture. In all fairness, this quote must be balanced by Wesley's claim that his convictions about God's justice and love are thoroughly grounded in Scripture (X, 211). Nonetheless, it is a clear illustration of at least one area where Wesley's basic convictions about responsible grace were a decisive influence in his determination of issues of Christian doctrine and practice.

The consistency with which this influence was expressed throughout Wesley's thought can be suggested by some programmatic reflections on the other major areas of his thought.

## *2. Doctrine of Christ*

Wesley did not engage in detailed reflections on Christology. However, his concern for responsible grace can be found in his scattered remarks. It is evident in his defense of Christ's active righteousness as a supplement to his passive righteousness, thereby qualifying Christ as a model for Christian behavior (V, 236). It is also evident in his concern to retain the rejection of human merit evident in the classical satisfaction model of the

atonement while, at the same time, repudiating any human tendency to rely on Christ's righteousness imputed to us and neglect the demand for inherent righteousness (V, 244).<sup>45</sup>

### *3. Doctrine of Humanity*

Wesley's convictions about responsible grace are at the heart of his doctrine of humanity. There is no clearer expression of the dialectic between God's gift and human responsibility in Wesley's thought than his well-known conjunction of a strong doctrine of original sin with an equally strong doctrine of God's universal prevenient grace.<sup>46</sup> This conjunction allows Wesley to deny all natural human merit and power while at the same time calling on sinners to respond to God's offer of grace and take responsibility for their lives in Christ. It must be admitted that Wesley was not always careful, particularly in his later writings, to give equal emphasis on both sides of this dialectic.<sup>47</sup> However, this can be attributed to the one-sided (anti-Calvinist) controversies in which he was embroiled at the time. As a theologian seeking to address the present needs of his Church, he did not have the luxury of detached contemplation which makes possible ideally balanced formulations.

### *4. Doctrine of Salvation*

The influence of Wesley's perspective of responsible grace is also evident in every major area of his doctrine of salvation. At the most basic level, its influence can be seen in his definition of major terms. For example, he defines salvation as not merely deliverance from hell or going to heaven, but a present deliverance from sin (VIII, 47; cf. XII, 71). "Grace" is taken to include not merely our free acceptance by God, but the power of God at work in us both to will and to do according to God's good pleasure (IX, 103). And, faith is understood to be more than mere assent. It is a disposition wrought in our heart that is productive of good works (V, 12, 168, 205). Accordingly, in Wesley's terms, salvation by grace through faith can never be understood in an antinomian sense. But neither can it be understood as self-salvation, for Wesley is quite clear that the love which transforms our lives is a gift of God (V, 39-40).

The tension between grace and responsibility is expressed structurally when the possibility of growth in Christ-likeness (sanctification) is made contingent on God's gracious acceptance (justification), while the continuance in God's acceptance (justification) is made contingent on growth in Christ-likeness (sanctification).<sup>48</sup> It is this dual tension that allows Wesley to integrate "faith alone" with "holy living" in an authentic dialectic.<sup>49</sup> A logical corollary of this tension is Wesley's affirmation of the third use of, the law-to guide Christian life (V, 443).

The most distinctive element in Wesley's doctrine of salvation is his affirmation of the possibility of entire sanctification.<sup>50</sup> This affirmation has been the focus of numerous critical evaluations. These evaluations typically charge Wesley with overlooking the presence of sin in all believers and with over-evaluating the natural human ability to conquer sin.<sup>51</sup> Obviously, such charges, if true, would be in radical conflict with the principle of responsible grace articulated above. However, a careful reading of Wesley proves the charges to be ungrounded.<sup>52</sup>

Wesley states quite clearly that the experience of entire sanctification, if ever obtained, is a gift of God, not a product of human effort (V, 164). At the same time, he stresses human responsibility in relation to entire sanctification. In the first place, Wesley considers the possibility of entire sanctification to hinge on a prior (typically long) period of responsible growth in grace which includes progressive victory over the sinful inclinations that remain in the life of a believer (sanctification in the larger sense of the word) (VI, 454; XI, 402-3).<sup>53</sup> His major emphasis clearly lies on this ongoing process of Christian growth because he is (theoretically) willing to concede the possibility that entire sanctification may be a reality only at or shortly preceding death (V, 165; XI, 372).<sup>54</sup> In the second place, Wesley stresses the element of human responsibility within the state of entire sanctification itself by emphasizing the continuing need for growth in Christ-likeness even here (VI, 5; VII, 202), the absence of which would ultimately lead to the loss of the experience (VI, 419).<sup>55</sup> Indeed, it is characteristic of Wesley that his first advice to those who claimed entire sanctification was to avoid pride, enthusiasm and antinomianism.<sup>56</sup> In brief, while the affirmation of the possibility of entire sanctification may be distinctive of Wesley, the conception of sanctification (as a whole) as the progressive responsible application of the free grace of God is characteristic of Wesley. It was, thus, no accident that Wesley chose as a motto for the Methodists the phrase "not as though I had already attained."<sup>57</sup>

### *5. Doctrine of the Church*

Wesley's comments on the doctrine of the church are sparse and reflect significantly his Anglican training.<sup>58</sup> However, the influence of his conception of responsible grace can be detected here as well. In particular, it is evident in his argument that the "holiness" of the Church must be more than its holiness "in Christ." It must be a holiness that is expressed, in varying degrees, in the lives of its members (VI, 400).

### *6. Doctrine of Sacraments*

Concerning Wesley's doctrine of the sacraments, one can do no better than to quote the conclusion of the definitive study on this subject:

"We find in him a combination of emphasis upon God's work as basic and essential, although without destroying man as man. There is a necessity for objective means of grace, but these are never seen as static or ends in themselves."<sup>59</sup>

Such an emphasis is clearly in line with the principle of responsible grace. At the same time, it seems fair to say that Wesley never consistently developed the implications of his radical reaffirmation of grace in 1738 for the doctrine of the sacraments.<sup>60</sup> This is particularly true in regard to the issue of infant baptism.<sup>61</sup>

### *7. Doctrine of Eschatology*

Finally, the influence of Wesley's conviction about responsible grace can be detected in his scattered comments regarding eschatology. In general, he preserves the tension between the "already" and the "not yet" of the presence of the Kingdom in the world.<sup>62</sup> Thereby, he can reject quietism without endorsing enthusiasm.

## CONCLUSION-IMPLICATIONS

The basic argument of this essay is that there is an underlying unity in Wesley's various situation-related theological reflections which is due to the influence, implicit or explicit, of a key orienting concept-responsible grace. If this argument is cogent, then it has several implications for Wesley studies and Wesleyan theology.

In the first place, an awareness of the unifying perspective of Wesley's work provides a significant help in understanding and relating the various parts of Wesley's thought. It also provides a criterion by which to assess claims about unresolved tensions or significant changes in Wesley's perspective.<sup>63</sup>

Perhaps more importantly, an awareness of the defining perspective of Wesley's theological reflection provides a criterion for guiding and/or assessing contemporary expressions of Wesleyan theology.<sup>64</sup> Albert Outler has issued a timely call for a new phase in Wesley studies which moves beyond presentations of Wesley as either an idealized figure or a mere endorser of particular popular causes. Replacing these earlier phases, Outler envisions an approach to theology wherein Wesley plays the role of magister or guide-"another of those voices behind us saying 'This is the way, walk in it.'"<sup>65</sup> In light of the preceding analysis, it can be suggested that the way Wesley would lead us is in seeking an evermore consistent and relevant expression of "responsible grace." At times, this may mean correcting or moving beyond Wesley himself.<sup>66</sup> Often, it will mean liberating Wesley from the tradition of later Wesleyan theologians who have lost the dynamic balance embodied in the concept of responsible grace.<sup>67</sup> Always, it will mean carrying out our theological reflections in a way that addresses the burning needs of the present Church and world.

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### Notes

1Carl Michalsen, *Worldly Theology* (New York: Scribner's, 1967), p. 127.

2Rupert Davies, "The People Called Methodists: 1. Our Doctrines" in *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain*, Vol. I, edited by R. Davies, et al. (London: Epworth Press, 1965), p. 147.

3Durwood Foster, "Wesleyan Theology: Heritage and Task," pp. 2, 6-7. This and the next two papers are scheduled for future publication in a volume of essays from the consultation.

4Thomas Langford, "Constructive Theology in the Wesleyan Tradition," pp. 7, 14.

5M. Douglas Meeks, "John Wesley's Heritage and the Future of Systematic Theology," pp. 3, 9, 11.

6Albert Outler, ed., *John Wesley* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. vii.

- 7Davies, "People Called Methodists," p. 147. See also Outler, John Wesley, p. 27
- 8Arthur Skevington Wood, "The Contribution of John Wesley to the Theology of Grace," in *Grace Unlimited*, ed. Clark Pinnock (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1975), p. 210.
- 9Outler, John Wesley, p. 27.
- 10Two convenient overviews of various positions in this debate are: George Lindbeck, "Theologische Methode and Wissenschaftstheorie," *Theologische Revue* 74 (1978): 259-80; and J. W. V. Van Huyssteen, "Systematic Theology and the Philosophy of Science," *Journal of Theology for South Africa* 34 (March 1981): 4-16. N. B. The German word *Wissenschaft* is often translated "science." However, it is conceived to include all self-critical approaches to knowledge and thus has a broader scope of meaning than is typically assigned to "science" in the Anglo American realm.
- 11Cf. Lindbeck, "Theologische Methode," p. 270. Brief summaries of several alternative conceptions can be found in Randy L. Maddox, *Toward an Ecumenical Fundamental Theology* (Chico, CA: Scholar's Press, 1984), chapters 5 and 6.
- 12The most relevant works are: *Wissenschaftstheoretische Kritik der Theologie* (Munich: Christian Kaiser, 1973); and *Arbeitsweisen Systematischer Theologie* (Munich: Christian Kaiser, 1976). For similar perspective reached by significantly different routes see George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984); and James D. and Evelyn E. Whitehead, *Method in Ministry* (New York: Seabury, 1980).
- 13Sauter, *Kritik der Theologie*, pp. 219-20, 222.
- 14Ibid, p S30
- 15Cf. Ibid., p. 260.
- 16Sauter, *Arbeitsweisen*, pp. 31-3.
- 17Ibid, p. 43-85.
- 18Ibid, pp. 10-41, 86-128.
- 19Ibid., p. 87.
- 20Sauter, *Kritik der Theologie*, p. 281.
- 21Sauter, *Arbeitsweisen*, p. 19.
- 22Cf. Carl Braaten and Robert Jenson, *Christian Dogmatics* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), Vol. II, p.130; Frederick Bruner and William Hordern, *The Holy Spirit-Shy Member of the Trinity* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), p. 65; and Gerhard Ebeling, *Luther* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970), p. 25.
- 23Cf. John T. McNeill, *The History and Character of Calvinism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1954), pp. 201-12; and Paul Tillich, *A History of Christian Thought* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1967), pp. 262-S.

- 24See Wilhelm Niesel, *Reformed Symbolics* (London: Oliver & Boyd, 1962), pp. 240-1.
- 25Cf. Meeks' evaluation mentioned above, fn. 5.
- 26To give just one example, Colin Williams, *John Wesley's Theology Today* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1960), pp. 23-38.
- 27Paul Hoon, "The Soteriology of John Wesley," unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Edinburgh, 1936, p. 343. Quoted by Paul Merritt Bassett, "The Holiness Movement and the Protestant Principle," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 18, 1 (1983): 13.
- 28Cf Williams, *Wesley's Theology*, p. 34.
- 29Cf. Davies, "People Called Methodists," p. 147.
- 30Cf. William Cannon, *The Theology of John Wesley* (New York: Abingdon, 1946); and Franz Hildebrandt, *From Luther to Wesley* (London: Lutterworth, 1951).
- 31See especially Harold Lindstrom, *Wesley and Sanctification* (Wilmore, KY: Francis Asbury Publishing Company, 1980), (reprint of 1946 edition).
- 32The most thorough is Williams, *Wesley's Theology*. A more "popular" presentation is Steve Harper, *John Wesley's Message for Today* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983). The order of salvation focus is evident as well in the selections presented by Outler in *John Wesley*.
- 33John Deschner, *Wesley's Christology* (Dallas, TX: Southern Methodist University Press, 1960).
- 34Lycurgus M. Starkey, *The Work of the Holy Spirit: A Study in Wesleyan Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1964).
- 35This and all following location references in the text of the essay refer to *The Works of John Wesley*, edited by Thomas Jackson (1835), 14 volumes (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979 reprint). The volume number is given first and then the page number.
- 36Compare *Works of Wesley*, Vols. 6 & 7 to Sauter, *Arbeitsweisen*, pp. 91-4.
- 37Albert Outler, *Theology in the Wesleyan Spirit* (Nashville: Tidings, 1975), p. 35.
- 38Outler notes that Wesley's first six favorite sermon texts all centered on the theme of grace. *Ibid.*, p. 13.
- 39Cf. Umphrey Lee, *John Wesley and Modern Religion* (Nashville: Cokesbury, 1936), p. 127. It should be noted that this interpretation of Wesley is not without its competitors. On the three major types of interpretation in this regard see Thomas Langford, *Practical Divinity* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1983), p. 33. We believe that the second interpretation Langford mentions is clearly the most adequate and consider the current essay a validation of that judgment.
- 40Outler notes that the Aldersgate experience, sparked by the reading of Luther's commentary on Galatians, provided the decisive impulse for Wesley's realization that sanctification follows justification rather than preceding it. Outler, *Wesleyan Spirit*, pp. 70-71.

- 41Note the vigorous protests of contemporary Lutheran theologian Gerhard Forde against the formulation "Justification by grace through faith!" Braaten & Jenson, *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. II, p. 243.
- 42Cf. Whitehead, *Method in Ministry*, pp. 21-25.
- 43Cf. Jerry Walls, "The Free Will Defense: Calvinism, Wesley and the Goodness of God," *Christian Scholar's Review* 13 (1983):19-33.
- 44Cf. Meeks, "John Wesley's Heritage," pp. 19-20.
- 45On Wesley's view of the atonement see Lindstrom, *Wesley and Sanctification*, pp.55-75.
- 46Excellent treatments of these twin doctrines are available in *Ibid.*, pp. 19-50; and Williams, *Wesley 's Theology*, pp.41-55.
- 47Cf. John Allen Knight "Aspects of Wesley's Theology after 1770," *Methodist History* 6:3 (April 1968):33-42.
- 48The best exposition of this dual tension is Lindstrom, *Wesley and Sanctification*, pp.83-104,213.
- 49Albert Outler, "The Place of Wesley in the Christian Tradition" in *The Place of Wesley in the Christian Tradition*, ed., Kenneth Rowe (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1976),p.15.
- 50Cf. Outler, *John Wesley*, p. 30.
- 51Cf. Kenneth Prior *The Way of Holiness* (Downer's Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1982),pp.71ff.
- 52Cf. the exposition of the doctrine of Christian Perfection in Lindstrom, *Wesley and Sanctification*, pp.117-19.
- 53Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 134. Wesley's various uses of "sanctification" are summarized in *Ibid.*, p. 123.
- 54In reality, Wesley believed the experience was possible prior to death and attributed the alternative opinion, held by his brother, to an absolutistic view of perfection. Cf. Williams, *Wesley's Theology*, p. 169.
- 55To understand how one could be "perfect" or "sinless" and still need to grow in Christ-likeness, it is necessary to recall Wesley's distinction between a "moral" definition of sin and a "strict" definition of sin (VI, 417; V, 163). See John L. Peters. *Christian Perfectionism and American Methodism* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1956),pp.39-46.
- 56See John Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 1966),pp.95-100.
- 57Cf. the subtitle to his essay "The Character of a Methodist" (VIII, 339).
- 58The best treatments of Wesley's view of the church are Williams, *Wesley 's Theology*, pp:141-58; and Albert Outler, "Do Methodists Have A Doctrine of the Church?" in *The Doctrine of the Church*, pp.11-28, ed., Dow Kirkpatrick (Nashville: Abingdon, 1964).



- 59Ole Borgen, *John Wesley on the Sacraments* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1972), p. 281.
- 60Cf. F. Ernest Stoeffler, "Tradition and Renewal in the Ecclesiology of John Wesley" in *Traditio-Krisis-Renovatio aus theologischer Sicht*, ed., B. Japert & R. Mohr (Marburg: N. G. Elwert, 1976), p. 312.
- 61Cf. Lindstrom, *Wesley and Sanctification*, p. 107fn9.
- 62Gf. Williams, *Wesley's Theology*, p. 192.
- 63Cf. above, footnotes 47 and 60.
- 64Note the call for such a hermeneutic principle by the working group on "Salvation, Justice and the Theological Task" of the Oxford Institute of Theological Studies. OXFORD notes 1.2 (1984): 6.
- 65Albert Outler, "A New Future for 'Wesley Studies': An Agenda for Phase III," presented at the 7th Oxford Institute of Methodist Theological Studies (1982). Essays from this conference will be published in 1985 by Abingdon under the title *The Future of the Methodist Theological Tradition*.
- 66See, for example, the application of Wesley's insights to the realm of social and political liberation—a theme Wesley rarely addressed—in *Sanctification and Liberation*, ed. Theodore Runyon (Nashville: Abingdon, 1981).
- 67Wesley's theological heirs have often lost this balance, particularly in America. On the one hand, American Methodism moved in a direction that emphasized natural human capacities at the expense of a clear doctrine of grace. (Cf. Robert E. Chiles, *Theological Transitions in American Methodism* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1965); and Langford, *Practical Divinity*, chapters 5 & 8). On the other hand, the American holiness movement, as it took its unique shape through the influence of the Oberlin School which introduced a more Calvinist anthropology and an emphasis on the crisis nature of sanctification as the "Baptism of the Holy Spirit" into the understanding of sanctification, moved in a direction that highlighted the divine side of sanctification as an event to a degree that often denigrated the responsible growth in grace that was so central to Wesley. (Cf. two articles by Donald Dayton: "Asa Mahan and the Development of American Holiness Theology," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 9 (1974); and "The Doctrine of the Baptism of the Holy Spirit: Its Emergence and Significance," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 13 (1978).

# A HERMENEUTICAL MODEL FOR THE WESLEYAN ORDO SALUTIS

by  
Kenneth Collins

## I. Introduction

It comes as a surprise to learn that in this age of ecumenism, John Wesley's theology has rarely been explored beyond Methodist circles. Indeed, while significant dialogue has occurred among Lutheran, Calvinist and Roman Catholic traditions,<sup>1</sup> Wesley's voice has seldom been heard in such settings. Why has this been so?

According to Albert Outler, Wesley has not been consulted in theological interchange because he has not been readily accessible to the theological world, "for want of proper, critical editions"<sup>2</sup> of his works. While this concern is certainly a factor, the greater part of the problem seems to lie in the assumptions held by Methodist and non—Methodist alike that Wesley was not a theologian but an evangelist and therefore is not to be taken seriously. Indeed, it has been argued that "although Wesley was a person of considerable intellectual and logical ability, his primary role was that of evangelist rather than theologian."<sup>3</sup>

To be sure, much of Wesley's energies were spent in evangelism, but this must not obscure the fact that he, "was the most important Anglican theologian of the 18th century because of his distinctive composite answer to the age—old question as to 'the nature of the Christian life.'"<sup>4</sup> A mistake often made by interpreters of Wesley is to view his itinerant activity as the *raison d'etre* of his theological formulations because it is the thing which can most easily be pointed to. However, Wesley's theological ruminations were not merely the by—products of his evangelism, but rather his itinerancy was an expression of his theological posture. In other words, despite the fact that Wesley was an evangelist, this in itself does not preclude his having been a significant theologian.

Actually, the question is not whether Wesley was a theologian, but what type of theologian he was. To be sure, he was "no theological titan"<sup>5</sup> nor was he a "system builder"<sup>6</sup> and his speculative powers were limited, partly from disuse."<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, in the words of Rupert Davies, Wesley "was in fact a redoubtable systematic theologian in that area which he made peculiarly his own, the processes of human salvation."<sup>8</sup> Indeed, the

majority of Wesley's theological writings explore some aspect of the order of salvation and this interest is consonant with the soteriological imagery expressed in his "Preface to the Sermons"<sup>9</sup> where he provides some significant hermeneutical clues to the nature and extent of his theological interests. He wrote:

I have thought, I am a creature of a day, passing through life as an arrow through the air. I am a spirit come from God, and returning to God: . . . I want to know one thing—the way to heaven; how to land safe on that happy shore. God Himself has condescended to teach the way; for this very end He came from heaven. He hath written it down in a book. O give me that book! At any price, give me the book of God! I have it: here is knowledge enough for me.<sup>10</sup>

Thus, the imagery of an arrow come from God and returning to God, added to Wesley's apparent but not actual repudiation of all other knowledge<sup>11</sup> implies that he was a "practical" theologian or in the words of Outler, a "folk theologian"<sup>12</sup> who designed nothing less than to speak "ad populum."<sup>13</sup> Both of these designations, although descriptive, can be misleading. For example, the delimitation of Wesley's theology as "folk" suggests that it is devoid of the rigor, complexity, structure and nuance which are the staples of the theological world. Equally expressive, but less ambiguous language can be found in the designation of Wesley as a Theologian of the *Ordo Salutis*. Such phraseology can describe the practical, soteriological, and people-oriented nature of Wesley's theology and at the same time suggest something of the complexity and structure of a theology centered in an order of salvation.

Moreover, when Wesley thought or wrote about some aspect of the *ordo salutis*, he did so in a systematic fashion such that within this well defined area, "there has never been a more orderly, well—arranged, and consistent theologian"<sup>14</sup> than he. For example, his treatment of the nature and function of works both before and after justification evidences subtleties which can tax the thought of even the most well—trained theologian. And it is precisely here, within the parameters of the *ordo salutis*, that the most meaningful dialogue can occur between Wesleyan theologians and the theologians of other traditions. Therefore, in order to facilitate this ecumenical exchange, a hermeneutical model will be delineated in the following pages which will not only depict the structure and systematic nature of much of Wesley's theology, but will also serve as the tool whereby the theological insights of Wesley can be most easily appropriated be all.

## II. Previous Models

Wesley's penchant for a *via salutis* can be discerned not only in his theological pieces and correspondence, but within the structure of several of his sermons as well. In "The Circumcision of the Heart," for example which was preached at Oxford University in 1733, there is a "processive structure; each of the four virtues of humility, faith, hope and love is a successive stage in a process of salvation."<sup>15</sup> On a more psychological and developmental level, the process of salvation as evidenced by a transition

from the natural, to the legal and finally, to the evangelical state is presented in the sermon "The Spirit of Bondage and Adoption." Indeed, so pre—occupied was Wesley with this structured way of thinking about salvation that Lindstrom notes, "the same conception of salvation as an ascent by steps was (even) applied to the organization of the Methodist societies. They were organized in classes and bands; there were also select bands or societies."<sup>16</sup>

Although Lindstrom correctly discerns the teleological bent of Wesley's theology, he believed that the doctrine of Christian perfection and not any teleological orientation, "was the determining factor in the shaping of each doctrine."<sup>17</sup> Bence, on the other hand, argues that, "if teleology is the structural component ingredient to Wesley's thought, it is more basic and hermeneutically significant than any single doctrine, including sanctification itself."<sup>18</sup>

Bence's claim of both improvement and refinement of the Lindstrom thesis<sup>19</sup> is substantiated by his well—written doctoral dissertation, "John Wesley's Teleological Hermeneutic." In this work, he observes the goal—directed nature of Wesley's theology and asserts that the "predominant orientation of Wesley is linear and chronological. 'Go Forward' is more characteristic of his thought than 'Return.'"<sup>20</sup> Moreover, Bence avers that, for Wesley, salvation is a dynamic process marked by gradations<sup>21</sup> whereby the fulfillment of a specific goal is counterbalanced, "with an immediate expectation of a new goal which transcends and at the same time extends that which has already been realized."<sup>22</sup> In other words, "Every moment is at the same time the realization of a degree of salvation, as well as a foundation for a further manifestation of divine grace."<sup>23</sup>

The implication for scholarship of this dynamic nature of Wesley's theology is that it is not sufficient merely to explore his doctrinal statements within the context of their historical settings. Although this preliminary task is vital, one must think systematically as well, and determine the theological setting within the *ordo salutis* where each doctrine is found. In other words, once a specific doctrine is located within the Wesleyan order of salvation, it must be expounded with reference to what both precedes and follows it within that theological structure.

Although Bence's insights are helpful in revealing much of the framework which supports Wesley's theology, his "teleological hermeneutic" does not address such important hermeneutical questions as: What is the specific structural relation between Wesley's doctrine of justification and entire sanctification? And what is the relation, if any, between the doctrines which form the theological setting of conversion and Christian perfection? H. Ray Dunning, for his part, has described the connection between justification and sanctification as the relation between "two foci of an ellipse."<sup>24</sup> However, since elliptical orbits are characterized by a process of alternating progression and regression around two fixed points, his choice of imagery is inappropriate for displaying the structural interrelation between justification and sanctification. And as has already been indicated, the contour of Wesley's theology is linear, chronological and teleological,<sup>25</sup> characteristics which ellipses do not express.

Thus, in light of the preceding discussion, what is needed is a hermeneutical model, serviceable to both Methodist and non—Methodist

scholars alike, which can portray both the teleological orientation of Wesley's theology and the structural connection between justification and entire sanctification. To be sure, many of the insights of Bence will be maintained in the construction of this new model. However, as Bence's work was an improvement and refinement of Lindstrom's thesis, this present work will be an extension of themes developed by Bence.

### **III. The Construction of a New Model**

The Wesleyan *ordo salutis* can perhaps best be portrayed by the image of a large modern suspension bridge whose purpose is to carry traffic in one direction only (goal orientation).<sup>26</sup> Continuing this analogy, the two main columns which support this expanse and which mark off significant points on the journey can be referred to as justification and entire sanctification, and although the second column represents a closer approach to the ultimate goal than does the first, the chief structural relation between them is one of parallelism. Indeed, it is the thesis of this paper that the doctrines which form the theological setting of justification within the Wesleyan *ordo salutis* find their parallel in the doctrines which form the setting for entire sanctification. This can easily be illustrated by two examples of Wesley's conjunctive language. With respect to faith, Wesley noted: "Exactly as we are justified by faith, so we are sanctified by faith. Faith is the condition, and the only condition of sanctification exactly as it is of justification."<sup>27</sup> And with respect to the witness of the Spirit, he remarked:

But how do you know, that you are sanctified, saved from your inbred corruption?

I can know it no otherwise than I know that I am justified. 'Hereby know we that we are of God,' in either sense, 'by the Spirit that he hath given us.'<sup>28</sup>

Naturally, the idea of parallelism within Wesley's *ordo salutis* needs to be substantiated by more than just two examples, and so a further and more systematic examination of the construction of Wesley's theology must now be undertaken.

#### **A. Substantiation of the Thesis**

##### **1. The Atonement**

Wesley deemed the death of Christ as the meritorious cause of justification as well as of entire sanctification. Concerning the former doctrine, he stated "Justification is another word for pardon . . . the price whereby this hath been procured for us (commonly termed the meritorious cause of our justification) is the blood and righteousness of Christ."<sup>29</sup> Moreover, in "A Plain Account of Christian Perfection" when Wesley expounded the relation between the atonement and entire sanctification, he observed: "Whatever grace we receive, it is a free gift from him. We receive it as his purchase, merely in consideration of the price he paid."<sup>30</sup> And he continued: "All our blessings, temporal, spiritual, and eternal, depend on his intercession for us, which is one branch of his priestly office."<sup>31</sup> Thus, if one can speak of the doctrines of justification and Christian perfection as the two pillars which sustain much of Wesley's theology, then the atonement is the bedrock upon which they both rest.

## 2. The Law

In his sermon, "The Original, Nature, Property and Use of the Law," Wesley delineated three uses for the moral law:

To slay the sinner is, then, the first use of the law; to destroy the life and strength wherein he trusts. . . . The second use of it is, to bring him unto life, unto Christ that he may live . . . The third use of the law is to keep us alive.<sup>32</sup>

These three functions of the law which are chiefly descriptive of the process leading to justification and initial sanctification are mirrored in the believer's approach toward Christian perfection. Indeed, Charles Wilson notes that, "In its activity of keeping a believer alive in Christ, that is, in promoting sanctification in the believer, the law has three specific uses."<sup>33</sup> These three further functions, as expressed by Wesley, are:

We have not done with this law: for it is still of unspeakable use first, in convincing us of the sin that yet remains both in our hearts and lives . . . secondly, in deriving strength from our Head into His living members, whereby He empowered them to do what his law commands; and thirdly, in confirming our hope of whatsoever it commands and we have not yet attained.<sup>34</sup>

It should be readily observed that the accusatory force of the first use of the law leading to repentance and justification has its parallel in the further function of the law in precipitating the conviction and repentance which precedes entire sanctification. But there is parallelism with a difference, for in the former instance, one is convicted of actual sin, but in the latter, one is convicted not of actual sin, but of inbred sin.

In a similar fashion, the second and third usages of the law find their counterparts within the process leading to entire sanctification. This observation, however, does not repudiate the distinctions which result from the employment of law in different contexts; rather such an observation only seeks to demonstrate all the more clearly that the principal structural relation between the two sets of law—functions is one of parallelism.

## 3. Repentance and Works Meet for Repentance

In light of the preceding section on law, it is not surprising to learn that Wesley specifically taught that, "there is a repentance consequent upon, as well as a repentance previous to justiffcation."<sup>35</sup> For example, in his commentary on Matt. 3:8, he remarked:

Repentance is of two sorts; that which is termed legal, and that which is styled evangelical repentance. The former . . . is a thorough conviction of sin. The latter is a change of heart (and consequently, of life) from all sin to all holiness.<sup>36</sup>

Wesley affirmed that the legal repentance brought about through the gracious activity of the Holy Spirit and the ministrations of the law was necessary "in order to our entering into the kingdom of God,"<sup>37</sup> while

evangelical repentance was necessary "in order to our continuance and growth in grace."<sup>38</sup> To be sure, there are important differences between the two repentances<sup>39</sup> since the former relates to actual sin, while the latter relates to inbred sin. This parallelism with a difference which has already been noted with respect to the functioning of the moral law constitutes what henceforth shall be referred to as trans—parallelism. In other words, a trans—parallelism within the construction of Wesley's theology can be said to occur when the differences noted between parallel doctrines are of such significance that each doctrine must not only be understood in relation to its parallel but also, and more importantly, in relation to its own specific context within the *ordo salutis*, and in relation to the soteriological change which has occurred between the parallel structures.

An illustration of trans—parallelism can be found in Wesley's conception of the nature and function of works "meet for repentance which both precede justification and entire sanctification. For example, in exploring the issue of the necessity of works antecedent to justifying faith, Wesley drew an important distinction between condition and degree. He wrote

Therefore both repentance, and fruits meet for repentance are, in some sense, necessary to justification. But they are not necessary in the same sense with faith, nor in the same degree; for those fruits are only necessary conditionally; if there be time and opportunity for them. Otherwise, a man may be justified without them.<sup>40</sup>

And when Wesley addressed this same issued, but this time with respect to works anterior to entire sanctification, he employed almost exactly the same language. He wrote:

Repentance and its fruits are necessary to full salvation; yet they are not necessary either in the same sense with faith, or in the same degree.—Not in the same degree; for these fruits are only necessary conditionally, if there be time and opportunity for them; otherwise, a man may be sanctified without them.<sup>41</sup>

But this similarity of language utilized to describe the necessity of works preceding both justification and Christian perfection must not obscure the significant difference between such works for Wesley clearly taught that, properly speaking, works previous to justifying faith are not good while those works which flow from such faith are.<sup>42</sup> This parallelism with a crucial distinction is what has been referred to as trans—parallelism.

The hermeneutical significance of the designation of Wesley's conception of works meet for repentance as evidencing trans—parallelism consists in the appeal to at least two reference points in the systematic interpretation of this doctrine. This means that the theological interpretation of Wesley's conception of the nature and function of works preceding entire sanctification, for example, must take into account not only the parallel of how Wesley viewed works antecedent to justification, but must also include any distinctive elements of the doctrine due to its specific positioning within the *ordo salutis*. Naturally, any doctrine's theological context is significant for the interpretive process, but for a doctrine which evidences trans—parallelism, this is especially so, since it is

the peculiar blending of similarity and contrast, but with emphasis upon the latter, which gives the doctrine its peculiar hue.

Moreover, the one model of parallelism/trans—parallelism can function on two levels. In the initial phase, (and this might be all that is needed for the interpretive process) the observation of parallel structures is made with the result that a specific reference point in a section of the *ordo salutis* is appealed to in the explication of a doctrine in a different section. On the second level of trans—parallelism, however, it is not sufficient merely to observe the similarity between parallel doctrines, but consideration must be given to the contrast which is a product of the distance within the *ordo salutis* which separates the two points of attention.

#### 4. Faith

In his sermon, "Justification by Faith," Wesley maintained that "Faith . . . is the necessary condition of justification; yea, and the only necessary condition thereof."<sup>43</sup> And in a later sermon, "The Scripture Way of Salvation," he averred as has been noted earlier:

I have continually testified in private and in public that we are sanctified as well as justified by faith . . . exactly as we are justified by faith, so are we sanctified by faith. Faith is the condition, and the only condition of sanctification, exactly as it is of justification.<sup>44</sup>

Moreover, Wesley defined both justifying and sanctifying faith in terms of a divine evidence or conviction.<sup>45</sup> But here the similarity ends, for in justifying faith, for example, the divine evidence or conviction is "A sure trust and confidence that Christ died for my sins."<sup>46</sup> But in sanctifying faith the divine evidence or conviction is:

First, that God hath promised it (entire sanctification) in the holy Scripture . . . secondly, that what God hath promised He is able to perform . . . thirdly, a divine evidence and conviction that He is able and willing to do it now.<sup>47</sup>

Wesley again noted this difference between justifying and sanctifying faith in his sermon "Repentance of Believers," and in describing that faith which is peculiar to believer, he wrote:

But supposing we do thus repent, then are we called to 'believe the gospel.'

And this also is to be understood in a peculiar sense, different from that wherein we believed in order to justification . . . Believe . . . He is able to save you from all the sin that still remains in your heart.<sup>48</sup>

Thus, both levels of parallelism ("exactly") and trans—parallelism ("different from") are necessary to describe Wesley's conception of faith.

Moreover, the utilization of these two levels of interpretation is likewise requisite for the description of the gradual instantaneous tension within the doctrines of justification and entire sanctification. For example, Wesley asserted that both justification and Christian perfection are instantaneous events which are preceded by a gradual work. However, the imagery he



employed to portray the gradual instantaneous flavor of the two doctrines is markedly different. With respect to justification, Wesley employed the imagery of birth with great effectiveness. He noted:

A child is born of a woman in a moment, or at least in a very short time: afterward, he gradually and slowly grows, till he attains to the stature of a man. In like manner, a child is born of God in a short time, if not in a moment. But it is by slow degrees that he afterward grows up to the measure of the full stature of Christ. The same relation, therefore, which there is between our natural birth and outgrowth, there is also between our new birth and our sanctification.<sup>49</sup>

But with respect to entire sanctification, Wesley appealed not to the imagery of birth, but to that of death. He wrote:

From the moment we are justified, there may be a gradual sanctification, a growing in grace, a daily advance in the knowledge and love of God. And if sin cease before death, there must, in the nature of the thing, be an instantaneous change; there must be a last moment wherein it does exist, and a first moment wherein it does not.<sup>50</sup>

## 5. The Witness of the Spirit

The last component of Wesley's theology which shall be addressed as evidence substantiating the thesis of this paper is his important teaching concerning the witness of the Spirit.

To be sure, Wesley asserted that the two chief acts in the process of salvation, justification and entire sanctification, are accompanied by both an indirect witness which operates largely through conscience and a direct witness which entails the Holy Spirit's attestation to our spirit. Concerning the latter, and with respect to entire sanctification, he wrote: "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>51</sup>

Despite the parallel of the role of the Holy Spirit in justification and perfection, the content of each witness is disparate. Indeed, Wesley noted that, "when we are justified, the Spirit bore witness with our spirit, that our sins were forgiven; so, when we were sanctified, he bore witness, that they were taken away."<sup>52</sup> Thus, both parallelism and trans—parallelism are vital for displaying the gradual instantaneous character of both justification and perfection.

## G. Some Observations

The interpretive model just presented refines the work of Bence by indicating that the structural relation between the two poles of Wesley's theology, justification and Christian perfection, and the doctrines which form their respective settings within the *ordo salutis*, is one of parallelism.

Moreover, it has been argued that this model develops Bence's insight that "the predominant orientation of Wesley is linear and chronological."<sup>53</sup> Indeed, it is precisely the distinction between parallelism (parallel structures with an emphasis on similarity) and trans—parallelism (parallel

structures with an added emphasis on contrast due to soteriological change) which portrays the teleological movement in Wesley's theology. In other words, parallelism with its emphasis upon similarity is not an appropriate vehicle to convey the notion of movement implicit in a teleologically—oriented theology. However, trans—parallelism can manifest such movement in its accent upon the soteriological "distance" between parallel structures. This last point is best illustrated against the backdrop of Wesley's harmartiology. Indeed, the trans—parallelisms which have already been noted such as the differing usages of law, repentance, faith, etc. with respect to justification and entire sanctification can be explained by Wesley's two—fold conception of sin. Thus, in justification, for example, one repents of actual sin while in sanctification, one repents of inbred sin. Now although the term "repent" is used in both contexts, the latter represents a further work in the process of salvation. In other words, Wesley employed the same vocabulary to describe the two quite different processes of salvation from the guilt and power of sin (justification) on the one hand and the further work of salvation from the being of sin (entire sanctification) on the other. Bence's teleological hermeneutic simply does not take this important observation into account and constitutes the reason why a new model has been introduced.

#### **IV. Application of the Model**

In his work, *Theological Transition in American Methodism*, Robert Chiles argues that a shift from free grace to free will characterizes the development of Methodist theology after the demise of Wesley.<sup>55</sup> John Knight, however, attacks this position and offers the counter thesis that this transition occurred not after the death of Wesley, but with John Wesley himself.<sup>56</sup> He writes:

Certain aspects of John Wesley's theology indicate a more decided anthropological emphasis during the last twenty years of his life, primarily with regard to man's freedom of the will.<sup>57</sup>

Moreover, Knight maintains that after 1770, due to the controversy with the Calvinistic Methodists, Wesley emphasized "freedom and man's works more than faith and God's grace."<sup>58</sup> Indeed, Knight takes Chiles to task precisely because the preponderance of evidence cited by the latter in the substantiation of his thesis is concerned with Wesley's writings prior to 1770.

But in the swelter of his own argumentation, Knight has failed to take into account, in a significant way, evidence which belies his own thesis. For example, in one of his later sermons, "On Working Out Our Own Salvation," (1785) the theocentric flavor of Wesley's theology is apparent in his emphasis upon the divine initiative in salvation as evidenced by his lucid discussion of prevenient, convincing and sanctifying grace.<sup>59</sup> And in 1773, Wesley specifically attributed the exercise of free will not to nature, but to the grace of God.<sup>60</sup>

But besides the evidence just cited, and much more importantly for the task at hand, the hermeneutical model of parallelism/transparallelism reveals that Knight has misinterpreted aspects of Wesley's theology. As has been indicated in the early part of this paper, it is simply not sufficient

merely to locate Wesley's doctrinal emphases in their historical settings. This is only part of the hermeneutical spade work which faces anyone who seeks to grapple seriously with Wesley. But once this primary task is accomplished, one must determine the theological setting within the Wesleyan *ordo salutis* where each doctrine is located. Such an approach does not deny the fact that Wesley underscored human responsibility freedom and works after 1770, but it asks the further question—How is such an emphasis to be interpreted in light of the entirety of his theology?

For the sake of brevity, though, the application of the model will be restricted to the interpretation of Wesley's emphasis upon works after justification which was the dominant issue of the 1770's and which led many of the Calvinistic Methodists to charge him with legalism.

On the first level of the model, parallelism suggests that part of the interpretive task in the evaluation of Wesley's conception of works after justification consists in a comparison between these works and those which precede justification. Interestingly enough, a controversy similar to that of 1770 occurred between Wesley and the Moravians in 1739 and continued into the 40's, but here the salient issue was the nature and role of works prior to justification. Tyerman has observed this similarity between the two periods and wrote:

Accordingly, at the conference held a few months afterwards (1744) he (Wesley) . . . proceeded to propound doctrines which, in substance were the same as those he now embodied in the thesis of 1770. Twenty—six years had elapsed since then; but there was a striking resemblance between the two periods.<sup>61</sup>

In the earlier controversy, in November 1739, Wesley contended that the Moravians, Molther and Bray, were disrupting the joint Moravian—Methodist Fetter Lane Society through the promotion of three errors. The first consisted of teaching that there are no degrees of faith, that faith mingled with any measure of doubt or fear was not real faith after all.<sup>62</sup> The second was promulgated by Molther's insistence that the believer's only duty was to believe, "that there is no commandment in the New Testament but to believe . . . and that when a man does believe, he is not bound or obliged to do anything which is commanded there."<sup>63</sup> And the last error consisted in teaching that the ordinances such as receiving the Lord's Supper, reading the Scriptures, using private prayer and fasting, etc., were not means of grace and could be neglected without resulting in spiritual depravation. The effect of these teachings was a virtual repudiation of the importance and necessity of works anterior to justification.

In November 1739, Wesley responded to these misguided notions in an important sermon entitled, "The Means of Grace." In this piece, he expostulated that there are "outward signs, works 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>64</sup> In other words, Wesley countered the antinomian tendencies of the Moravians at Fetter Lane by insisting that the doctrine of justification by faith must not result in a quietism which deprecates divinely—empowered human activity. Indeed, he affirmed that an employment of proper means does not

contradict *sola fide* so long as it is remembered that such means do not result in any form of merit.

Moreover, it was precisely Wesley's doctrine of prevenient grace which kept his theology, at this point of the *ordo salutis*, clear from any notion of merit or attainment. Thus, works preceding justification were not viewed as products of human initiative but as responses to the gift of "God's intervening grace."<sup>65</sup> Divine grace not human effort, therefore, is the first movement in the Wesleyan symphony of salvation.

Contrary to Knight's assumptions of anthropocentricity, parallelism as a hermeneutical device, suggests that this theocentric flavor of Wesley's estimation of works prior to justification is paralleled in his view of works after justification (hence preceding entire sanctification). For example, just as Wesley considered works "meet for repentance" as the way God has ordained in which one is to wait for justification, in other words as a means of grace, so too, he viewed the works which flow from justification as the way God has appointed in which one is to wait for the subsequent change of entire sanctification. He wrote:

Q. How are we to wait for this change(entire sanctification)?

A. Not in careless indifference or indolent inactivity, but in vigorous, universal obedience, in a zealous keeping of all the commandments, in watchfulness . . . in denying ourselves . . . and a close attendance on all the ordinances of God.<sup>66</sup>

Furthermore, Wesley postulated that God's favor, but this time in the form of sanctifying as opposed to prevenient grace, initiates this response of human activity.<sup>67</sup> And the same distinction between condition and degree as well as a repudiation of merit which was characteristic of the earlier section of the *ordo salutis* is present here as well. To be sure, Wesley noted that those works which flow from faith are "necessary to full salvation; yet they are not necessary either in the same sense with faith, or in the same degree. —Not in the same degree; for these fruits are only necessary conditionally."<sup>68</sup>

Now if this discernment of parallel structures is correct, then the question must go out to John Knight: Why does the year 1770 mark an anthropological shift in Wesley's theology especially when it is observed that Wesley himself defined the role of works in the process of salvation in 1770 using almost exactly the same language he employed in the 1740's? If Knight is to be consistent with his observations of anthropocentrism, why not make 1740 or even 1739 the *terminus a quo*?

Moreover, the second level of the model, trans—parallelism in its attentiveness to soteriological change reveals that works subsequent to justification are good while those which precede, strictly speaking, are not. Now when this idea is considered in conjunction with the fact that the controversy of the 1770's largely revolved around the issue of works following justification, it is small wonder that Wesley highlighted these good works. Indeed, he could do so precisely because such works were the products of God's sanctifying (as opposed to prevenient grace). Once again, the grace of God lies behind all.

Thus, in light of the preceding, it can be argued that Knight's own thesis is flawed. His isolation of Wesley's statements in 1770 on works

after conversion repudiates the historical parallel of the 1740's as well as the theological parallel of Wesley's estimation of works prior to justifying faith. Thus, it can be argued that Knight's allegation of the anthropocentricity of Wesley's theology after 1770 is problematic, at least with respect to the issue of works. For although he aptly observes the historical fact that after the controversy with the Calvinistic Methodists, Wesley stressed, "freedom and man's works more than faith and God's grace,"<sup>69</sup> he abbreviates the interpretive process and immediately propounds his conclusions.

The approach of parallelism/trans—parallelism, on the other hand, begins with the historical materials and then proceeds to interpret them not only in light of Wesley's theology as a whole, but also and especially in relation to the structure within that theology. Such a methodology underscores the essential theocentricism of Wesley and reveals that both works prior and subsequent to justification are the products of divine initiating grace. Furthermore, it allows significant aspects of Wesley's theology, such as his important doctrines of faith, human responsibility, etc., to bear their full weight in the interpretive process. Moreover, and it must be concluded, it is precisely this approach which takes Wesley seriously as a theologian—and a "systematic" theologian at that!

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### Notes

1Albert Outler, "John Wesley as Theologian—Then and now, *Methodist History* 12 (July, 1974): 81.

2Albert Outler, "The Place of Wesley in the Christian Tradition," in *The Place of Wesley in the Christian Tradition*, ed. Kenneth E. Rowe (Metuchen, NJ: The Scarecrow Press, 1976), p.33.

3Clarence Luther Bence, "John Wesley's Teleological Hermeneutic" (Ph.D. dissertation, Emory University, 1981), p. 1.

4Outler, "Place of Wesley," p. 14.

5\_\_\_\_ "Towards a Re—Appraisal of John Wesley as a Theologian." *The Perkins School of Theology Journal* 14 (Winter, 1961): 7.

6Ibid

7Ibid

8Frank Baker, "Unfolding John Wesley: A Survey of Twenty Years' Studies in Wesley's Thought." *Quarterly Review* 1 (Fall, 1980): 60.

9Edward H. Sugden, ed., *Wesley's Standard Sermons*, 2 vols. (London: The Epworth Press, 1951),1:29—34.

10Ibid, p.31—32.

11This is to be understood in a hierarchical sense. For Wesley, all knowledge is important, but that teaching which leads to salvation is most important of all.

- 12Outler, "Place of Wesley," p.
- 13Sugden, Sermons, 1:30.
- 14William R. Cannon, "Salvation in the Theology of John Wesley." *Methodist History* 9 (October, 1970) :3.
- 15Clarence I. Bence, "Processive Eschatology: A Wesleyan Alternative." *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 14(Spring, 1979):54.
- 16 Harold Lindstrom, *Wesley and Sanctification* (Wilmore, KY: Francis Asbury Publishing Co.), p. 122. Bracketed material mine.
- 17Bence, "Hermeneutic," p.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 18.
- 19*Ibid*
- 20*Ibid*, p. 80.
- 21*Ibid.*, p. 98.
- 22*Ibid*, p. 7.
- 23*Ibid*, p. iii.
- 24H. Ray Dunning, "Systematic Theology in a Wesleyan Mode," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 17(Spring, 1982):18.
- 25Bence, "Hermeneutic," p. 80.
- 26No doubt this "expanse" can be abused by those who seek to travel in a reverse direction.
- 27Edward H. Sugden, ed., *Wesley 's Standard Sermons*, 2 vols. (London: The Epworth Press, 1951), 2:453. Emphasis mine.
- 28John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, 14 vols. (London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room; reprint ed., Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1978), 11:420. Emphasis mine.
- 29Sugden, *Sermons*, 2:445.
- 30Wesley, *Works*, 11:395.
- 31*Ibid*, p. 396.
- 32Sugden, *Sermons*, 2:53—54.
- 33Charles Randall Wilson, "The Correlation of Love and Law in the Theology of John Wesley" (Ph.D. dissertation, Vanderbilt University, 1959), p. 92.
- 34Sugden, *Sermons*, 2:54. Emphasis mine.
- 35*Ibid*, p. 453.
- 36John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament* (San Francisco: E Thomas Press; reprint ed., Salem, OH: Schmul Publishers, 1976), p. 15.
- 37Sugden, *Sermons*, 2:380.
- 38*Ibid*

- 39Ibid, p. 454.
- 40Ibid, p. 451—52.
- 41Ibid, p. 456.
- 42John Telford, ed., *The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.*, 8 vols. (London: The Epworth Press, 1931), 2:224.
- 43Sugden, *Sermons*, 1:126.
- 44Ibid, 2:453. Emphasis mine.
- 45Ibid, 1:125., 2:457.
- 46Ibid, 1:126.
- 47Ibid, 2:457.
- 48Ibid, 2:391. Emphasis mine.
- 49Ibid, 2:240.
- 50Wesley, *Works*, 8:329.
- 51Ibid, 11:402. Emphasis mine.
- 52Ibid, p. 420.
- 53Bence, "Hermeneutic," p. 80.
- 54Sugden, *Sermons*, 2:373.
- 55Albert E. Chiles, *Theological Transition in American Methodism, 1790—1936* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1965), p. 144f.
- 56John Allan Knight, "Aspects of Wesley's Theology After 1770," *Methodist History* 6(April, 1968):33.
- 57\_\_\_\_, "John Fletcher's Influence on the Development of Wesleyan Theology in America," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 13(Spring, 1978):17.
- 58Ibid, p. 21. Emphasis mine.
- 59Wesley, *Works*, 6:509.
- 60Ibid, 10:444.
- 61Luke Tyerman, *The Life and Times of the Rev. John Wesley, M.A.*, 3 vols. (New York: Harper and Brothers, Publishers, 1872), 3:71. Bracketed material mine.
- 62Nehemiah Curnock, ed., *The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.* 8 v019. (London: The Epworth Press, 1938) 2:354.
- 63Ibid, p. 354—55.
- 64Sugden, *Sermons*, 1:242.
- 65Colin Williams, *John Wesley's Theology Today* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1960), p. 61.
- 66Wesley, *Works*, 11:402. Bracketed material mine.
- 67Sugden, *Sermons*, 1:242.

68Ibid., 2:456. As noted earlier, although Wesley often employed exactly the same language in discussion of the nature and function of works both before and after conversion, he indicated one significant distinction. Those works which follow, technically speaking, are "good"; those which precede are not.

69Knight, "Fletcher" p. 21.



# **INSPIRATION, REVELATION AND DIVINE ACTION: A STUDY IN MODERN METHODIST THEOLOGY**

by  
William J. Abraham

There are sound reasons for isolating the divine inspiration of the Bible for special attention. First, the concept of inspiration has become one important ingredient in modern doctrines of scripture and thus, provides one valuable point of entry into those issues, such as divine action, revelation and authority, that cluster together in any comprehensive account of scripture. In this study, we shall find that the concept cannot be divorced from the idea of revelation: the two are invariably related and together naturally lead into a general thesis about divine action. Secondly, and more specifically, attention to the idea of inspiration highlights the content of a person's doctrine of scripture by indicating the divine activity which is said to bring scripture into existence. It is generally agreed, of course, that in a Christian account of the origins of the Bible, God will have some role in its production: the doctrine of inspiration invariably indicates what precise role God has in the process. Lastly, the idea of inspiration uniformly indicates where one stands on the whole critical enterprise that has become such a marked and disputed feature of the modern theological landscape. At the very least, it is difficult to hedge indefinitely, given the way in which the doctrine has been so liberally used to inhibit the full range of biblical research.

In this paper, I shall explore the idea of inspiration developed by a number of modern theologians who stand in the mainline Methodist tradition. This is a neglected field of study which deserves much more attention than it has received. One suspects that the widespread myth that Methodists have no theology-a myth all too often trumpeted abroad by Methodists themselves-has a lot to do with this sorry state of affairs. Of necessity, I shall be selective, concentrating on central figures on the American scene. Moreover, I aim to provide a theological assessment of the positions reviewed.

It is useful to begin our study from the turn of the century. By that

time, the tradition as a whole had come under considerable strain. There had, of course, always been tension within and trials from without. Certainly this was the case with its doctrines of inspiration, as I have argued elsewhere.<sup>1</sup> Thus, there was from the beginning a tendency to concentrate either on Wesley's blending of revelation with inspiration or on his commitment to the actual phenomenon and purpose of the Bible as ascertained by inductive study. It was rare to find anyone who searchingly attempted to combine these into a comprehensive and coherent account of inspiration. So there was plenty of scope for rival doctrines of inspiration to develop. Yet there was a fundamental background of agreement that held these various strands together. At the very least, all agreed on the cruciality of special revelation for Christian theism as a whole; in fact, it was this that generally provided the backcloth for their account of inspiration and it was a matter of degree how far one managed to keep these concepts apart. By the early years of the twentieth century, however, this foundation began to crumble and was ultimately replaced by an uneasy pluralism that has of late received official sanction within the United Methodist Church in America.

One can already sense the winds of change blowing through the work of Olin C. Curtis (1850-1918) and Henry C. Sheldon (1845-1928). Curtis, who taught at Boston and then at Drew, is still committed to the view that special revelation is of the very essence of the Christian faith,<sup>2</sup> even though he shrewdly recognizes that the traditional, apologetic appeal to miracles as a warrant for revelation was inadequate as developed by his forebears.<sup>3</sup> He is very sure that miracles cannot be given up and provides a judicious defense of supernatural intervention, arguing that it is in keeping with the purposes of God in redemption to act in an extraordinary manner.<sup>4</sup> His doctrine of scripture fits into this framework, for the Bible is seen as a dynamic and essential means of grace which brings the sinner into peace with God, amplifies and illuminates his inner life and acts as a vital force in forging Christian brotherhood between Christian believers.<sup>5</sup> He therefore rejects the need for an inerrant Bible:

Even on matters not scientific, absolute inerrancy in the Bible is not required, provided the portrait of Christ, the facts and doctrines of redemption, and the principles of Christian conduct are supplied in sufficiency for the Christian consciousness.<sup>6</sup>

Curtis was quite sure that it was indeed sufficient, so much so that the whole point of a theory of inspiration for him was to explain the power and vitality of the Bible in the lives of Christians.

One senses a measure of impatience as he proceeds to take up the question of inspiration. He dislikes the "incrusted terminology" of the numerous theories available and "can spare the space for only bare mention of the four theories which are typical."<sup>7</sup> His own theory, named the endorsement theory, is an attempt to blend all four into one. It is this that shows how far Curtis is still wedded to the confusion that bedevils most analyses of inspiration right down to the present.

As I have argued elsewhere,<sup>8</sup> there is an endemic tendency to construe divine inspiration as a complicated speech-act of God. Wesleyans fall into this trap as readily as Calvinists and Fundamentalists.<sup>9</sup> They tend to look

upon divine inspiration as one mode of special revelation whereby God communicates with chosen prophets and apostles. As this does not at all square with wide tracts of the biblical literature ad hoc adjustments are then needed to stretch the concept to cover, say, the Wisdom material and the Gospels. Curtis' work is as good an example of this as anyone's.

The very reason for his wanting to combine older theories in one betrays the collapsing of inspiration and revelation into one divine activity.

There is, I am convinced, no worthy reason for holding one of these theories to the exclusion of the remaining three. The probability is that the word of God was given by a combination of all four methods; but it is not now possible for us to decide in every case precisely what took place.<sup>10</sup>

Curtis, here, treats inspiration and the giving of the word of God as synonymous. In turn, a comprehensive view of inspiration involves a summary account of what God has done in revelation and redemption. Within this process, the psychology of inspiration may take the form of direct divine speaking, but it may also take the form of enriching human genius. The important work of the Holy Spirit rests in the Holy Spirit endorsing whatever was done on the human plane in the historic process of redemption. This endorsement embraces the original work or deed, its acceptance by the Church when it formed the canon and, equally, its acceptance by the individual Christian conscience. It is at this point that we can see how inspiration is being stretched to cover as much ground as possible. In the process, the link with revelation is severed for the key explanatory concept is now endorsement, but why this concept should be chosen is a mystery. All it does is fill the gap that cannot be filled in by the idea of revelation. It does, of course, enable Curtis to speak of the inspiration of scripture as a whole, but this tells us little about what the term means in itself and gives no indication as to why it should be applied to all of the Bible.

Henry C. Sheldon's account of inspiration, like that of Curtis, is a byproduct of his doctrine of revelation. He is at home with the classical emphasis on divine speaking,<sup>12</sup> arguing that God acts in a manner suited to the abilities, maturity and experience of the recipients of revelation. Scripture is the great depository of special revelation and commends itself to us by its organic completeness in drawing together diverse and contrasting material. The revelation it embodies is itself accepted because of its intrinsic quality, as shown for example by the unique attractiveness of Christ, by the objective evidence of prophetic foresight and miracle, by the subjective internal witness of the Holy Spirit and by its superiority over other sacred books.<sup>13</sup>

For Sheldon, inspiration is intimately related to the whole process of revelation. He defines it as an "interior divine agency auxiliary to the grasp and expression of truth, and therefore, serving as a factor in the process of revelation."<sup>14</sup> It is not immediately obvious why we should construe inspiration in this way. More importantly, it is not at all clear what inspiration means here. Sheldon has merely told us where inspiration occurs-it is a factor in the process of revelation-and has left the content of the notion quite empty-it is an interior divine agency. The exposition that follows

on the heels of his definitions does not improve matters. To be sure, we are provided a lengthy list of biblical references which supposedly indicate how inspiration was given, but these either are too general to throw light on inspiration or too specific in that they rehearse those texts that refer to the work of the Spirit in special revelation and thus, perpetuate confusion. Moreover, Sheldon clearly indicates that inspiration does not guarantee inerrancy, that it can be a matter of degree, that it extends to the language used, that it is not restricted to the activity of writing, that it is akin to the enlightening operation of the Holy Spirit in believers generally and that it goes beyond the intuitional theory by incorporating an element of direct divine action.<sup>16</sup>

All this bespeaks a fine theological mind systematically covering the necessary bases, but it still does not throw any light on what inspiration really is. It leaves the matter far too obscure as touching its essence. Indeed, Sheldon falls back, almost self-consciously, into totally opaque language about the activity of God to explain the heart of his position.

The true theory of inspiration includes the main thought of the intuitional theory, and adds a good margin for the direct agency of the Holy Spirit, that agency being conceived as operating dynamically rather than mechanically, and as being akin in its mode to that which has place in various acts of spiritual enlightenment in the subjects, generally, of the gracious visitation of the Spirit.<sup>17</sup>

In tone and style Curtis and Sheldon exhibit a clear change from the work of their predecessors. Compared to Pope and Miley, the leading Methodist theologians of the generation before them, one detects a deliberate attempt to come to terms with the issues that convulsed theology in their day. In fact, Curtis had studied at Leipzig, Erlangen and Marburg, and both of them were students of the brilliant Boston philosopher Borden Parker Bowne (1847-1910). However, compared to Bowne, their ideas on revelation and inspiration are more conservative for Bowne dismantled the underlying theological framework that had been central to the whole classical Wesleyan tradition. Thus, his fame rests in part on his moving American Methodism toward a liberal theology which in turn was built on his carefully-developed version of Personal Idealism. His ideas won the allegiance of some of the best minds of two generations of Methodist theologians, no mean feat by any standards.

As we turn to expound his account of inspiration, it should be remembered that there is no necessary antipathy between Idealism and traditional Christianity for many theologians were well able to harmonize the two.<sup>18</sup> Cornelius van Til managed to combine an Idealist position with a rigorous doctrine of inerrancy.<sup>19</sup> There is, however, a clear connection between Idealism generally and Bowne's approach to revelation and inspiration. What Idealism does is provide Bowne with an underlying picture of the relation between God and the world which is used to criticize the classical doctrines of revelation and inspiration.

Bowne, of course, has no intention of dispensing with the concepts of revelation or inspiration; what he does is reinterpret them along liberal lines. For him, the Bible embodies a revelation because of the lofty

character of its central ideas and "inspirations."<sup>20</sup> As to inspiration, Bowne is very much aware that it has constantly been understood as a form of divine speaking or dictation;<sup>21</sup> equally, he knows that this is difficult to square with the text of scripture as we have it.<sup>22</sup> His alternative is, as he himself confesses, somewhat indefinite.<sup>23</sup> Inspiration simply means that the scriptures were "written by men who were moved and enlightened by the Holy Spirit."<sup>24</sup> More explicitly, he writes:

That the scriptures are the product of inspiration is the firm faith of the Church. The authors were not left to their own devices, or to the blind gropings of their own understanding; but they spoke and wrote under the actuating influence of the Holy Spirit.<sup>25</sup>

Beyond this, Bowne has little to reveal; indeed, he gives the distinct impression that dwelling on inspiration and the arid discussion it has produced is a distraction from the true way in which God acts in the world. It is at this point that Browne displays his Idealist underwear.

God is equally present and equally near in every event. God does not intervene miraculously; He acts through the natural events of the world; these miracles are "signs whereby sense-bound minds are made aware of a divine power and purpose which they would otherwise miss."<sup>26</sup> In other words, the language of divine action needs to be seen as providing an angle of vision that is different from but not incompatible with, say, scientific explanations of natural phenomena.<sup>27</sup> Thus, divine revelation is not something which happens alongside or above events and feelings, it is another way of describing the progressive development of those events and feelings in history. Natural events are, after all, acts of God.

Unwittingly unbelievers have built on the false antithesis of the natural and the supernatural, and have fancied that when natural laws were traced in the revealing moment, all supernatural meaning was denied. This fancy vanishes when we rise to the thought that the natural itself is no self-running mechanism, but only the orderly form of the divine working.<sup>28</sup>

It is permitted to believe in a revelation by God through man to man for the better knowledge of God and the greater blessing of men. In the human world, God is less a with-worker than a through-worker, but He works nevertheless to will and to work of His good pleasure.<sup>29</sup>

Bowne's ideas are clearly embedded in the thought of two outstanding theologians who span two generations of American theology: Albert Cornelius Knudson (1873-1953) and L. Harold DeWolf (born 1905). Of the two, DeWolf provides a more self-consciously formal analysis of inspiration. Knudson shows little interest in the matter aside from providing the standard repudiation of verbal communication. In fact, he treats revelation and inspiration as synonymous, rejecting both at the same time,<sup>30</sup> and is content to repeat Bowne's analysis of revelation in his own terms, without furnishing any positive account of inspiration.

It is also important to note that revelation does not stand

opposed to what may be called the "human" or "natural" mode of acquiring knowledge; it does not necessarily involve the miraculous. History and psychology might conceivably describe the exact process by which the belief in God arose but this would not exclude a divine agency. The revelational activity of the Divine Spirit is entirely consonant with a synchronous activity of the human spirit. Indeed, the two involve each other; they are different aspects of one and the same process. From one point of view, the quest after God is a human search, a human striving, but from another point of view, it is a divine revelation.<sup>31</sup>

DeWolf's account of inspiration, as of revelation, is a lucid expansion of Bowne's position. Dismantling the classical distinction between general and special revelation, he sees all reality as expressive of the activity of God.

If an idealistic metaphysics is correct, then all experience of the material world is induced directly by God Himself and special revelation could not be more direct than what has been called general revelation.<sup>32</sup>

All events, therefore, are equally the product of divine activity. What leads us to separate a particular class as special in revelation has nothing whatever to do with direct or supernatural divine causation, but has everything to do with the impact of that event as instructive in acquainting us with the purpose and character of God. Moments that are more revealingly meaningful to men, moments of special communion with God in which the worshipper is filled with the sense of His presence and particular historical movements which preserve in a single, great stream of living tradition various manifestations of God, these are the constitutive ingredients of special revelation.<sup>33</sup> Inspiration is a by-product of these special experiences or moments:

This Doctrine is that the writing of the Bible as a whole was accomplished by an extraordinary stimulation and elevation of the powers of men who devoutly yielded themselves to God's will and sought, often with success unparalleled elsewhere, to convey truth useful to the salvation of men and of all nations . . . Before each part of the Bible was written, there were such events in the experience of the writers as to induce the writing. Inspiration is to be attributed primarily to these experiences and only secondarily to the passages in which they found expression.<sup>34</sup>

It is not at all surprising that the position embraced by Bowne, Knudson and DeWolf occupied a prominent place in its time in Methodist circles. Overall, there is a depth, richness and freshness in their thinking that embodies the best in the modern liberal tradition. Their writings vibrate with confidence and honesty when compared to the work of conservatives who self-consciously sought to perpetuate the classical Wesleyan heritage. If Methodists were simply people who think and let

think, they were very good Methodists. Yet, their account of inspiration is meager and insubstantial. DeWolf is the most explicit of the three and he is beginning to move in the right direction, but, even then, the concept of inspiration is idling: it is difficult to ascertain its cash value for understanding the Bible or our religious lives. This is no accident. Bowne, Knudson and DeWolf are so preoccupied with a very general analysis of divine action that specific divine activity like revelation and inspiration are given little attention in their own right. In this, they are truly modern figures for contemporary theologians, especially on the Anglo-American scene, are still elaborating the essentials of their approach to divine action.<sup>35</sup>

There are several problems, however, that have not been resolved in this tradition. First, not enough attention has been given to the work on the logic of verbs of action.<sup>36</sup> Despite a wealth of material, no general theory of human action has proved satisfactory; so attempts to work out very general theories of divine action must be suspect in the extreme, given our present state of knowledge and insight.<sup>37</sup>

Secondly, as represented by Bowne, the tradition is internally inconsistent. On the one side, Bowne rejects any idea of divine intervention in the world; on the other, he is fully committed to the classical ideas of the incarnation<sup>38</sup> and even the virgin birth of Jesus.<sup>39</sup> Indeed, Bowne is remarkably conservative in his theology and there is unmistakable continuity between much of his thinking and the theology of classical Methodism, a fact that is too readily overlooked by historians and theologians.<sup>40</sup> However, Bowne and those who come after him never fully face the tension inherent in their position, so it is not surprising that the inevitable instability constitutive of their position has had to be addressed by their modern offspring. The contemporary debate about the incarnation is one attempt to resolve the problem by the simple excision of one horn of the dilemma.

Thirdly, Bowne, Knudson and DeWolf invariably build their theories about divine action on slender foundations for they tend to generalize from one or two cases to all cases. DeWolf furnishes a clear example of this:

If there should occur in the physical world an event which men could not fit into the formulas which we call causal laws, that event would be no more an act of God than would the ordinary processes of nature. As Jesus declares, it is God Himself who "makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust." It is God who feeds the birds of the air and clothes the grains of the field in flowering glory. If God does these things which are parts of the regular natural order, then no dividing of a sea nor halting of the sun in its visible march across the sky could be more completely a divine act.<sup>41</sup>

We can well agree in his analysis of the divine activity mentioned by Jesus. What is happening here is that Jesus, drawing implicitly on the general activity of God in creation as the source of nature's power, picks out God as the crucial causal agent behind the sun, rain, the growth of flowers, etc. Given God's creative and sustaining role in all creation, the claims make perfect sense, as recent work on the problem of grace and freedom by John

Lucas has lucidly displayed.<sup>42</sup> However, it is sheer assumption to think that all talk about divine action can be analyzed in this fashion. Each case must be taken on its merits before general claims about God's action in revelation, inspiration, incarnation, regeneration, sanctification, and the like can be sustained. Perhaps this is one point where the old, dusty, hairsplitting debates about the activity of God in the Christian life that preoccupied Calvinists and their Methodist opponents can serve as a reminder of the complexity of the issue. Generalizations about the activity of God should come after we have explored these matters, not before. As it stands, Bowne, Knudson and DeWolf's theory of divine action is as bizarre and unfounded as those who insist on construing all divine action as miraculous activity.

Fourth, even if we did arrive at a satisfactory analysis of the idea of divine action, that in itself is only of limited value. Sooner or later, we must drop the general talk about God acting and come straight out and say what He does. Once we do so, we then have to clarify these precise claims as best we can and at this juncture, our general theory will be of extremely limited value. It is the absence of skill and imagination in this regard that accounts for the vagueness and obscurity of so much writing on inspiration. Bowne, Knudson and DeWolf, for example, gave no indication of the metaphors, models or analogies that would illuminate this concept; somehow we are expected to grasp their idea of inspiration by gazing at it indefinitely, a policy that is certain to induce frustration. Even the old, discredited analogies of the Fathers are to be preferred to this. To be told that inspiration is like God playing on a lyre, at the very least, gives us something to reject. Bowne, Knudson and DeWolf never quite reach that point in the negotiations.

Even when they do pause to clarify a particular action of God, they make undue haste. Bowne and DeWolf are good cases in point. Bowne, for example, treats special revelation as an alternative way of referring to human insight. He is very reluctant to go into details, but it is difficult for him to avoid this position.

Mediation is the great form of divine communication. New truth is not painted on the sky or given to all at once, but it begins in the thought of one or a few, and thence, spreads. This is the form in which God's revelation of Himself is spread abroad.<sup>43</sup>

We must see that the revelation consists essentially in the new ideas concerning God and His will for men, and that all else the history and the writing-are but means of setting forth and preserving these ideas.<sup>44</sup>

There is a simplicity and tenor to this outlook that is very attractive to anyone who has wrestled with the relationship between revelation and the biblical text. Andrew Greeley sums it up with characteristic flair. Speaking of Sinai, he writes:

Do I really believe that it is God that is doing, God that is acting? Or is the revelatory experience of which I speak something that men do by themselves and then postulate the



acting of God as an explanation? It seems to me that this is an inappropriate way to pose the question. Of course, I believe that God acted on Sinai and in the history of Israel and at Calvary and Easter. I believe that God acts in all human events and that He acted in a unique way in the dramatic religious encounters. Do I believe that God really spoke? If one means by this do I believe that he spoke the way He was depicted as doing in the movie *The Ten Commandments*, the answer is, obviously, no. If I am asked if there was really a voice speaking on the mountain that people could hear, I would say maybe. I wasn't there and I don't know. If there was a voice, it was not the voice of God. God does not have a voice. It must have been a modification of the air waves that God produced for the purpose of communication with people. Such an event would be marvelous indeed, and since I believe in an open universe, I would not want to exclude the possibility of such an event; but I will assert that under normal circumstances, that is not the way God works. Indeed, which is more marvelous—a God who works through creating modifications in the air waves or a God who works through the growth of human insight and understanding?<sup>45</sup>

It is tempting to yield to the closing rhetorical flourish. After all, who knows exactly what did happen on Sinai, for as a means of grace, the biblical traditions display a rich history of development and adaptation. Moreover, reference to divine speaking must be read sensitively, bearing in mind that it need not always involve direct divine intervention in its biblical or, for that matter, its present usage by believers. The temptation, however, must be resolutely resisted, not least because of the paucity of options to which Greeley limits us. Greeley shows a lack of imagination, for God has ways of intervening that go beyond some crude manipulation of the air-waves.<sup>46</sup> Moreover, he gives no indication as to how the mere accumulation of human insight enables us to discern the mind and will of a transcendent, incorporeal agent. The urge to trumpet some grandly general theory about divine action inhibits his awareness of this problem. So long as this remains unexplored, then so long will there be a ready market for the Fundamentalist, who, equally simplistically, identifies revelation *au grand serieux* with the text.

We can explore this further when we turn to DeWolf who has a clear grasp of the need to spell out more fully how God reveals Himself. He very correctly focuses on those human situations where we are want to speak of revelation.

I may observe actions of a human friend, read his letters and examine various things which he has made. Yet, I may find him an enigma. I cannot understand the secret springs of his seemingly strange activities and expressions. Then, one day, a phrase in a letter, a symbol in his handiwork or a single act suddenly discloses to me his heart. Of such an occasion, I later say, "It was a veritable revelation to me. In a moment, I came to understand him." Of course, the new datum which I have

observed is no more of my friend's doing than are a thousand others. But to me, it is more instructive in acquainting me with his purpose and character.<sup>47</sup>

Unfortunately, DeWolf proceeds to ignore the significance of his own analogy. It is precisely because friends do something quite concrete in space and time that their acts have such profound significance. Many of our acts are especially revealing only because they are direct, unmediated acts. Even then, not all our basic acts reveal anything significant. Most of what we do is, in fact, routine and says very little indeed. It is equally the case with God. Much of what God is doing in the world is beyond our ken for we are often baffled and bewildered and are, therefore, quite rightly exhorted to walk by faith and not by sight. It is precisely because God has acted more directly at chosen points in history to reveal Himself that walking by faith is possible. God has done things analogous to those more openly direct actions which clear the air and let us know what is going on. His word communicated face to face with prophets and apostles, His costly incarnation in Jesus Christ, such direct and unique acts as these done quite deliberately on God's part in the past are of the very essence of His revelation to us. Reducing such acts of God to acts analogous to God sustaining the world or clothing the lilies of the field not only drains these concepts of their content, it destroys the intellectual foundation of our faith in God and leaves us in darkness.

Bowne, Knudson and DeWolf evade this issue because of their instinctive confidence in their Idealist metaphysics. In this, they are at one with such great figures as Schleiermacher and Troeltsch who, in a more radical and consistent posture, dismantled much more of the classical Christian heritage and made a brilliant attempt to rebuild the whole structure and content of Christian theology. Unfortunately for all of them and their followers, Idealism is no longer a live option for most of us. Even if it were intelligible, it is doubtful if modern proponents could muster much evidence in its favor. Yet without this foundation, the whole tradition is in danger of collapse. Not surprisingly, Barth and his followers found it essential to seek out alternative warrants in revelation to keep the boat of faith afloat. Many of these in turn, however, have reaped a fresh harvest of problems by clinging to the liberal antipathy to direct divine action in the world. The only way out is to reach back to a fresh appraisal of those classical aspects of divine action which have been cast aside in both liberal and Barthian theologies.<sup>48</sup> I, for one, find the whole tenor and content of Wesley's theology much more satisfactory, at this point, than some of the modern Methodist substitutes.<sup>49</sup>

Our excursus on the problems inherent in Bowne and his followers may seem to have taken us a long way from the idea of divine inspiration. However, it has not been without its value, for it indicates how general theories of divine action are vitally relevant to our interpretation of inspiration. As we have seen, it is not surprising that the results are meager for it is very easy to be bewitched into believing that a general account of divine action is all that is needed. When this in turn generates its own problems, the chances of inspiration receiving adequate attention are even further reduced. Hence, one looks in vain to find a positive doctrine of

inspiration in the writings of recent Methodist theologians such as Edwin Lewis, Carl Michalson, William Hordern, Albert Outler, John Deschner, Schubert Ogden or John Cobb.<sup>50</sup> Clearly, other issues have arisen to absorb interest and in this regard, Methodist theology shares the general lack of enthusiasm for the topic in the mainline traditions of the Church.

This is a pity for it leaves a theological vacuum that is all too easily filled by the voices of aggressive Fundamentalists and conservative Evangelicals. Even those who have sought self-consciously to return to Wesley as a major model have all too readily yielded to temptation.<sup>51</sup> Mainline Wesleyan theology has, in fact, carried over important ingredients from its classical heritage which must be absorbed in any modern doctrine of inspiration and revelation.<sup>52</sup> Chief among these are its commitment to the whole range of modern biblical research and its rejection of verbal inspiration. No harm, moreover, can come from catching the sense of joy, freedom and creativity which pervades such a brilliant thinker as Bowne, one figure who stands out amidst a gallery of able scholars and sensitive Christians. Bowne and his followers represent a healthy liberal dimension inherent in the theology of the founding fathers of Methodism that we reject at our peril.

However, there can be no patching over of the errors of their ways. They fail to wrestle sufficiently with the nature and religious significance of special revelation. They are far too exuberant in their claims about what God has made known in nature, history and experience. They lapse too readily into vague and abstract talk about divine action. They fail to dream up suitable analogies to illuminate inspiration and revelation, or if they do, they do not grasp their significance. Finally, they ignore too readily the reality and consequences of our native rebellion against God and thus, elbow out the importance of grace in our lives. For schooling in these matters, we must recapture afresh something of the depth and breadth of the historical rock from which the people called Methodists were hewn. Surely there is cause for rejoicing that the definitive edition of the works of that elusive eighteenth century evangelist and theologian called John Wesley is now at last appearing.

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### Notes

1See "The Concept of Inspiration in Classical Wesleyan Theology," in *A Celebration of Ministry*, ed. Kenneth Cain Kinghorn (Wilmore: Francis Asbury Publishing Co., 1982).

2*The Christian Faith* (New York: Eaton and Mains, 1905), p.127.

3*Ibid.*, pp. 162-4.

4*Ibid.*, pp. 165-6.

5*Ibid.*, pp. 169-72.

6*Ibid.*, p. 175.

7*Ibid.*, p. 177. Curtis' summaries are too brief and inadequate to bear repetition here.

- 8The Divine Inspiration of Holy Scripture (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981).
- 9Wesley, Clarke, Benson, Watson and a host of others take this route. See my "The Concept of Inspiration in Classical Wesleyan Theology."
- 10Curtis, *The Christian Faith*, p. 177.
- 11Curtis has a sure grasp of the possibility of direct divine speaking. He insists that prophets and apostles may well have directly received a message from God. "How extremely absurd it is for any Christian thinker to hold that God could nor or would not; in the furtherance of redemption, give a prophet or an apostle a message as definite as human speech." *The Christian Faith*, pp. 178-9.
- 12"Special revelation may be outward, in the sphere of external nature or in the visible history of men and nations; or, it may be inward, consisting in a message to some elect spirit among men, who then becomes the instrument of its communication to others." *System of Christian Doctrine* (New York: Eaton and Mairis, 1903), p. 76.
- 13Ibid., pp. 90-118. Sheldon is at this point skillfully attempting to keep alive an apologetic strain that goes right back to Wesley himself and was given special prominence by Richard Watson.
- 14Ibid., p. 138.
- 15Ibid., p. 139, notes- 1-4. Examples of the former are: Matt. 22:29; Luke 16:17; Acts 15:28; Rom. 15:18-19; 1 Cor. 2:16. Examples of the latter are: Gal. 1:12; Eph. 3:3; 1 Peter 1:12.
- 16Ibid., pp. 140-8.
- 17Ibid., p. 149.
- 18C.S. Lewis, William Temple, J. R. Illingworth and A. E. Taylor are outstanding examples of this trend. For brief comment on this,- see my "Some Trends in Recent Philosophy of Religion," *The Theological Educator*, 9, 1979, pp. 93-103.
- 19For details on this see John C. Vander Stelt *Philosophy and Scripture, A Study in Old Princeton and Westminster Theology* (Marion, New Jersey: Mack, 1978), pp. 220-70.
- 20Studies in Christianity (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1909), p. 15, 41.
- 21Ibid., p. 31.
- 22Bowne rehearses the standard objections with consummate skill. Ibid., pp. 31-39.
- 23Ibid., p. 31.
- 24Ibid., p. 29.
- 25Ibid., p. 28.
- 26Ibid., p. 61.

- 27 Bowne's analysis of religious language has clear affinities with the thought of the later Wittgenstein and his followers. *Ibid.*, pp. 65-71.
- 28 *Ibid.*, p. 83.
- 29 *Idem.*
- 30 *The Doctrine of God* (New York: Abingdon, 1930), p. 109.
- 31 *Ibid.*, p. 215.
- 32 *Theology of the Living Church* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1953), p. 65.
- 33 *Ibid.*, pp. 66-7.
- 34 *Ibid.*, p. 76.
- 35 Especially noteworthy in America are Gordon Kaufman in *God the Problem* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972), especially chp. 6, and Schubert Ogden in *The Reality of God and other Essays* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), especially chp. 6. In England by far the most incisive work has been done by Maurice Wiles in *The Remaking of Christian Doctrine* (London: SCM, 1974).
- 36 I have in mind here all those verbs that speak of our doing something in contrast to verbs that speak of our passively undergoing something; or all those verbs which speak of our causing something to happen as opposed to something merely happening to us.
- 37 For a useful introduction to the Philosophy of Action, see Alan R. White *Philosophy of Action* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968).
- 38 See *Studies in Christianity*, p. 88.
- 39 *Ibid.*, p. 385.
- 40 The tradition represented by Bowne is generally conceived as "rampant liberalism," to use the term employed by William J. McCutcheon. (see *The History of American Methodism*, Vol. 3, ed. by Emory Stevens Bucke, New York and Nashville: 1964, pp. 262-289). Bowne's theology is much more complex and orthodox than this label would suggest. Equally misleading is the conservative Wesleyan image of Bowne which would dismiss his theology as an attempt to accommodate to the growing worldliness of late nineteenth century Methodism (see, for example, Timothy L. Smith, *Called Unto Holiness*, Kansas City: Nazarene Publishing House, 1963, p. 46). Bowne's theology embodies several elements that are central to Wesley's theology. The following are pervasive in his thinking: the essentials of the orthodox faith (for example, the Incarnation, the Trinity, and salvation by faith), the importance of a person's relationship with God, the primacy of love as the key attribute of God, holiness of heart and life, the importance of reason and experience in theology generally. Unfortunately, we do not have as yet a fair and comprehensive history of Methodist Theology. Robert E. Chiles' *Theological Transition in American Methodism*, (New York and Nashville: Abingdon, 1965) is invaluable but much too Barthian in theological perspective to be satisfactory. Moreover, Chiles uncritically accepts the content of Wesley's theology as a standard by which to judge the tradition

as a whole. This overlooks the tensions and problems inevitably inherent in Wesley and ignores the need for adaptation and development.

41A *Theology of the Living Church*, p. 66.

42John R. Lucas, *Freedom and Grace* (London: SPCK, 1976). See especially the essay "Freedom and Grace" in this collection of essays, pp. 1-15.

43*Studies in Christianity*, p. 77.

44*Ibid.*, p. 41.

45*The Sinai Myth* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1975), p. 23-4.

46I discuss this issue further in *Divine Revelation and the Limits of Historical Criticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982).

47A *Theology of the Living Church*, p. 66.

48For an excellent summary of the continuity between the Liberal and Neo-orthodox theology as regards direct divine action in the world, see Kenneth Cauthen, *The Impact of American Religious Liberalism* (New York and Evanston, Harper and row, 1962), pp. 239-43.

49I discuss this issue at length in *Divine Revelation and the Limits of Historical Criticism*.

50I suspect that the situation is little different in Britain.

51See, for example, the early issues of the *Wesleyan Theological Journal*. For an important historical review see Paul Bassett, "The Fundamentalist Leavening of the Holiness Movement, 1914-40," *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 13, 1978, pp. 65-91.

52For a review of the classical Wesleyan tradition on inspiration, see my "The Concept of Inspiration in the Classical Wesleyan Tradition," in *A Celebration of Ministry*.

## WESLEYANISM AND THE INERRANCY ISSUE

by J. Kenneth Grider

The long, Wesleyan tradition, in contrast to the rather recent and recent tradition in Calvinistic evangelicalism, has been one in which we have been hunters for the soteriological in the authoritative Scriptures, instead of for whether or not they contain errors on matters that do not matter—non—faith and non—practice matters.

A spill—over from the Calvinistic interest occurred during the first five formative years of the Wesleyan Theological Society, whereby all members were required to subscribe to the view that the autographs of Scripture were inerrant. Belief in the inerrancy of the autographs had been required for membership in the Evangelical Theological Society formed some twenty years earlier, and that requirement, no doubt, figured in a similar requirement for membership being established for members of the Wesleyan Theological Society.

I had been a member of and active in the Evangelical Theological Society, as had Stephen Paine and others, now forming the Wesleyan Theological Society. Scholars in that society were evangelicals, and we Wesleyans were also, of course, so we were at first uneasily content to make the same requirement for membership that was made by the Evangelical Theological Society.

As we of the Wesleyan Theological Society celebrate our twentieth year, I should like to present a number of supports for the change we barely voted through at the annual meeting of about our fifth year.

In that meeting, I made three brief speeches supportive of the change; and I feel that it is significant that the change was made.

I have never taught that there were errors in the autographs. I teach only that there might have been, and that it would not matter greatly to faith and practice if there had been certain inconsequential errors in such areas as mathematics or geography.

Harold Lindsell says that there are the inerrancy people, and those whom he calls the "believers in errancy."<sup>1</sup> He does not recognize my agnostic—like kind of view, which I suspect is also the view of many other Wesleyan Theological Society members.

Since the early 1970's, much energy has been expended in Calvinistic evangelicalism to support the so—called total inerrancy view. The late Francis Schaeffer and Norman Geisler have figured significantly in this interest, but no one has figured as significantly as has Harold Lindsell.<sup>2</sup>

Besides treating the issue as editor of Christianity Today, Lindsell has published two books supporting it: *The Battle for the Bible*,<sup>3</sup> and *The Bible in the Balance*.<sup>4</sup> In the earlier book, which occasioned perhaps more controversy within evangelicalism than has any other book within the past two or three decades, Lindsell teaches his view straightforwardly—as indeed he does in the sequel to it. He teaches that the Bible autographs were inerrant on all matters, scientific and historical, as well as doctrinal and ethical. He states that this kind of view has been normative throughout Christian history, and that "believers in errancy"<sup>5</sup> have only appeared in any force during the past 150 years. He even prefers to define "evangelical" on a "total inerrancy" basis,<sup>6</sup> although he is, of course, not willing to say that the so—called "errancy" people are not Christians.

After discussing the divided situation within what he hesitatingly calls Evangelicalism, he seeks to support his view from the Scriptures themselves; then treats the history of the church as though it is supportive; and follows this by a discussion of the "inerrancy" tensions among the Missouri Synod Lutherans and the Southern Baptists, in Fuller Theological Seminary's history, and among certain other para—church groups.

A basic supposition of Lindsell's is that, while the early Christian creeds (Apostles', Nicene, Athanasian) do not have an article on Scripture, their writers assumed such a view to be commonly believed, so that no article on the matter was needed. Lindsell also assumes that the later creeds which do contain an article on Scripture mean that it is pervasively without error even though this is not made expressly clear in the later creeds—such as the Westminster Confession. Lindsell also tends to interpret numerous Fathers and medievals and Reformers, and even John Wesley, as teaching total inerrancy, when they do not do so expressly. Lindsell then calls the inerrant—on—doctrine—and—practice view as taught by many evangelicals a departure from the church's historical stance.

Fuller Theological Seminary's Jack Rogers, in his *Confessions of a Conservative Evangelical*,<sup>7</sup> studied the writings of the seven Englishmen and the four Scotsmen who served on the committee that wrote the article of faith on Scripture in the Westminster Confession, and he found that not one of them taught that Scripture is necessarily inerrant on matters such as science and history. His work should be applauded as historical sleuthing which tends to undermine the view of Lindsell and others that the article of faith on Scripture in that Confession intends total inerrancy.

The total inerrancy view came to be taught by B. B. Warfield at Princeton at around the turn of the nineteenth century; and it is espoused by many evangelicals today, such as Dallas Theological Seminary's Norman Geisler.

I myself, not admitting that there were any errors of any kind in the autographs, am non—committal about any possible non—faith, non—practice errors in those non—extant manuscripts. I hold, as a faith confidence which I cannot altogether support, that the autographs would not have contained



errors on doctrine and practice matters—if I am allowed to interpret with wide—brush strokes the manuscripts which we do possess.

I am actually a hunter after the Bible's soteriological message, and do not even like to engage myself with such matters as whether it errs on non-faith or non—practice matters.

As to why Scripture might possibly contain errors on unimportant matters, but not on important ones, I hold this because I believe that a special help on the consequential matters was a significant aspect of the Holy Spirit's inspiration of the writers. One of the important effects of inspiration, I feel, is that the writers were guided in such a way that they did not teach errors on doctrine and practice. I believe, however, that a careful student of the Scriptures can only say this if he is allowed to interpret Scripture with Scripture, often explaining the difficult and seemingly inconsistent passages with passages that are more clear in their meaning.

It is on a considerable number of bases that as a Wesleyan evangelical, I hold the confidence that Scripture is inerrant on doctrine and practice, but that it just might contain error on matters relating to mathematics or science or geography or such like.

One basis for this view is that, if God had been interested in some sort of wooden accuracy even on non—doctrinal and non—ethical matters, it is strange that he would have chosen such languages as Hebrew and Greek for the writing of the Bible. This is especially because Hebrew had no written vowels. Since it had only consonants, we have been required to supply vowels; and this necessity of supplying vowels makes for an inexactness not in keeping with total inerrancy interests. It is admitted that the context helps us to be usually confident about what vowels to add. And most would agree that the Massorettes did very well in adding vowels to the Hebrew consonants. Yet inexactness is introduced. With regard to Greek: the fact that the earliest manuscripts were uncials, thereby containing only capital letters, leaves it open to question in some contexts as to whether (for example) SPIRIT refers to the Holy Spirit or the human spirit. The total absence of punctuation gives rise to further uncertainties.

God could have gotten inspired thoughts conveyed in the Hebrew and in the Greek, it would seem to me. And He could have used those languages if He was interested that the writings contain no errors in doctrine and practice matters. But especially the Hebrew, and the Greek to some extent, would have been inadequate languages, if God was anxious about some sort of total accuracy.

Further, if God was interested in total inerrancy, why are the approximate 300 quotations in the New Testament not the writers' own translations of the inspired writings of the Hebrew Old Testament, but instead always from a Greek translation of the Hebrew: the Septuagint? Something of total accuracy is always lost, in a translation. And, while the Holy Spirit would have been helping the seventy pre—Christian Septuagint translators, the church has not understood that they enjoyed what we technically call inspiration.

Moreover, what great advantage would there have been, in total inerrancy in the Hebrew and Greek autographs, when the writings were soon to need to be translated into other languages, and the wooden

accuracy would have been lost anyway? In the thousands of extant New Testament manuscripts, we find tens of thousands of minor variations. We find numerous such variations if we collate only our few oldest New Testament manuscripts and if we compare the Dead Sea Hebrew—language Scrolls with the Massoretic Hebrew Old Testament manuscripts. Why should the Holy Spirit guard just those original autographs that came from the Bible writers themselves on all minute non—faith matters, when the equivalent meaning of what is said had to be translated into all sorts of languages, and fine, precise accuracy was going to be lost anyway? Evidently, what is important is that the meaning be guarded sufficiently so that matters of doctrine and practice are protected. That, as I see it, is one of the continuing works of the Holy Spirit of truth.

Of bearing also on the inerrancy issue is the fact that even the four Gospels, which give details of Christ's life, tend to give only such life details as relate in some way to the redemption He provided for us. These strange looking books which we call Gospels, which do not seem to conform to any previous literary form, seem to be biographies that were not simply biographies. They do not give biographical details one by one, but details that relate to redemption. They give accounts of His teachings, His mighty works, and His death and resurrection. Two of them, Matthew and Luke, start with His birth, no doubt because they understand that its supernaturalness and its naturalness relate to the redemption He provided; then they skip over to matter related to His ministry. John gives us a different order of events because he feels that that order will facilitate his purpose of giving us an account of the redeeming Christ in whom he wants the reader to believe savingly.

Moreover, Scripture itself is not interested in inerrancy. It makes a claim for inspiration, but not for inerrancy—at least, not for total inerrancy. And what the New Testament says the Old Testament's inspiration results in is not inerrancy, but correct teaching on doctrine and practice. The most express passage of all, on inspiration, states clearly what the inspiration insures; and all the things that it insures, or results in, are doctrine and practice matters. This passage reads, "All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16).

A final matter I would mention on this: to express a total inerrancy view of Scripture might mean that we would be expressing a "higher" view of Scripture than the church usually expresses on Christ our God—Man Savior. We express the confidence that Christ was sinless. Paul says this in 2 Corinthians 5:21: "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf . . ." The writer of Hebrews says it in 4:15: "For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin."

Christ was without original sin because he was a new Adam, a new representative of the race, and did not get represented by the first Adam. And Scripture declares in effect that he did not ever disobey the Father who had sent Him. Yet Scripture does not declare outright that Christ never did err in any way whatever. I myself would not state that He erred in any way. Yet, even as I allow that Scripture might err in some unimportant way, I

would also allow that Jesus might have erred in such a way. He might have as He grew up. Are we to believe that He never once looked for Joseph in the carpenter shop only to learn that "father" was somewhere else? Some evangelicals, such as Olin Alfred Curtis, understand that there was a gradual dawning in Jesus' consciousness of just who He was. If He had never made any mistake of the type I have mentioned, it would be somewhat open to question whether He really was fully human, as well as fully divine.

Luke's statement that "Jesus kept increasing in wisdom" (Luke 2:52) as well as in "stature" might imply that in His humanity as a lad, He gradually corrected earlier faulty understandings.

What I am saying is that Scripture and the church have taught unequivocally that Christ was sinless, not that He was totally errorless on unimportant matters. And I am saying that if one were to say that the Scriptures were totally without errors, even on inconsequential matters where doctrine and practice are not involved, we would be saying something more select about them than the Scriptures and the church have usually expressed about our God—Man Savior Himself.

The Wesleyan tradition, I feel, is similar to the view I have here taken on the inerrancy issue.

Although John Wesley can be and is quoted as supporting a total inerrancy view, I interpret him as teaching a view similar to my own, on this matter. It is so that Wesley made at least one statement, in his journal, which might imply total inerrancy. He said, "Nay, if there be any mistakes in the Bible, there may as well be a thousand. If there be one falsehood in that book, it did not come from the God of truth."<sup>8</sup> This statement, which is quoted by Harold Lindsell in *The Battle for the Bible*, is different from much that is contrary to it in Wesley; and indeed, even this statement is not a clear teaching of total inerrancy. On this latter matter, he has not clearly stated that he is including unimportant matters as he says there are no mistakes in the Bible. Indeed, as he says that if there is one "falsehood," he implies that the "mistakes" he has just spoken of would be on consequential matters. Since "falsehood" is his synonym for "mistake," then "mistake" must have to do with a consequential matter. Besides, since he uses the word "truth" here, implying that the Bible, without any falsehoods in it, comes from "the God of truth," he seems to be talking about its consequential matters, instead of its mathematics, or geography, or genealogical tables, or something of that sort.

Besides, many things that Wesley says about Scripture show clearly that he views it in much the same way as I have here said I myself do. For one thing, he allows that there might have been incorrectness in the genealogies in Matthew and Luke. In his comment on Matthew 1:1 in the Notes, he says:

If there were any difficulties in this genealogy, or that given by Luke, . . . they would rather affect the Jewish tables than the credit of the evangelists: for they act only as historians, setting down these genealogies as they stood in those public . . . records. Therefore, they were to take them as they found them. Nor was it needful they should correct the mistakes, if there were any. For these accounts sufficiently answer the end for

which they are recited. They unquestionably prove the grand point in view that Jesus was of the family from which the promised seed was to come. And they had more weight with the Jews than if alterations had been made by inspiration itself.

This passage shows two special things about Wesley's view on inerrancy. It shows that there might have been unimportant errors. It shows also that, if there were any, it does not matter, if the "grand point," the important point, is still made, in the passage.

Wesley's use of "true," in "infallibly true," I feel, also suggests that he understood the Scriptures to be infallible on the important matters instead of always correct on such matters as mathematics. In this connection, he says, " 'All Scripture is given by inspiration of God,' consequently all scripture is infallibly true."<sup>9</sup>

In a letter, he said, "The Scriptures are a complete rule of faith and practice; and they are clear in all necessary points."<sup>10</sup> This shows that "faith and practice" are the "necessary points," and that those are the points in Scripture he is interested in.

It is correct that Wesley's instruction was to "enjoin nothing that the Bible does not clearly enjoin," and to "forbid nothing that it does not clearly forbid."<sup>11</sup> But this is simply an announcing of his *sola scriptura* view, not of anything like an inclusive inerrancy.

It is also correct that he and other Holy Club members were called "Bible moths,"<sup>12</sup> who fed on the Bible as moths do on cloth. Again, this is only a high view of Scripture as a means of grace, as he understood it to be; not that it is totally inerrant.

Even Wesley's well-known statement about Scripture helping us to "know one thing—the way to heaven," where he also says, "O give me that book!" and where he says he is "*homo unius libri*,"<sup>13</sup> only supports what I am saying—not a total inerrancy view.

I should also suggest that the loose, inexact way in which Wesley uses Scripture, referring to its thrust, often without quoting it precisely, implies that he did not think of it as somehow correct in areas of detail on matters that do not matter.

Early Methodist Adam Clarke, Biblical scholar extraordinary, also held this kind of view on inerrancy. He said, "I only contend for such an inspiration, or Divine assistance of the sacred writers of the New Testament, as will assure us of the truth of what they wrote, . . . but not for such an inspiration as implies that even their words were dictated, or their phrases suggested to them by the Holy Ghost."<sup>14</sup>

That Clarke was interested in faith and practice matters, instead of anything like a total inerrancy, is shown when he says, "The Sacred Scriptures . . . are alone sufficient for every thing relative to faith and practice of a Christian, and were given by inspiration of God."<sup>15</sup> Along with this, it should be mentioned that for Clarke at times "the Holy Ghost . . . dictated to them . . . what to write . . ."<sup>16</sup> This heightened degree of the Spirit's help, in certain parts of Scripture, has been properly taught also by many others inside of and outside the Wesleyan tradition.

On inerrancy specifically, Clarke implies that this has to do with matters of salvation when he writes, "The Bible . . . declares his [God's] will

relative to the salvation of men . . . Men may err, but the scriptures cannot . . ."17 He also says, "The apostles were assisted and preserved from error by the Spirit of God; and therefore, were enabled to deliver to us an unerring rule of faith."<sup>18</sup> Again, this is inerrancy on the "rule of faith," not on inconsequential matters.

H. Orton Wiley (1877—1961) viewed inerrancy similarly. He seems to have written Article Four of the Nazarene Articles of Faith, as he served on a commission which re—wrote the article on Scripture—which re—writing was made official at the 1928 General Assembly and at the subsequent district assemblies.<sup>19</sup> I studied under him and taught a course jointly with him at Pasadena College during the 1952—53 school year, and also visited with him on theological matters almost daily. I also visited with him and corresponded with him occasionally until near the time of his passing in 1961. We discussed specifically the matter of the Bible's total inerrancy, and he told me clearly that he did not hold to that position. One reason I remember this so clearly is because, at that time, I myself tended toward the total inerrancy view. I have since searched Wiley's *Christian Theology* to see if, in it, he anywhere indicated a total inerrancy view. This is because I was corresponding at the time with my friend from Drew University student days, William Arnett, long—time systematic theologian of Asbury Theological Seminary, who told me he was reading Wiley as teaching total inerrancy. Yet from my visits with Wiley, from checking his writings, and from checking the passages which Professor Arnett asked me to check, I am confident that Wiley nowhere taught total inerrancy. He probably wrote about, and he did teach, the kind of inerrancy which is indicated in Article Four of the Nazarene Articles of Faith, which speaks of the "Holy Scriptures," written by the help of "inspiration," as "inerrantly revealing the will of God concerning us in all things necessary to our salvation."<sup>20</sup> The word "inerrantly," here, first appeared in the Scripture article in 1928. In 1907, this part of the article had read, "revealing the will of God concerning us in all things necessary to our salvation." No change was made in the article in the Manuals of 1908 and 1919; and the changes in the 1911 and 1916 Manuals were not of consequence. The twenties had been a time when fundamentalist ideas on scripture had been debated, and when some Nazarenes had tried to nudge the denomination toward fundamentalism as such. This might have figured in the introduction of the word "inerrantly" in the 1928 article on scripture. Yet it is to be noted that Scripture is only said to be inerrant on matters "necessary to our salvation"; not on all matters.

Wiley's delineated view on scripture is found in his *Christian Theology*. In it, he says that the Spirit's "inspiration" means that "the Bible becomes the infallible Word of God, the authoritative Rule of Faith and Practice in the Church."<sup>21</sup> This is not a total inerrancy statement; instead, it reveals that his interest is in the Bible's being "infallible" and "authoritative" on the matters that matter: doctrine and practice. At one place, he gives seven bases for believing that the Scriptures "have been kept intact and free from essential error, so that we may be assured of the truth originally given by the inspired authors."<sup>22</sup>

A. M. Hills, perhaps second only to H. Orton Wiley in significance as a theologian of America's Holiness Movement during this century, author of

35 books and over 2000 articles, taught that Scripture contains errors on unimportant matters.

Sometimes, it seems that Hills means only that the copies of the autographs introduced errors—which we are all compelled to understand. He writes, "Thus by the negligence or inaccuracy of the copyist, through the many centuries, in hundreds of manuscripts, there came to be ten thousand various readings in the Old Testament, and one hundred and fifty thousand in the New Testament, as the eminent scholars tell us, . . ." <sup>23</sup>

At other times, though, he simply admits that there are inconsequential errors and discrepancies in our Bible, and he does not seem to be speaking of copying variations. In this connection, he says, "But to say that all of Scripture was so inspired verbally, is to put too great a tax upon faith. In view of the discrepancies, and the disagreements and misquotations, or inaccurate quotations, and the manifestly lower moral and spiritual tone in some passages than in others, these strong theories [of "universal" plenary and "common" verbal inspiration], if applied to the whole Bible cannot be successfully defended." <sup>24</sup> He goes on to say, "But if the inspiration of the original text [the autographs] were absolute and complete [he implies that it was not], and were absolutely proved, no one can maintain that we have that original text in every minute particular." <sup>25</sup> Later, he says, "But, in spite of all discrepancies, and disagreements, and errors, and minor inaccuracies, the Bible still remains God's inspired and infallible book." <sup>26</sup> And he soon adds, "The marvel and the miracle is that there are so few discrepancies of any real importance." <sup>27</sup>

So, while he states, early in his treatment of Scripture, that it is the copyists of the autographs, the "original texts," who made errors, he later seems clearly to be saying that there were inconsequential errors and discrepancies in the autographs. This is in part because he later speaks simply of Scripture as having the errors in it. It is in part because the nature of the errors is not such that they would come from merely the copyists. When he speaks of copyist errors, he refers to letters within words that are missing or out of order, or incorrect—clearly copyist errors. Yet, he later speaks of, as quoted above, "the discrepancies and the disagreements and misquotations, or inaccurate quotations," and of the "errors," all due to a lower than verbal form of inspiration obtaining in the Scripture writers.

Hills might be the only major Holiness Movement theologian to teach that there were unimportant errors in the autographs. I myself understand that there might have been inconsequential errors, not that there were. It would seem to me that even such an error as that of quoting one Old Testament prophet, and saying that the quote is from a different prophet, might have been an error that got introduced into the text at a later time. A copyist could have mistakenly thought that the wrong prophet was named, and changed it to another name. I also feel that it would be of no special consequence if the autographs did contain occasional errors of that sort. It is interesting, though, that Hills took this kind of view in a 1931 publication, just after evangelicalism generally in America, the Church of the Nazarene included, had been pushed in the middle and late 1920's toward fundamentalist directions. It is a fact, too, that from 1932 until the appearance of the first volume of Wiley's *Christian Theology* in 1940,

Fundamental Christian Theology was the required theology text for Nazarene home—study—course ministers.

One more Holiness theologian's views should be mentioned, I feel, on this inerrancy issue: those of Richard S. Taylor, my colleague for sixteen years at Nazarene Theological Seminary.

Taylor's views are remarkably similar to my own. On the worth of literary criticism, he is more disparaging than I am; and he has even discouraged ministers from studies that include such pursuits, whereas I would not. Yet in the same book, on the inerrancy issue, he takes a view which seems to be identical to my own, on possible inconsequential errors in the original writings of Scripture. He says, "Of course the whole question of 'inconsequential error' remains debatable; this book is not assuming that such error existed in the autographs."<sup>28</sup>

As we in the Wesleyan Theological Society begin our next twenty years of contribution to the theological understanding of people in our tradition, let it be hoped that we will do our theological work with care, not accepting readily spillovers from the right wing of the larger segment of the evangelical camp: Calvinistic evangelicalism.

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#### Notes

1See Harold Lindsell, *The Battle for the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), p. 141.

2Such Calvinistic evangelicals as Jack Rogers and Fuller Theological Seminary president David Allen Hubbard have at the same time opposed the total inerrancy view.

3Harold Lindsell, *The Battle for the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976).

4Harold Lindsell, *The Bible in the Balance* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979).

5Lindsell, *The Battle for the Bible*, p. 141.

6Ibid, p. 139.

7Jack Rogers, *Confessions of a Conservative Evangelical* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974).

8John Wesley, *The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.*, 8 vols., ed. Nehemiah Curnock (London: Epworth, 1909; reprint ed., 1938), 6:117.

9Wesley's Works, 6:193.

10Ibid, 2:325.

11Ibid, 8:192.

12See Richard Green, *John Wesley Evangelist* (London: The Religious Tract Soc., 1906), pp. 76—77.

13John Wesley, *The Sermons of John Wesley*, annotated by E. H. Sugden (London: Epworth, 1936), 1:31.

- 14Adam Clarke, *The New Testament . . . with Commentary and Critical Notes* (New York: Abingdon—Cokesbury Press, n.d.), 1.
- 15See J. B. B. Clarke, ed., *An Account of the Infancy, Religious and Literary Life of Adam Clarke*, 3 vols. (London: T. S. Clarke, 1833), 1:172.
- 16Clarke, *Commentary*, comments on 2 Peter 1:20, 21.
- 17Adam Clarke, *Miscellaneous Works*, 13 vols. (London: T. Tegg, 1839—1846), 12:132.
- 18Clarke, *Commentary*, 6:9.
- 19A. Elwood Sanner stated in the Wiley Lectures at Pasadena College that Wiley had told him that he, Wiley, had written Article Four, and that Wiley had added, "I wanted to state it so that there would be a little bit of elbow room in there." Stephen S. White stated in the *Herald of Holiness* in 1966: "I had nothing to do with writing this statement (Article Four), but I am quite sure Dr. Wiley did have" (Nov.9, 1966, 14). White did not serve on the Manual Revision Commission. His college theology teacher, E. P. Ellyson, was its chairman; General Church Secretary E. J. Flemming, its secretary; and the other members were J. B. Chapman (not elected general superintendent until 1928), H. Orton Wiley, A. E. Girvin, John Gould, and P. L. Pierce (see *Manual, Church of the Nazarene*, 1923, 186—186; *Journal Sixth General Assembly*, 7).
- 20See *Nazarene Manual*, 1928, p. 22.
- 21*Christian Theology*, 1:170.
- 22*Ibid.*, 213—214.
- 23A. M. Hills, *Fundamental Christian Theology*, title page missing, p. 64.
- 24*Ibid.*, p. 78—79.
- 25*Ibid.*, p. 79.
- 26*Ibid.*, p. 87.
- 27*Ibid.*
- 28Richard S. Taylor, *Biblical Authority and Christian Faith* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1980), p. 80.



# **JOHN WESLEY AND THE ISSUE OF AUTHORITY IN THEOLOGICAL PLURALISM**

by Allan Coppedge

A prime concern of theological pluralism is the question of the criteria for truth in Christian theology, and one aspect of being pluralistic is sometimes described in terms of a commitment to multiple authorities in religious matters. Four criteria are usually mentioned in this regard: Scripture, tradition, experience and reason. The frequent reference in such discussion to a "Wesleyan quadrilateral" would seem to indicate that Wesley himself used these four criteria in a similar manner. Yet, Wesley borrowed from the Church of England an Article of Religion on the sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures that was written during the Reformation Age and included the Articles for the Methodist Church of America which appears to align him with the Classical Protestant position regarding the final authority of the Scripture. Which is correct? Did Wesley view the four norms as co—ordinate authorities of equal value, or did he believe that the Scripture was the final authority in matters of truth? If the first is true, then it will be quite right to classify him as a strong supporter of at least this aspect of theological pluralism. If the second option is correct, then it will be very difficult to claim Wesley as the forerunner of contemporary theological pluralism.

Because the basic question is so intimately bound up with Wesley's attitude toward the Scripture, our study begins with the development of his views about the Word of God. Wesley's understanding of the role of the Bible was first shaped in the Epworth rectory under the influence of his father. Samuel Wesley had a deep personal commitment to the Scripture as the Word of God, and his own scholarly writings reflect his passion for the Bible.<sup>1</sup> An indication of its importance can be seen in his counsel that John not enter into Holy Orders unprepared, and the most significant part of this preparation was personal familiarity with the Bible, based on a knowledge of the text in the original languages. John later paid tribute to his father in a review of his early years:

From a child, I was taught to love and reverence the Scripture, the oracles of God; and next to these, to esteem the primitive

Fathers, the writers of the three first centuries. Next after the primitive church, I esteem our own, the Church of England, as the most scriptural national church in the world.<sup>2</sup>

If what John was taught was an accurate reflection of his father's conviction about the order of religious authority, then it is clear that for Samuel Wesley, Scripture was to be given priority over tradition.

This crucial importance of the Bible was reinforced for John during the Oxford years by his reading of Jeremy Taylor's *The Rule and Exercises of Holy Living*. Taylor repeatedly returns for his base authority to the Word of God, which he confines to the Bible. All commandments and revelations promises and threatenings, stories and sermons in the Bible belong to the Word of God, and even the best books of devotion or sermons cannot be compared with it. As Martin Schmidt rightly observes, "It was certainly of significance for John Wesley's development that in this book he was so strongly directed to the Bible."<sup>3</sup>

The relation of Scripture to authority was probably more specifically raised for Wesley at the time of his ordination. Receiving Holy Orders in the Church of England required subscription to the Thirty—nine Articles of Religion, and one of these Articles dealt with the role of Scripture in the Church. Wesley's correspondence with his parents during this time clearly indicates he was giving the Articles very careful attention. In particular Article XVII on Predestination raised enough problem for him to question whether or not he could in good conscience subscribe to the Articles without reservation.<sup>4</sup> After much consideration and a careful study of John Ellis' *A Defense of the Thirty—Nine Articles of the Church of England*,<sup>5</sup> Wesley was able to commit himself to the Articles, and later was to reaffirm that allegiance:

In saying, 'I teach the doctrines of the Church of England,' I do, and always did, mean . . . I teach the doctrines which are comprised in those Articles and Homilies to which all the clergy of the Church of England solemnly profess to assert, and that in their plain, unforced, grammatical meaning.<sup>6</sup>

It was Article VI on the Holy Scriptures that specifically spelled out the Anglican position on religious authority:

Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to Salvation: so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an Article of faith, or to be thought requisite or necessary to Salvation.<sup>7</sup>

The Article then makes a distinction between the canonical books "of whose authority was never any doubt in the Church," and the apocryphal books. The latter are read by the Church "for example of life and instruction of manners; but it doth not apply them to establish any Doctrine." By this the Church of England aligned itself with Classical Protestantism's commitment to *sola scriptura*. In addition to the declaration that the Scriptures contain all things necessary for salvation, the Article makes it clear that no doctrine is to "be believed as an article of

faith" unless it may be read in the Bible—or proved thereby. So by this declaration of faith, the Holy Scriptures were definitely established as final authority in the Church, and clearly distinguished from tradition.

A standard interpretation of the Articles in Wesley's day was that of Bishop Gilbert Burnet. In discussing this Article, Burnet points out that the important point to be established is "the rule of this faith." He then shows how the Church of England differs from the Roman Church:

We . . . affirm, that the scriptures are a complete rule of faith, and that the whole Christian religion is contained in them, and no where else; and although we make great use of tradition, especially that which is most ancient and nearest the source, to help us to a clear understanding of the scriptures; yet as to matters of faith, we reject all oral tradition . . . and we refuse to receive any doctrine, that is not either expressly contained in scripture, or clearly proved from it.<sup>8</sup>

The fact that the Scripture was recognized in the Church of England as the final authority in all matters of doctrine and practice was certainly not lost upon the conscientious young Wesley as he pored over the Articles of Religion in preparation for his ordination. Further, the very action of subscribing to the Articles at that time is a very strong indicator that Wesley was beginning to make the Bible his "complete rule" in matters of religious authority.

In looking back over early Methodism, Wesley pinpointed 1729 as the year in which he "began not only to read but to study the Bible, as the one, the only standard of truth, and the only model of pure religion."<sup>9</sup> This was the year he began to meet with the Oxford Methodists for the serious study of certain key books, including the Greek Testament. Although Heitzenrater has pointed out that the Oxford circle did not begin their more concentrated study of the Bible until 1734—35,<sup>10</sup> still 1729 is a significant point at which a fresh appreciation of the Scriptures is realized by Wesley. Yet, when Wesley wrote in 1766 that it was the year 1729 in which he began to study the Bible as "the only standard of truth," even he may be placing the date too early. That certainly was his position in 1766, but in 1729, he still had not finished working through two thorny issues related to authority, viz., the relation of Scripture to experience, which was to pertain to his struggle with the mystics in the mid—1730's, and the relation of Scripture to tradition, which was to relate to his evaluation of the Early Church during his sojourn in Georgia.

The first of these questions to be answered, i.e., the relationship of experience to Scripture, is wrapped up with Wesley's involvement with the mystics. Robert Tuttle has pointed out that between 1732—1735, Wesley became heavily influenced by the speculative mysticism of William Law. During this time, Wesley traveled several times to London for personal interviews with Law. Wesley had been attracted to Law by his books *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life* and *Christian Perfection*, but by the time Law had become Wesley's spiritual director in the mid—thirties, he had become a convert to the German mysticism of Tauler and Boehme. Under this influence, Wesley began to search after salvation and assurance by means of contemplation. Here the emphasis was upon personal experience

of God according to the mystical scheme of inner penance<sup>11</sup> Wesley summarized the views of the mystics in a letter to his brother, Samuel, in November, 1736, in which he pointed out his chief objection was that they rejected the means of grace as God's scripturally—ordained instruments for communicating His favor to men. Wesley synthesized the mystics' approach:

All means are not necessary for all men; therefore each person must use such means, and such only, as he finds necessary for him. But since we can never attain our end by being wedded to the same means; therefore, we must not obstinately cleave unto anything, lest it become an hindrance, not an help. Observe, farther, when the end is attained, the means cease.<sup>12</sup>

One of the chief means was the Scripture, which the mystics bypassed: "The Scripture they need not read; for it is only His letter with whom they converse face to face." It was this view of the means of grace, and the Scriptures in particular, that Wesley came to see in Georgia as the rock which nearly shipwrecked all his faith. On his return voyage to England, he penned his evaluation of those who placed experience above Scripture:

All other enemies of Christianity are triflers; the Mystics are the most dangerous of its enemies. They stab it in the vitals; and its most serious professors are most likely to fall by them. May I praise Him who hath snatched me out of this fire.<sup>13</sup>

It is important to realize that Wesley was rejecting the mystical emphasis upon experience, because they set aside the means of grace. Just as important, however, is the underlying reason that Wesley placed such a high premium on the means of grace. They were crucial in his eyes because they were the "scripturally ordained" means of grace:

According to this, according to the decision of holy writ, all who desire the grace of God are to wait for it in the means which He hath ordained; in using, not in laying them aside.<sup>14</sup>

The authority for evaluating their importance was the Bible, rather than experience or tradition. So that by the time he returned from Georgia, the Scriptures had become the touchstone by which he tried all opinions.

This same question arose again when Wesley had to confront a mystical quietism in the early years of the revival. The debated question was how to wait upon God? with the means of grace or without them? Wesley responded:

It cannot possibly be conceived, that the Word of God should give no direction in so important a point; or, that the Son of God . . . should have left us undetermined with regard to a question wherein our salvation is so nearly concerned. And, in fact, He hath not left us undetermined; He hath shown us the way wherein we should go. We have only to consult the oracles of God; to inquire what is written there; and, if we simply abide by their decision, there can be no possible doubt remain.<sup>15</sup>

While he made clear his position on the essentialness of means of grace, it

must also be observed that Wesley left no doubt as to why he took this view. It was the position of Scripture, and that for him was determinative.

The second issue with which Wesley continued to grapple after 1729 was the relation of Scripture to the tradition of the Early Church. During the time of his missionary service, he was heavily influenced by reading William; Cave's *Primitive Chnstianity*,<sup>16</sup> and for a time apparently began to place the tradition of the first three or four centuries on a par with the authority of Scripture. But while still in Georgia, he also read Bishop William Beveridge's *Synodikon*, which convinced him that much of the Early Church tradition was not of apostolic origin, and that he could not place tradition, even that which was closest to the New Testament Church on the same level of authority as the Scripture.<sup>17</sup> He rejoiced on his return to England that he had been delivered from the error of "making antiquity a co—ordinate rather than a subordinate rule with Scripture."<sup>18</sup>

So by the first of 1738, Wesley had squarely faced the question of the relation of Scripture to both experience and tradition, and he had settled the issue for himself that Scripture was to be the undisputed final authority in all religious matters. He wrote at this time to Lady Cox, "To anyone who asketh me concerning myself or these whom I rejoice to call my brethren, what our principles are, I answer clearly, We have no principles but those revealed in the Word of God."<sup>19</sup> The following year, he responded to some reservations about his conduct in promoting the revival, and he clearly justified his actions upon the authority of Scripture:

If by catholic principles you mean any other than scriptural they weigh nothing with me. I allow no other rule, whether of faith or practice, than the Holy Scriptures. But on scriptural principles I do not think it hard to justify whatever I do. God in Scripture commands me, according to my power, to instruct the ignorant, reform the wicked, confirm the virtuous. Man forbids me to do this in another's parish; that is, in effect, to do it at all seeing I have now no parish of my own, nor probably ever shall. Whom then shall I hear? God or man?<sup>20</sup>

A convincing demonstration of how the Scripture served as final authority for Wesley at this time is found in the way he dealt with theological issues just prior to his evangelical conversion. As Wesley wrestled from March to May, 1738, with a new definition of faith and a different understanding of justification, his intellectual and spiritual pilgrimage was under the heavy influence of Peter Bohler. Although Bohler was both persuasive and persistent, Wesley was not to be convinced by reasoned argument alone, but began to test Bohler's views against the Bible:

The next morning, I began the Greek testament again resolving to abide by 'the law and the testimony'; and being confident that God would hereby show me whether this doctrine was of God.<sup>21</sup>

A month later, Wesley struggled to comprehend Bohler's assertion that conversion could be instantaneous, and again, he turned to the Scripture:

I could not comprehend what he spoke of an instantaneous work. I could not understand how this faith should be given in a moment. I searched the Scriptures again touching this very thing, particularly the Acts of the Apostles: but, to my utter astonishment, found scarce any so slow as that of St. Paul, who was three days in the pangs of the new birth.<sup>22</sup>

It was this confidence in the authority of Scripture that made it possible for Wesley in future years to invite others to convince him of a different view, but only from the Bible. In the preface to his Sermons, which he described as "what I find in the Bible concerning the way to heaven," Wesley indicated by what standard he is willing to be corrected:

I trust whereinsoever I have mistaken, my mind is open to conviction. I sincerely desire to be better informed. Point out a better way than I have known. Show me it is so, by plain proof of Scripture.<sup>23</sup>

The issue of final authority of Scripture was settled none too soon. The great revival of the eighteenth century had been going only a few months before major doctrinal question arose, and as in so many theological disputes, the root issue was one of authority, i.e., how was this matter to be settled. This first theological controversy of the revival provided a unique opportunity for Wesley to test his own recently—established commitment to the Scripture as the final authority for Christians. It arose in the closing weeks of 1739 and the first half of 1740, when Wesley found himself occupied at the Fetter Lane society in a doctrinal disagreement with the Moravians.

When he arrived that fall from Bristol, he immediately realized he had a major problem:

The first person I met there was one (Mrs. Turner) whom I had left strong in faith and zealous of good works; but she now told me Mr. Molther had fully convinced her she never had any faith at all; and had advised her, till she received faith, to be 'still,' ceasing from outward works; which she had accordingly done, and did not doubt but in a short time she should find the advantage of it.<sup>24</sup>

That evening, he heard Mr. Bray commending this same "stillness," and speaking against the danger of outward works, attendance at church, and the sacrament. Behind these testimonies stood the influence of Philip Henry Molther, a former tutor to the son of Count Zinzendorf, who had been ordained as a missionary to Pennsylvania. Arriving in London en route, he was very anxious to bring the society there under stronger Moravian influence. He taught a kind of "Quietism" called "stillness" and persuaded many that the faith they professed was not true faith, and that they must remain "still," without using any means of grace, until they were given faith.<sup>25</sup>

Wesley recognized the problem as a form of antinomianism that was rapidly becoming a threat to all he had designed to promote, holiness of heart and life, and he took steps to correct it. He had a conference with the

Moravian leaders, Molther and Augustus Spangenberg, in order to understand their position, after which he recorded in his Journal the difference between Molther and himself on the nature of faith, the way to faith, the manner of propagating the faith, and the fruits of Moravian effort in England. In addition, he wrote what might be called certain "position papers" on his own views "with regard to the question in dispute with the Moravians" and inserted them in the Journal. He dealt first with the questions of faith and assurance, and then with the doctrine of the true Church.<sup>26</sup>

Because Wesley recognized that the Moravians' positions were contrary to Scripture, he immediately began to challenge them, and his attempts at correcting the problem began with a Scriptural base. He recorded that he began the year 1740 by endeavoring "to explain to our brethren the true, Christian, Scriptural stillness, by largely unfolding those solemn words, 'Be still, and know that I am God.'"<sup>27</sup> Throughout the spring, Wesley continued to explain in public and private the Scriptures which had been misunderstood.<sup>28</sup> The base of the Moravian error was bypassing the means of grace in the same manner as the mystics. But Wesley had already worked through the implications of that view at Oxford and in Georgia, so he was not unprepared for the Moravians. From 2 Timothy 3:16, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God" he explained the ordinances of God as means of grace:

Although this expression of our church, 'means of grace,' be not found in the Scripture; yet, if the sense of it undeniably is, to cavil at the term is a mere strife of words. But the sense of it is undeniably found in Scripture. For God hath in Scripture ordained prayer, reading or hearing of Scripture, and the receiving the Lord's Supper as the ordinary means of conveying His grace to man.<sup>29</sup>

Since the Scripture was final authority, to show that the means of grace were Biblical was to settle the matter for Wesley.

During the last week in June, at the height of the controversy, Wesley delivered a series of morning and evening expositions specifically designed to combat the Moravian influence. In the Fetter Lane Society, he began with an account of the work of God in their midst over the past two years with special reference to the doctrines of salvation, faith and ordinances. He followed this with preaching on obedience after conversion, the confidence of believers, sin in believers, Scripture as a means of grace, and the doctrine of the Lord's Supper. Finally, two of Wesley's "Standard Sermons" from this period, "The Means of Grace" and "The Spirit of Bondage and of Adoption," were directed to the questions raised by the Moravians.

On July 18, a company met with Wesley at his mother's for a Thanksgiving service. Afterwards, they "consulted how to proceed with regard to our poor brethren of Fetter Lane. We all saw the thing was now come to a crisis, and we, therefore, unanimously agreed what to do." On the following Sunday, he attended the society's lovefeast, and when it was over, he read a paper reviewing the errors into which they had fallen. He concluded: "I believe these assertions to be flatly contrary to the Word of God. I have warned you hereof again and again, and besought you to turn

back to the 'law and the testimony.' I have borne with you long, hoping you would return. But as I find you more and more confirmed in the error of your ways, nothing now remains, but that I should give you up to God. You that are of the same judgment, follow me."<sup>30</sup> Eighteen or nineteen followed him out of the meeting, and five days later, he met three or four hundred at the Foundry, and after explaining his position almost all present agreed to join him in a new society.

After the division, Wesley detailed his theological difference with the Moravians in a letter to the Church at Herrnhut. Toward the close of the letter, he touched their view of the Scripture:

You receive not the Ancients but the modern Mystics as the best interpreters of Scripture, and in conformity to these, you mix much of man's wisdom with the wisdom of God; you greatly refine the plain religion taught by the letter of Holy Writ, and philosophize on almost every part of it, to accommodate it to the Mystic theory. Hence, you talk much, in a manner wholly unsupported by Scripture.<sup>31</sup>

With his brother, Charles, he was even more pointed: "As yet I dare in no wise join with the Moravians . . . because their general scheme is Mystical, not scriptural—refined in every point above what is written, immeasurably beyond the plain doctrines of the gospel."<sup>32</sup>

This controversy is relevant to a study on authority and religious pluralism for several reasons. First, it shows that while Wesley did not hastily create division over doctrine, theology was important enough to cause disruption. There was a clear limit to the latitude Wesley was willing to allow on central doctrines like salvation and the nature of faith. The Moravians dealt a blow to these essentials in Christian theology, and for these Wesley was ready to separate. Correct theology no less than a very "practical divinity" was at the center of the dispute.

Second, Wesley began to see the practical effects of false theology on the spiritual life of believers. The Moravian teaching on the role of the Church, prayer, the Scriptures, good works, and the ordinances of God undercut all those "means of grace" which Wesley believed were essential for the cultivation of Christian holiness. The central importance of sanctification in his theology caused him to reject Molther's views as a form of antinomianism. Whatever undermined growth in godliness, Wesley saw as contrary to the "Oracles of God," and consequently, to be dismissed out of hand. His theological "tolerance" of divergent views was directly related to whether such a position encouraged or discouraged holiness of heart and life.

Third, Wesley revealed that his standard for judging a doctrine was the Scripture. Whatever did not accord with 'the law and the testimony' was not to be received. Further, it was by the Bible that Wesley sought to establish members of the societies in solid theology, and this was the weapon he wielded to correct erroneous doctrines. Wesley thought it quite proper to separate himself from those that refused to recognize the ultimate authority of the Word of God in doctrine and practice.

Finally, these events also indicate that Wesley was patient regarding even doctrinal differences. The fact that almost nine months passed from



the beginning of the controversy to the separation shows that Wesley desired to give men time to weigh their theological views. But patience was not indifference, and after a time, division occurred because the Moravian position extended beyond the latitude of Scripture.

We may conclude then that the evidence seems to indicate that from 1738, Wesley had settled the question about the relationship of Scripture to other criteria for truth. Scripture is not seen as only the first in a line of coordinate criteria, but as the final authority in all religious matters. As Snyder puts it, Wesley had "Scripture as the 'norming norm' to be placed above all other authority."<sup>33</sup> Because of this, Wesley must be classified on the question of religious authority as firmly in the Classical Protestant tradition. Colin Williams in identifying Wesley with this position observes, "That Wesley continually subjected tradition and experience to the 'written Word of God' even a casual reading of his works will reveal."<sup>34</sup>

Not only did Wesley begin the revival with his view, but he continued to maintain this conviction throughout his lifetime. Nearly fifty years after the Methodists "began to preach that grand scriptural doctrine, salvation by faith," Wesley could reaffirm his identification with the Reformation position:

The faith of the Protestants, in general, embraces only those truths as necessary to salvation, which are clearly revealed in the oracles of God. Whatever is plainly declared in the Old and New Testaments is the object of their faith. They believe neither more nor less than what is manifestly contained in, and approvable by, the Holy Scriptures. The Word of God is 'a lantern to their feet and a light in all their paths.' They dare not, on any pretence, go from it, to the right hand or to the left. The written word is the whole and sole rule of their faith, as well as practice.<sup>35</sup>

It is significant for contemporary Methodism to note that this was not only Wesley's personal position, but that it characterized the Methodists as a whole. In 1742, Wesley wrote in the "Character of a Methodist":

We believe, indeed, that 'all Scripture is given by the inspiration of God'; and herein, we are distinguished from Jews, Turks, and Infidels. We believe the written Word of God to be the only and sufficient rule both of Christian faith and practice; and herein we are fundamentally distinguished from those of the Roman Church.<sup>36</sup>

But if Wesley's position on Scripture was so strong, was there any room in his thinking for other criteria for truth such as reason, experience and tradition? What role, if any, did they play in his thinking? This is a particularly pertinent question to an age that has come to assume the coordinate authority of the so called "Wesleyan quadrilateral." The answer to the question is that for Wesley, all three are quite significant, but only as a secondary means of evaluating truth, never as the primary means. They were viewed always as subordinate criteria, and never as equal authority with that of Scripture. These were always judged by Scripture, never

Scripture by them. Thus, with regard to the truth given by God, Wesley could affirm:

The Scriptures are the touchstone whereby Christians examine all, real or supposed, revelations. In all cases, they appeal 'to the law and testimony' to try every spirit thereby.<sup>37</sup>

As Williams observes about Wesley, "His point is that the final authority in matters of religion is the Bible, and all other writings must be judged in the light of this once—for—all revelation."<sup>38</sup>

Yet, within the parameters of Biblical truth, there were many things that needed clarification and others where the Scripture was not explicit in details. This was the place, i.e., under the umbrella of the Word of God, that Wesley saw the proper role for reason, experience and tradition. Since each of these subordinate criteria plays an important role for Wesley, it is appropriate for this study to include an evaluation of the place of each in his thinking. First, is the position of reason, which Wesley saw as a part of the image of God in man. It was a gift from God, and though it had been adversely affected at the Fall, by the grace of God, it was still operative. Because it was reflective of the image of God, all true religion, Wesley thought, would be reasonable in essence. When the Methodists were accused of renouncing reason, Wesley responded:

It is a fundamental principle with us that to renounce reason is to renounce religion, that religion and reason go hand—in—hand, and that all irrational religion is false religion.<sup>39</sup>

In his sermon "The Case of Reason Impartially Considered," Wesley distinguished himself from both those who undervalue reason and those who overvalue it. To those mystics and others who did not believe in its importance, he pointed out how essential reason was, not only for everyday life, but also to understand the Word of God.

The foundation of true religion stands upon the oracles of God. Now, of what excellent use is reason, if we would either understand ourselves, or explain to others, those living oracles! And how is it possible without it to understand the essential truths contained therein?<sup>40</sup>

On the other hand, to the rationalists who believed that reason was God's highest gift, Wesley pointed out the dangers of overvaluing it. While it is the handmaiden of faith in that it makes possible the reception of revelation, it can never produce the vital content of the Christian faith. The fact that reason did not produce revelation was the reason Wesley did not make it a coordinate authority with scripture. But he was willing for it to do all that was possible:

Let reason do all that reason can: Employ it as far as it will go. But, at the same time, acknowledge it as utterly incapable of giving either faith, or hope, or love; and consequently, of producing either real virtue, or substantial happiness.<sup>41</sup>

Wesley was also vitally concerned that the truth of the Christian faith be actualized in personal experience, and so the place of experience in the

structure of authority needs to be considered. Wesley was convinced that Biblical truth does work in everyday life, and if not, something is wrong. He feared the formalism of the Church of England in which so many had a proper understanding of Christianity, but had no vital experience of it in their lives. He wrote concerning one friend, "The theory of religion he certainly has. May God give him the living experience of it."<sup>42</sup>

Wesley was also willing for experience to drive men back to Scripture to see if they had understood it. This was certainly the situation in his own life when his own experience led him to consider the Scriptural data on the nature of faith and the character of conversion. Further, he thought that experience might clarify and confirm Scripture, but it was never to supercede it.

While Wesley feared any approach to Christianity that overlooked personal appropriation, he was also aware of the danger of making experience normative. Therefore, for him "experience is not the test of truth, but truth the test of experience."<sup>43</sup> Thus he warned fellow Christians against "that daughter of pride, enthusiasm," and the peril of "hastily ascribing things to God" such as dreams, voices, impressions, visions or revelations. His constant counsel was:

Try all things by the written word, and let all bow down before it. You are in danger of enthusiasm every hour, if you depart ever so little from the Scripture: yea, or from the plain, literal meaning of any test, taken with the context.<sup>44</sup>

In an evaluation of the Quakers, Wesley objected to their principle of making the Scriptures "a secondary rule, subordinate to the Spirit." "The Spirit is our principal leader," responded Wesley, "yet He is not our rule at all; the Scriptures are the rule whereby He leads us into all truth."<sup>45</sup> Wesley was convinced that the Spirit of God would never lead in personal experience contrary to the Word of God.

Finally, we must consider the place of tradition in Wesley's criteria for truth. Tradition was important to Wesley for the same reasons that reason and experience were important to him, i.e., because tradition in many ways is primarily a history of the Christian Church's use of reason as well as its experience. For Wesley, tradition was never to be taken lightly, and he had a special appreciation, as we have seen, for the positions of the Early Church. He particularly found them helpful in interpreting Scripture, and he would have been quite unsympathetic to those who did not take seriously the history of Biblical interpretation. To the accusation by William Dodd that he rejected all ancient and modern authorities, Wesley replied:

Sir, who told you so? I never did; it never entered my thoughts. Who it was gave you that rule I know not; but my father gave it me thirty years ago (I mean concerning reverence to the ancient church and our own), and I have endeavored to walk by it to this day. But I try every doctrine by the Bible. This is the word by which we are judged in that day.<sup>46</sup>

So while Wesley was willing that the great expositors of the Church serve as a check on his own interpretation of Scripture, he was not willing

for them to become final authority. This fits with what we have seen earlier regarding his rejection of a position that made "antiquity a coordinate rather than a subordinate rule with Scripture."<sup>47</sup> In his tract "Popery Calmly Considered," he made his position clear relative to the Catholic practice of placing the traditions of the Church on an equal base with the Scripture: "The Scripture therefore, being delivered by divinely—inspired men, is rule sufficient of itself: so it neither needs, nor is capable of, any farther addition."<sup>48</sup> But not only did he insist that the theology of the Church be under the authority of the Bible, but the institution as well. "In all cases the Church is to be judged by the Scripture, not Scripture by the Church."<sup>49</sup>

Since Wesley is so clear in making reason, experience and tradition not coordinate with the authority of Scripture, but subordinate criteria for truth, it may be legitimately asked why did he at times string them together in what would appear to be a listing of equal value? Why does he sometimes imply that he can be convinced of a different view by plain proof from Scripture and reason, or from Scripture, experience and tradition, or from some other combination of the four criteria?<sup>50</sup>

It is evident from the evidence that whatever purpose Wesley had in mind when he listed several of the criteria together, he did not mean to say that they were all of equal authority and that "none could be subsumed under any other." It is obvious that for him, Scripture did not just have "primacy" over the other three. Primacy could easily be interpreted as meaning only the first of several equal authorities consulted. Whereas for Wesley, there is no question that the Scripture is the final authority. The answer to our question must be sought elsewhere.

It would seem that if Wesley saw a legitimate place for reason, experience and tradition, it would not be surprising that he mentioned them repeatedly as significant. The fact that they are sometimes linked with Scripture would suggest Wesley's awareness of two things. First, that Scripture needed to be interpreted, and that there were legitimate, God-given tools for that task. He is not necessarily to be faulted for sometimes speaking in a popular manner and not distinguishing on every occasion the tools from the ultimate authority. He certainly spoke on enough other occasions with the theological precision necessary to articulate his position. Thus, he was desirous to see Scripture confirmed in experience. Further, it was obvious to him that understanding the Scripture was only possible through reason. In addition, he did not see himself isolated from all others who had interpreted the Bible from previous generations. Wesley was willing that all three of these be used to correctly interpret Scripture, and where any one of them came into conflict with Scripture, he was ready to examine the Bible again to see if it had been improperly understood. But when the Scripture was rightly interpreted and still seen in conflict with one of the other criteria it was the Scripture that prevailed as the final word on any subject.

The second reason Wesley may have linked Scripture with other criteria was that he was aware that on many things, the Scripture does not give guidance, and in many other cases, gives only general principles. It was in these situations that Wesley felt it was right to use other criteria for truth. Here it was not a matter of reason, experience or tradition

contradicting Scripture, but complementing it; these were not for rejecting its authority, but for applying it. Where Scripture is not precise, reason, experience and tradition are the next best means for determining truth or discerning its specific application. Colin Williams has captured Wesley's perspective when he writes:

Wesley then must be placed with the Reformers in his principle of *sola scriptura*, in the sense that Scripture is the final authority in matters of faith and practice; not in the sense that tradition and experience have no value, but in the sense that these further sources of insight must be congruous with the revelation recorded in Scripture.<sup>51</sup>

And where these insights were congruous rather than contradictory to Scripture, Wesley was prepared to make use of them. Their authoritative status was, no doubt, more tentative, and they were not to be used in the same absolute sense as principles from scripture. Nevertheless, they were to be used fully within their limitations.

In conclusion, then, it cannot be said that Wesley views Scripture as a co—ordinate authority with tradition, experience or reason. Whatever the source of the expression "Wesleyan quadrilateral," it is clearly a misleading phrase. It tends to imply that Wesley put all four criteria for truth on the same plane of value and authority, and this is certainly not the case. Accordingly, it would not be possible to legitimately claim Wesley as support for this part of theological pluralism. In reality, the opposite would seem to be more true. Not only can he not be referred to as the one who established a pluralism of religious authority, but the evidence strongly suggests that he would resist any theological stance that was contrary to Scripture, or that did not continue the Classical Reformation commitment to *sola scriptura*. If his relationship with the Moravians is any indicator at all, it appears that there could be circumstances in which he would be willing even to separate from those whose theological positions were "flatly contrary to the Word of God."

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#### Notes

1Cf. Samuel Wesley's *The Life of Our Blessed Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. An Heroic Poem, The History of the Old and New Testaments, and in Latin his Dissertations on the Book of Job.*

2Arminian Magazine, XIII (1790), p. 214.

3Martin Schmidt, *John Wesley: A Theological Biography* (Nashville and New York: Abingdon Press, n.d., pp. 76—77).

4For a fuller discussion of Wesley's consideration of the Articles see Allan Coppedge, "John Wesley and the Doctrine of Predestination," University of Cambridge, Ph. D. dissertation, 1976, pp. 4—6. Also cf. Susannah's reply, *Arminian Magazine*, I (1778), p. 37.

5Richard Heitzenrater, "John Wesley and the Oxford Methodists 1725—35," Duke University, Ph. D. dissertation, 1972, p. 503.

- 6John Wesley, *The Letters of the Reverend John Wesley* (London: Epworth Press, 1931), II, p. 70.
- 7Gilbert Burnet, *An Exposition of the Thirty—nine Articles of the Church of England* (Oxford: University Press, 1831; 1st ed. 1699), p. 92.
- 8Ibid., p. 93.
- 9John Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* (London: Epworth Press, 1952), p. 6.
- 10Heitzenrater, *op. cit.*, p. 289.
- 11Robert Tuttle, Jr., *John Wesley: His Life and Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), p. 150.
- 12Letters, I, p. 207—8.
- 13John Wesley, *The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.* (London: Robert Culley, 1909), I, p. 420.
- 14John Wesley, *The Standard Sermons of John Wesley* (London: Epworth Press, 1921), I, p. 245.
- 15Ibid.
- 16Journal, I, pp. 264—268.
- 17Howard Snyder comments, "This meant Scripture and tradition were not an unbroken line, but that the two were sometimes in conflict. And, in case of conflict, tradition must give way." *The Radical Wesley* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter—Varsity Press, 1980), p. 69.
- 18Ibid. p. 419. January 24, 1738. Baker feels Wesley became convinced "uncorrupted antiquity was the co—ordinate with reason in interpreting a supplementing Scripture." Frank Baker, *John Wesley and the Church of England* (London: Epworth Press, 1970), p. 139.
- 19John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), Vol. 25, p. 533. Hereafter referred to as *Works* (Oxford).
- 20Ibid, p. 615. Cf. Snyder's evaluation that Wesley "was always clear as to the priority of Scripture, especially from 1738 on." *Op. Cit.*, p. 71.
- 21Journal I, p. 447. March 23, 1738.
- 22Ibid, p. 454. April 22, 1738. Bohler also brought living witnesses to testify to their conversion in this manner. For Wesley, the testimony from experience served to confirm Scripture, but not supersede it as final authority. Cf. *Journal*, I, pp. 471—72.
- 23Serrmons, I, pp. 32—33.
- 24Journal II, p. 312.
- 25Ibid For more on the impact of stillness see MS: Martha Jones to Charles Wesley, and MS: T. Cowper to Charles Wesley, *Early Methodist Volume*, *Methodist Archives*, The John Rylands Library, Manchester, and *The Arminian Magazine*, IV (1781), p. 153.
- 26Journal II, p. 328—331, 333. 335.

- 27Journal, II, 331. Cf. Wesley's disagreement with a Bristol man January 25, 1740: "I cannot approve of your terms, because they are not scriptural. I find no such phrase as either 'faith of assurance' or 'faith of adherence' in the Bible." *Ibid.*, p. 333.
- 28*Ibid.*, p. 345. Cf. also his exposition of the book of James the first week in June. p. 349.
- 29*Ibid.*, p. 359—60.
- 30*Ibid.*, pp. 354—56, 369, 70.
- 31Letters, I, p. 350. August, 1740.
- 32*Ibid.*, p. 353. Cf. his earlier statement to James Hutton: "I think the Brethren wrong in a few things . . . because I believe the Bible. The chief thing wherein I think them wrong is in mixing human wisdom with divine. " p. 342.
- 33Snyder, *op. cit.*, p. 71.
- 34Colin Williams, *John Wesley 's Theology Today* (Nashville—New York: Abingdon Press, 1960), p. 23.
- 35Works, VII, pp. 198—99.
- 36Works, VIII, p. 340.
- 37Letters, II, p. 117.
- 38Williams, *op. cit.*, p. 25.
- 39Letters, V, p. 164.
- 40Works, IV, p. 354. Cf., also Wesley's "Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion," in which he says that to decry reason is utterly unscriptural . . . Works, VIII, pp. 11—12.
- 41*Ibid.*, p. 360. Cf., Williams: "The importance of reason is not that it provides another source of revelation, but that it is a logical faculty enabling us to order the evidence of revelation." p. 32. And Letters VII, p. 319.
- 42Letters, VII, p. 47.
- 43Williams, *op. cit.*, p. 34.
- 44Works, XI, p. 429.
- 45Letters, II, p. 117.
- 46Letters, III, p. 172.
- 47Journal, I, p. 419.
- 48Works, X, p. 141.
- 49*Ibid.*, p. 142.
- 50The author has been unable to locate in Wesley's writings any single place where all four parts of the "quadrilateral" are mentioned together.
- 51Williams, *OD. cit.*, pp. 25—26.

**"TRUE RELIGION"  
AND THE AFFECTIONS:  
A STUDY OF  
JOHN WESLEY'S ABRIDGEMENT OF JONATHAN EDWARDS'  
TREATISE ON RELIGIOUS AFFECTIONS**

by Gregory S. Clapper

The phrase "religious affections" has a quaint sound today. On the odd occasion that it is encountered, it more than likely conjures images of an over—dressed, nineteenth—century dandy, reading floridly romantic theosophy in an effort to cultivate new pinnacles of exquisite interiority. This was not always the case.

For Jonathan Edwards and John Wesley, the "religious," or "holy," or "gracious" affections were of the essence of what Christianity was about, and neither man was a religious dilettante of the drawing room. At the very beginning of his *Treatise on Religious Affections*, Jonathan Edwards states that "True religion, in great part, consists in Holy Affections."<sup>1</sup> In his later abridgement of this work, Wesley puts his name to the same opinion.<sup>2</sup>

In this paper, I will attempt to make clear what Wesley did, and did not, mean by this. To do this, I will first make a few remarks about Edwards' thought and Wesley's relation to it. Next, I will briefly exposit Wesley's abridgement of Edwards' *Treatise* and compare the themes found there with the theology that Wesley's original works betray. This comparison will show that the *Treatise* was not just tangentially related to Wesley's theological concerns (as some of his published abridgments were), but that it was a theologically—important document which portrayed a crucial component of what Wesley thought Christianity was all about.

### **Edwards and Religious Affections**

Jonathan Edwards was born in East Windsor, Connecticut in the year of John Wesley's birth, 1703 (d. 1758). Educated at Yale, he had a lifelong fascination with both philosophy and natural science as well as theology. Locke and Newton were his intellectual companions every bit as



much as Calvin was. Such interests were reflected in his writings as well as his readings, as seen in his papers titled "Of Insects," "The Mind" and even "Of Being."<sup>3</sup> While his Freedom of the Will<sup>4</sup> is usually taken to be his major contribution to theology, Edwards is more widely known for his sermon "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" which is most notable for its vivid depiction of the end that awaits the reprobate. Unfortunately, neither Freedom of the Will nor his famous sermon gives a true picture of the broad scope and creative nature of his work. Edwards was much more concerned with beauty and love than he was with either humanity's bondage to sin or the nature of hell.<sup>5</sup> It is these wider interests that are most relevant for our concerns.

Roland Delattre in his *Beauty and Sensibility in the Thought of Jonathan Edwards* claims that Edwards understood Divine Being to be most immediately and powerfully present to humanity as beauty.<sup>6</sup> This beauty is known through our sensibility; i.e., it is felt, and not merely intellectually inferred by the understanding. Saving knowledge of God then, is available only in and through the enjoyment of God. The fullness of God is encountered as a living reality "only according to the degree to which men find in [God] their entire joy and happiness, the fulfillment of their aesthetic—affectional being."<sup>7</sup>

This emphasis on the sensible apprehension of God, when linked with Edwards' appreciation for the philosophy of John Locke, has been taken by some of Edwards' interpreters as showing that Edwards' epistemology was nothing more than philosophical empiricism.<sup>8</sup> But Terrence Erdt has recently shown that a "sense of the heart" or a "sweetness" (*suavitas*) can be found in Calvin's thought, so that Edwards' emphasis on feeling and the "heart" has a rootage in the theological tradition which is deeper than is often suspected.<sup>9</sup> But regardless of its historical roots, Edwards' affectional "sense of the heart" was at the center of his psychology, epistemology, ethics and, indeed, his whole theology.

## **Wesley and Edwards**

It was Edwards' theoretical concern with the nature of religious experience and, more importantly, his burning practical desire to have such experience widely propagated, that put Edwards and Wesley on common ground. Wesley's first contact with Edwards' writings came in 1738. Wesley was traveling from London to Oxford when he "read the truly surprising narrative of the conversions lately wrought in and about the town of Northampton, in New England. Surely 'this is the Lord's doing and it is marvelous in our eyes.' "<sup>10</sup>

What he read was Edwards' *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God . . .*<sup>11</sup> which was to be the first of the five works of Edwards that Wesley would abridge and publish.<sup>12</sup> The other four works which Wesley published also had direct bearing on the subjects of Christian experience and evangelism. These were *The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God* (written in 1741, Wesley's abridgement published in 1744), *Some Thoughts Concerning the Present Revival of Religion in New England* (1742,1745); *The Life of David Brainerd, who was Edwards' son—in—law and a missionary to the Indians* (1749,1768); and, of course, the *Treatise on Religious Affections* (1746,1773).

These five works by Edwards represent the largest number of separate works by one author that Wesley was to abridge and publish under his own name. The influence of Edwards on Wesley was so strong that Albert C. Outler has said that Edwards was a "major source" of Wesley's theology, and that, indeed, Wesley's encounter with Edwards' early writings was one of four basic factors that set the frame for Wesley's thought.<sup>13</sup>

This is not to say, though, that there were no important differences between the two, for there were. Wesley was familiar with Edwards' *Freedom of the Will*, but he published no abridgement of it and, instead, attacked the views contained in it in his "Thoughts Upon Necessity."<sup>14</sup> Wesley thought that Edwards' denial of human freedom made nonsense of the moral life. In general, anything that smacked of Calvinistic "irresistible grace" or "unconditional election" Wesley was careful to excise from his abridgements.

Edwards also had his disagreements with Wesley. In fact, the only record of Edwards referring to Wesley was a disparaging remark which he made about Wesley's views on perfection.<sup>15</sup> If one were to give an irenic reading of their differences, one might say that while Wesley and Edwards agreed about the sovereignty of God, Edwards expressed this sovereignty through his Calvinist doctrines of predestination and the bondage of the will, and Wesley expressed the same thing by emphasizing prevenient grace and the perfecting possibilities of the spirit. Both the continuities and the differences between these two men can be seen in microcosm in Wesley's abridgement of Edwards' most widely read book,<sup>16</sup> his *Treatise on Religious Affections*.

### **Wesley's Abridgement of Edwards' Treatise**

The task of discerning a man's views by looking at how he abridged another man's work must be approached with caution. Frank Baker in his article "A Study of John Wesley's Readings" states that one of the ways that Wesley dealt with a "dangerous" book was by publishing an expurgated version of it.<sup>17</sup> This might lead one to believe that Wesley's version of the *Treatise on Religious Affections* was merely the lesser of two evils: since the book was already in print, Wesley may have thought that it would be better if his followers read his version rather than Edwards', if they had to read it at all. If this were the case, the abridgement would be less an endorsement of Edwards' views and more a somewhat hostile toleration of them.

Such doubts about attributing the abridgement's views to the abridger are reinforced when it is noted that books did, in fact, appear in the first edition of Wesley's *Christian Library*<sup>18</sup> which contained views contradicting Wesley's own.<sup>19</sup> But this is less of a problem than it first appears to be, for the publication of the offending passages was more the result of Wesley's hasty abridging than any inconsistency in Wesley's thought. Wesley later corrected the *Christian Library* to remove the contradictions, and the expurgated version was published after his death by Thomas Jackson in 1827.

There is one compelling piece of evidence, though, that allows us to take Wesley's abridgement of Edwards' *Treatise* as representative of Wesley's own views, namely, that Wesley specifically endorsed the book.

Wesley did not always write a preface for the books that he published, but in the case of the Treatise he did. In this preface, he both distances himself from some parts of the original Treatise and recommends the portion he retained. The end of this preface reads "Out of this dangerous heap, wherein much wholesome food is mixed with much deadly poison, I have selected many remarks and admonitions which may be of great use to the children of God. May God write them in the hearts of all that desire to walk as Christ also walked!"<sup>20</sup> Our purpose now is to spell out what Wesley considered poison and what he considered food.

## 1) What Wesley Deleted

Determining what Wesley left out of the Treatise is more difficult than one might first suspect, since it appears that Wesley did not work from the original edition. John E. Smith has determined that Wesley worked from an abridgement made by William Gordon, published in London 1762.<sup>21</sup> Gordon, who is listed as an "independent minister" in the Dictionary of National Biography,<sup>22</sup> reduced the text by more than one—third, omitted many notes and rewrote the text in hundreds of places. This means that in order to be sure that any omission was truly Wesley's omission, all three texts must be compared.

But determining exactly what Wesley left out would be crucially important only if our purpose were to chronicle the differences between Edwards and Wesley on the topic of religious affections. The central intent of this paper, though, is to see what Wesley liked about the Treatise, not what he disliked. So, instead of a lengthy three—way textual comparison, I will just make a few general remarks about Gordon's abridgement and Wesley's deletions.

First of all, while he did remove much of the original text, Gordon's appreciation of Edwards was much less critical than Wesley's. The original Treatise consisted of a preface and three major parts: Part I concerning the nature of the affections; Part II containing 12 signs that cannot be used to judge whether or not particular affections are gracious; and Part III which contains 12 distinguishing signs of "Truly Gracious and Holy Affections." Gordon retains all four basic parts of the work, and in parts II and III both sets of 12 signs are fully represented. His excisions and revisions, which apparently occurred most often when he determined that Edwards was "too refined for common capacities,"<sup>23</sup> do not, in my judgment, pervert the essential thrust of Edwards' work.

Wesley was a much more ruthless editor. Whereas Gordon's abridgement was about two—thirds of the original, Wesley's was one—sixth. He cut not only Edwards' preface, but the second, third and fourth of the twelve signs of Part III in their entirety, as well as considerably reducing the explanations of the remaining signs. One sign (the seventh) was so reduced that Wesley did not even bother to number it and, instead, merely included a brief summary of it in the preceding section. (This omission of the number, though, might be the fault of Wesley's notoriously bad printers. Later in the text, the numbering jumps from IV to VI with V never appearing.)

The omissions that Wesley made usually fall into one of two categories,

both of which are alluded to in Wesley's Preface. These two categories of edited material might be defined as: 1) Calvinistic and 2) overly "subtle."

As he made clear in his Preface, Wesley thought that Edwards' purpose in writing the Treatise was to show that backsliders were never true believers in the first place. In other words, Wesley saw the Treatise as a Calvinistic tract on the perseverance of the saints. Wesley claimed that Edwards' attempt to defend such an indefensible doctrine led him to heap together "so many curious, subtle, metaphysical distinctions, as are sufficient to puzzle the brain, and confound the intellects, of all the plain men and women of the universe; and to make them doubt of, if not wholly deny, all the work which God had wrought in their souls."<sup>24</sup> After this broadside, Wesley goes on to admit, as quoted above, that there is much wholesome food mixed in with the "deadly poison."

As others have pointed out, it seems clear that Wesley misunderstood Edwards' purpose in writing the Treatise.<sup>25</sup> Edwards was trying to show valid signs for distinguishing true from false piety or "religion," not explain away the fact of backsliding. Wesley might justifiably be accused of being somewhat defensive here—seeing Edwards' Calvinism operating where it really was not. True, Edwards does mention the "elect" in a few places, and other Calvinistic tendencies which Wesley altered can surely be seen in the original, but Wesley's Preface mischaracterizes the tenor of the Treatise as polemical when it is in fact constructive. Since Wesley was caught up in heated debate with the Calvinists at the time of the abridgement, his defensiveness can at least be understood, if not justified.<sup>26</sup>

The most substantive passages that Wesley omitted from the Treatise, however, are not the overtly Calvinistic ones, but the overly "subtle" ones which "puzzle" and "confound" plain—thinking humanity. Wesley shared Edwards' interest in science and philosophy, but edification was his ultimate criterion when evaluating the written word. Edwards was a brilliant speculative thinker who incorporated many of his philosophical theories into his theological works. Because of this, Wesley encountered much that could be dispensed with. This can be seen especially in two of the three signs that Wesley omitted.

The second of Edwards' twelve signs states that the "first objective ground of gracious affections is the transcendently excellent and amiable nature of divine things";<sup>27</sup> the third sign says that holy affections are founded on the "loveliness of the moral excellency of divine things."<sup>28</sup> In these two signs, we can see the metaphysics of "beauty" and "excellence" which Delattre has declared to be the lynch—pin of Edwards' speculations.<sup>29</sup> Wesley was probably content with Edwards' point (made in many other places) that divine things are the object of gracious affections, and that extended discussions of the "loveliness" or "moral excellency" of these divine things were therefore dispensable.

Conjecture about why Wesley deleted the fourth sign is more difficult, for it asserts something which Wesley would not want to deny—the intellectual component in the affections ("Gracious affections do arise from the mind's being enlightened, rightly and spiritually to understand or apprehend divine things."<sup>30</sup>) Certainly, Wesley was never tempted, as Luther was, to "tear out the eyes of reason" in order to promote faith. One can only guess that Wesley considered this sign to go too far in the other

direction, i.e. that it could be taken as a kind of rationalism. In this condensed volume, Wesley may have thought that there was not enough space for a sign that might give some support to those who advocated a mere 'head' religion which bypassed the heart.

## 2) What Wesley Retained

At the beginning of Part I, Edwards quotes the text of 1 Peter 1:8: "Whom having not seen ye love: In whom, though now you see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory." In this text, Edwards sees the two archetypal exercises of true religion: Love to Christ and Joy in Christ. Based on this, he then formulates the proposition that he will defend throughout the entire book, that "True Religion, in great part, consists in Holy Affections."<sup>31</sup> His first step in this process is to define what affections are.

According to Edwards, the "affections of the mind" are "the more vigorous and sensible exercises of the will."<sup>32</sup> In drawing this out, Edwards goes on to say that God has imbued the soul with two faculties: the understanding which is capable of perception and speculation, and the inclination or will which either is pleased or displeased, approving or rejecting the things perceived. The mind with regard to the exercises of the will is called the heart. The crucial point here is that the affections are not exercised apart from the understanding.

Edwards makes this anthropology even more explicit when he says that it is the mind and not the body that is the proper seat of the affections. Herein lies the difference between the affections and passions as well. Passions are more sudden, have a more violent effect on the "animal spirits," and in them "the mind is less in its own command."<sup>33</sup>

The next section of Part I consists of several points which attempt to show that a great part of true religion lies in the affections. These range from the more speculative arguments ("The religion of heaven consists much in affection"<sup>34</sup>) to arguments based on observations of human behavior ("affections are the springs of men's actions"<sup>35</sup> which, of course, are necessary for religion) to arguments based strictly on Scripture ("Holy Scripture places religion in the affections"<sup>36</sup>; "The Scriptures place the sin of the heart much in hardness of heart"<sup>37</sup>). From these and other arguments Edwards draws these inferences:

- 1) That we cannot discard all religious affections.<sup>38</sup>
- 2) That "such means are to be desired, as have a tendency to move the affections."<sup>39</sup>
- 3) That "if true religion lies much in the affections, what cause have we to be ashamed, that we are no more affected with the great things of religion!"<sup>40</sup> In other words, we are to be held accountable for having certain affectional capacities.

This leads to Part II.

Having established the connections between true religion and the affections in Part I, Edwards now moves on to the theme that occupies the largest part of the book: distinguishing the holy and gracious affections from those that are not. Part II consists of 12 points which deal with 12 different ways of analyzing affections. Edwards asserts that these 12

"signs" cannot give certain knowledge as to whether or not religious affections are "truly gracious."

One can imagine the sobering effect that these negative points must have had on many of the "spirit—filled Christians" of his day. Among the most interesting, are points number 1 (that religious affections are raised very high<sup>41</sup>); 2 (that they have great effects on the body<sup>42</sup>); 4 (that the persons did not make the affections themselves<sup>43</sup>); and 5 (that they come with texts of Scripture.<sup>44</sup>) Point number 3 can serve as a warning to all garrulous theologians of any age (that it is no sign to be fluent, fervent and abundant in talking of the things of religion<sup>45</sup>).

The final four signs, when seen together, show that, for Edwards, we can never know how another person's soul is seen by the eyes of God by observing their outward behavior. People can: spend much time in Religion and Worship<sup>46</sup>; praise God with their mouths<sup>47</sup>; be confident that their experience is divine<sup>48</sup>; or convince other people of their Godliness<sup>49</sup> without being assured that their affections are gracious. This makes an important point about the entire book. It is to be an aid for one's own spiritual quest, not a guidebook for the judgment of others. Part III of the Treatise is perhaps the most important section, for this is where Edwards explains what are valid signs of gracious and holy affections. The first sign is that gracious affections arise from "spiritual, divine and supernatural" influences on the heart.<sup>50</sup> In a sense, this begs the question and is of no practical help, but it does make clear that his epistemology is a kind of spiritual empiricism. The Spirit of God gives the believer a new "spiritual sense"<sup>51</sup> through which one has access to the divine things.

The second sign in Wesley's abridgement (Edwards' fifth sign) states that gracious affections are accompanied by a conviction of the reality and certainty of divine things. This conviction is not some sort of vague mysticism, or a certainty about the existence of "divine things" in general a la Schleiermacher. It is a "conviction of the truth of the great things of the Gospel."<sup>52</sup> The title of the Treatise may sound as if the book is about generic religious experience, but, in reality, the positivity of the Christian religion is constantly and unashamedly asserted.

The sixth sign states that gracious affections are attended with "evangelical humiliation," i.e. a conviction of one's own "utter insufficiency, despicableness and odiousness, with an answerable frame of heart, arising from a discovery of God's holiness."<sup>53</sup> On this point, it is flatly put that "They that are destitute of this, have not true religion whatever profession they may make."<sup>54</sup> For Edwards (and Wesley), humility is pervasive, it is a quality of all the other affections, and therein lies an important safeguard against "enthusiasm."

The material contained in the seventh sign in the original is treated in just a few unnumbered paragraphs by Wesley. This is perhaps because this sign simply states that gracious affections are attended with a change in the nature of the affected person, which is really already implied in several of the other signs (e.g. numbers 6, 8, 9, 11, 12 in the original).

The eighth and ninth signs show that while false affections have a tendency to harden the heart, truly gracious affections promote the spirit that appeared in Christ (#8), a tenderness of spirit (#9). In these sections,

Edwards lays special emphasis on love, meekness, quietness, forgiveness and mercy. From the very beginning, of course, Edwards has said that love is the first and chief of the affections—the "fountain" of all gracious affection<sup>55</sup>—but it is not until this eighth sign that we are given an overall view of what specific additional affections are, in fact, "religious."

The tenth sign is that gracious affections have beautiful symmetry and proportion. While there are echoes here of Edwards' philosophical contention that we know God through beauty, there is also something more important being stressed. In saying, for example, that love of God must be yoked with love of man, or that having hope does not mean jettisoning holy fear, Edwards is laying out a theological roadmap (or we might say a "grammar") of the affections. This grammar of the affections can be seen as the emotional manifestation of Christian doctrines. In one sense, the laying bare of this grammar is the main theological task of the entire Treatise.

The eleventh sign states that gracious affections increase the longing for spiritual attainments while the false affections tend to make one rest satisfied. This can be seen as a corrective against those who might think that Edwards is about a kind of mysticism which cultivates "religious experiences" for their own sake. This theme reaches its culmination in the twelfth and final sign where the emphasis is shifted completely away from inner experience to the necessary fruits of the affections: works of love.

This last sign, the explanation of which is by far the longest of the twelve in both the original and in Wesley's abridgement, contains many arguments for Christian practice as the chief of all the evidences of a "saving sincerity" in religion. So much is practice emphasized here that Edwards feels compelled to answer two objections that might arise regarding the importance of the works: the objection that Christian experience is to be the central sign of grace, and that emphasizing works could lead to a works—righteousness. Edwards smoothly answers these objections by showing that "experience" and "practice" cannot be separated, and that making a "righteousness" of experience is just as heretical as a works righteousness.<sup>56</sup>

### **The Themes of the Treatise in Wesley 's Original Works**

We can see from the above exposition of Wesley's abridgement of Edwards' Treatise that Wesley endorsed the view that true religion consists, in great part, of gracious affections. These gracious affections find their apex in love and joy, but also consist of meekness and forgiveness, among others, all of which are marked by humility. The outward expression of these affections in dramatic bodily demonstrations is not a sign of their holiness, but they must issue in fruits—works—in order to be considered gracious.

It is not hard to find equivalent statements in Wesley's own writings. In commenting on Romans 14:17 ("For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost"), Wesley says:

For the kingdom of God—That is, true religion, does not consist in external observances. But in righteousness—the image of God stamped on the heart; the love of God and man,

accompanied with the peace that passeth all understanding, and joy in the Holy Ghost.<sup>57</sup>

On Galatians 5:22 ("But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace . . ."), he says that—"love is the root of the rest"<sup>58</sup> (cf. Edwards' statement that love is the "fountain" of the other affections). In the following verse, commenting on meekness, there is an unmistakable parallel with the "symmetry and proportion" of Edwards' tenth sign. Here Wesley says that meekness means "Holding all the affections and passions in even balance."<sup>59</sup>

Similarly, commenting on 1 John 4:19 ("We love him, because he first loved us"), Wesley says: "This is the sum of all religion, the genuine model of Christianity. None can say more: why should anyone say less, or less intelligibly?"<sup>60</sup>

In his sermons, the emphasis on the affective life is no less evident. For example, in "Salvation by Faith," saving faith is distinguished from the faith of a devil "by this: it is not a speculative, rational thing, a cold, lifeless assent, a train of ideas in the head; but also a disposition of the heart."<sup>61</sup> In "The Circumcision of the Heart" he begins the final section by saying "Here, then, is the sum of the perfect law; this is the true circumcision of the heart. Let the spirit return to God that gave it, with the whole train of its affections."<sup>62</sup> Again, the sixth sermon in the "Sermon on the Mount" series contains the following:

In praying that God, or His name, may be hallowed or glorified, we pray that He may be known, such as He is, by all that are capable thereof, by all intelligent beings, and with affections suitable to that knowledge; that He may be duly honored, and feared, and loved, by all in heaven above and in the earth beneath; by all angels and men, whom for that end He has made capable of knowing and loving Him to eternity.<sup>63</sup>

In his sermon "The Witness of the Spirit," Wesley tries to show how the testimony of God's Spirit may be distinguished from the "presumption of a natural mind." Wesley, again, sounds like Edwards here by 1) relying on Scripture as a guide; 2) emphasizing joy, but a joy that is humble; and 3) maintaining the importance of works as a sign of the presence of grace, especially the "keeping of the Commandments."<sup>64</sup>

All of the works of Wesley quoted above were written before he published his abridgement of Edwards' Treatise, so we cannot say that this particular work was germinal for Wesley's own thought on this topic. But I think it is fair to say that in the Treatise, Wesley saw a useful summary of insights into the nature of Christian experience which clearly reflected his own views on the matter. He could, in clear conscience, recommend this work as if it were his own to "all that desire to walk as Christ also walked."

### **True Religion and the Affections**

Wesley recognized that by emphasizing the importance of the affections for "true religion," he would be parodied and ridiculed. Alluding to his sermon text of Acts 26:24 ("And Festus said with a loud voice, 'Paul, thou art beside thyself'"), Wesley says in "The Nature of Enthusiasm":



And so say all the world, the men who know not God, of all that are of Paul's religion: of every one who is so a follower of him, as he was of Christ. It is true, there is a sort of religion, nay, and it is called Christianity, too, which may be practised without any such imputation, which is generally allowed to be consistent with common sense—that is, a religion of form, a round of outward duties, performed in a decent, regular manner. You may add orthodoxy thereto, a system of right opinions, yea, and some quantity of heathen morality; and yet not many will pronounce, that 'much religion hath made you mad.' But if you aim at the religion of the heart, if you talk of 'righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost,' then it will not be long before your sentence is passed, "Thou art beside thyself."<sup>65</sup>

But in his abridgement of the Treatise, as well as his original work, Wesley showed that one can talk about the inner life without losing one's reason, for his discourse is always rational in form, even when its subject matter is affectional. Similarly, he showed that focusing on the affections does not entail making them the primary source of revelation, as witnessed to by his constant use of the external checks of the Bible and tradition. The other great danger of linking true religion with the affections—an obsession with one's own inner experience—is also clearly excluded from Wesley's conception by his constant emphasis on the affections issuing in external behavioral "fruits," i.e. making Christian love and joy manifest in the world through one's actions.

Certainly, true religion for Wesley does not start with the heart, its beginning is the Gospel. Neither is the end of true religion in the heart, for its *telos* in the human life is in the works of love, the "fruit" of the heart. But until the heart is addressed, the Gospel will fall on deaf ears and the works will be empty moralism.

The affections for Wesley were more than a source of error and confusion, things which only confound our "higher" faculties. They were not seen as dispensable luxuries which may or may not be indulged in (according to one's temperament after all of the hard thinking is done. Wesley's message, like Edwards', was simply that if the seeker after Truth was not humbly filled with love and joy about what God had done for him or her, then the Gospel message had not really been heard and Christianity had not yet taken root in that person's life. Wesley knew that such a position made him somewhat vulnerable to the charge of "enthusiasm." But his reading of the Gospel convinced him that this was a risk that all Christians had to run.

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#### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Jonathan Edwards: Works (New Haven, 1959, Vol. 2, p. 95). First published in Boston in 1746, all quotes will be from Volume 2 of the Yale University Press edition of his Works, John E. Smith, editor, Perry Miller general editor (New Haven, 1959). Hereafter, RA.

- 2Christian Library, (1827), Vol. 30, p. 310. Wesley's abridgement first appeared in his collected Works (Volume 23; pp. 177—279) 1773, reprinted in 1801, and later appeared in the second edition of his Christian Library (Volume 30: pp. 307—376) 1827. See Frank Baker, ed., *A Union Catalog of the Publications of John and Charles Wesley* (Durham: Duke University, 1966) entry number 294 for the complete publication history. All references in this paper are to the Christian Library edition. Hereafter, RA (W).
- 3Cf. *Scientific and Philosophical Writings*, Volume 6 of his Works (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980).
- 4Works, Volume 1 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957).
- 5Actually, there are less than a dozen imprecatory sermons written by Edwards to be found among the more than a thousand which survive in manuscript form. See Sydney E. Ahlstrom: *A Religious History of the American People*. (Garden City, New York: Image Books, 1975) p. 370.
- 6(New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968) p. 50. Delattre's analysis is based on all of Edward's works, but he draws most heavily on the RA *The Nature of True Virtue* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1960) and the *Miscellanies* (forthcoming in the Yale Works series.)
- 7Ibid., p. 49.
- 8The most influential exponent of this view was Perry Miller, especially in his *Jonathan Edwards* (New York: Wm. Stoane Associates, 1949).
- 9See his *Jonathan Edwards: Art and the Sense of Heart* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980) especially chapter 1 "The Calvinist Psychology of the Heart."
- 10Nehemiah Curnock, ed., *The Journal of Rev. John Wesley* (London: Epworth Press, 1960) Volume II, pp. 83—84. Hereafter, *Journal*.
- 11The full title continues: in the *Conversion of Many Hundred Souls in Northampton and the Neighboring Towns and Villages of New Hampshire in New England*, first written in 1736, Wesley's abridgement published in 1744.
- 12For more detailed commentary on the abridgements, as well as an enlightening comparison of Wesley and Edwards, see Charles Rogers' "John Wesley and Jonathan Edwards" in *The Duke Divinity School Review*, (Volume 31, Number 1, Winter, 1966, pp. 20—38).
- 13In his *John Wesley*, in the *Library of Protestant Thought* series (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964) p. 16. The other three factors, according to Outler, were his Aldersgate conversion, his disenchantment with Moravianism and his vital reappropriation of his Anglican heritage.
- 14Thomas Jackson, ed., *The Works of John Wesley* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, reprinted, 1979) Volume X, pp. 457—474.
- 15The Works of President Edwards, IV, p. 118, quoted in Rogers "John Wesley and Jonathan Edwards," p. 36.
- 16RA, Smith's introduction, p. 78.
- 17In *London Quarterly and Holborn Review*, 1943, p. 240.

- 18See Frank Baker's Union Catalog (cited above) for the publication history of the Christian Library (entry number 131).
- 19See T.W. Herbert's *John Wesley as Editor and Author* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1940) pp. 26—27.
- 20RA (W), p. 308.
- 21RA, p. 79. Smith says that the chances of Wesley and Gordon independently making so many of the same omissions and substitutions is very small. Dr. Frank Baker's opinion, stated to me in a personal correspondence, concurs with Smith's.
- 22Ed. by Leslie Stephen and Sidney Lee (New York: Macmillan and Co., 1890) Volume XXII, p. 235.
- 23Gordon's abridgement, p. 78.
- 24RA (W), p. 308.
- 25See Smith's introduction in RA, p. 80, and Rogers' "John Wesley and Jonathan Edwards," p. 30.
- 26John Allan Knight's "Aspects of Wesley's Theology After 1770" in *Methodist History* (6, 3, April, 1968) pp. 33—42.
- 27RA, p. 240.
- 28RA, p. 253.
- 29See *Beauty and Sensibility in the Thought of Jonathan Edwards*, (cited above) for in—depth discussions of primary and secondary beauty, the equivalence of beauty and excellence; and beauty as the "cordial content of being to being—in—general."
- 30RA, p. 266.
- 31RA (W), p. 310.
- 32Ibid., p. 311.
- 33Ibid, p. 312.
- 34Ibid. p. 316.
- 35Ibid, p. 313.
- 36Ibid, p. 313.
- 37Ibid, p. 316.
- 38Ibid, p. 317.
- 39Ibid, p. 318.
- 40Ibid, p. 318.
- 41Ibid, p. 320.
- 42Ibid, p. 321.
- 43Ibid., p. 324—325.
- 44Ibid, p. 327.
- 45Ibid, p. 324.

- 46Ibid, p. 333.
- 47Ibid, p. 334.
- 48Ibid, p. 335.
- 49Ibid, p. 342.
- 50Ibid, p. 343.
- 51Ibid., p. 346.
- 52Ibid.
- 53Ibid, p. 349. To avoid confusion, I will refer to the signs by Edwards' enumeration.
- 54Ibid, p. 349.
- 55Ibid, p. 316, for example.
- 56See pp. 372—376, *ibid.*
- 57Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament (London: Epworth Press, 1976) p. 575.
- 58Ibid, p. 697.
- 59Ibid, p. 697.
- 60Ibid, p. 915.
- 61Sugden, ed., *Wesley's Standard Sermons* (London: Epworth Press, 1955) Volume 1, p. 40.
- 62Ibid, p. 279.
- 63Ibid, p. 436.
- 64Wesley's sermon "The Witness of the Spirit," second part, in *ibid.*, pp: 211—218. Wesley was, like Edwards, always quick to emphasize the gracious nature of these affections. He thought any emphasis on the affections which was purely naturalistic to be heretical. For example, regarding Hutcheson's feeling—based ethics, he said that Hutcheson was a "beautiful writer; but his scheme cannot stand, unless the Bible falls." (Journal Curnock, ed., Volume V, p. 492).
- 65Wesley's *Standard Sermons*, Volume II, pp. 86—87.

## BOOK REVIEWS

W. T. Purkiser. *Exploring Christian Holiness: Volume 1, The Biblical Foundations*. Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1983. 253 pp. Reviewed by Wayne McCown, Dean and Professor of Biblical Studies, Western Evangelical Seminary, Portland, Oregon.

This is the first volume to be published in an important new trilogy. Purkiser states: "It is a survey of the biblical foundations of the doctrine, experience, and life of holiness" (p. 9). Volume 2, by Paul Bassett and William Greathouse, will deal with the historical development of the doctrine in the Christian church. In Volume 3, Richard Taylor will represent its theological formulation as understood by contemporary exponents. In the Foreword, the publishers state: "These resultant volumes are neither a polemic nor a studied attempt to establish consensus. Rather they simply present an in—depth study of the three areas which form the foundation of holiness theology—Scripture, history, and doctrine" (pp. 7—8).

The plan for Volume 1 is straightforward and simple. First, there is an introductory chapter, defining holiness. Then, the survey proceeds in canonical order (excepting Job), from Genesis to Revelation. Appended are a bibliography (of books, commentaries, and articles) and three indices (subject, author, and Scripture references).

Essentially, what we have in this volume is a commentary on the holiness texts of Scripture. (Its analog in pentecostal circles is the *Laymen 's Commentary on the Holy Spirit*, edited by John Rea. Plainfield, New Jersey: Logos International, 1972). Generally, the treatment is quite succinct, even pithy. There is a preponderance of quotes—many of them choice quotes from non—holiness commentators.

The really important contribution and value of this volume is contained in these materials. Otherwise, it is quite disappointing. We note in this review only the major weaknesses.

1. Nowhere does the author describe his plan for text selection (a rather important matter, in a book of this design). Moreover, the treatment is uneven and disproportionate. The approach is hop—scotch through the Scriptures (OT—40 pp.; NT—150+ pp.). Purkiser sometimes surveys a large area with amazing dispatch; at other times, he fidgets about on a single point. For example, the Book of Leviticus is covered in a scant two pages (similarly Joshua and Judges together), while "Hebrews 12:10,

14—17" gets 4 pages—and no mention is even made of Hebrews 12:1—2. Even more disproportionate is the treatment of "The Baptism with the Spirit and Sanctification," which gets 9 pages—and thereby hangs another tale.

2. The bibliography has only 22 articles: 11 are by holiness authors, including eight published in the Wesleyan Theological Journal. Of the articles by holiness authors, 10 are cited in the discussion on Acts—and nowhere else. (One quote from the Preacher's Magazine is located elsewhere). This phenomenon obviously reflects Dr. Purkiser's interest in certain (key) issues in interpreting Acts. However, it reflects poorly on his reading and research in other areas. Especially in light of the approach taken, it is surprising and regrettable that use was not made of the following essays:

Dayton, Wilbur T. "Holiness Truth in the Roman Epistle," *Further Insights into Holiness* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press 1963).

Greenlee, J. Harold. "The Greek New Testament and the Message of Holiness," *Ibid.*

Kinlaw, Dennis F. "Old Testament Roots of the Holiness Message," *Ibid.*

Dayton, Wilbur T. "Entire Sanctification as Taught in the Book of Romans," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* (1966).

Turner, George A. "'Shall We Continue in Sin?' An Exposition of Romans Six," *Asbury Seminarian* (1974).

Thompson, David. "Old Testament Bases of the Wesleyan Message," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* (1975).

McGown, Wayne. "Sanctification in the Thessalonian Epistles," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* (1977).

McCown, Wayne. "Holiness in Hebrews," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* (1981).

Maddox, Randy. "The Use of the Aorist Tense in Holiness Exegesis," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* (1981).

McCant, Jerry. "The Wesleyan Interpretation of Romans 5—8," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* (1981).

Also ignored is the following collection of nine essays by Wesleyan scholars: *An Inquiry into Soteriology from a Biblical Theological Perspective*, edited by John E. Hartley and R. Larry Shelton, Anderson, Indiana: Warner Press, Inc. 1981.

Dr. Purkiser has been content to use standard commentaries and secondary sources. No periodical literature whatsoever is cited/used, for example, in the chapters on Romans and Hebrews. As a consequence, the treatment frequently tends to be mediocre, only moderately informed, and somewhat dated.

3. This "survey" is just a collection of bits and pieces, organized under certain subtitles and Scripture references. It contains scholarly exegeses and quotes (for the most part), homiletical outlines and ideas (sprinkled here and there), lots of biblical citations (variously reproduced), and critical

discussions on certain matters (often extraneous to the subject), etc. But no attempt is made whatsoever to develop a biblical theology of holiness. There is not even a summary (synthetic/concluding) chapter.

There are building blocks here, but no "foundations." Hopefully, the succeeding volumes in this set will supply what is yet lacking.

Leon O. Hynson and Lane A. Scott, eds. *Christian Ethics: An Inquiry into Christian Ethics from a Biblical Theological Perspective* (Wesleyan Theological Perspectives, Volume 3), (Anderson, IN: Warner Press, Inc., 1983). Reviewed by Albert L. Truesdale, Associate Professor of Philosophy of Religion and Christian Ethics, Nazarene Theological Seminary, Kansas City, Missouri.

*An Inquiry Into Christian Ethics from a Biblical Theological Perspective* is the third in a series of five volumes to be published by Warner Press. Each volume will deal with a major aspect of Christian thought from the perspective of Wesleyan theology.

The volume on Christian ethics is a welcome contribution to an area of applied Christian theology in which there has been scant contribution from members of the Holiness tradition. Given this tradition's emphasis on the conduct of the Christian life the absence, up till now, of anything approaching a systematic treatment of Christian ethics is surprising. The editors of this volume explain this omission by saying that in the Holiness tradition, we have placed our emphasis on doing the Christian faith, but have failed to provide "a reasoned explanation of the moral life." Too often, they say, our moral criteria have been so "esoteric that no one else comprehends them" (p. 3). They could have added, "and neither do we." While Methodist ethicists such as L. Harold DeWolf, Georgia Harkness, and E. Clinton Gardner have made significant contributions to Christian ethics, their colleagues in the Holiness wing of the Methodist tradition have not.

Consequently, the present volume breaks new ground for the Holiness tradition. While *An Inquiry* will not serve as a suitable college or seminary text (for reasons to be mentioned later) it is a significant contribution by Wesleyan scholars to a discussion of the Biblical foundations of Christian ethics, to Wesley's understanding of Christian ethics, and to an application of Christian ethics to selected contemporary moral issues.

The book proceeds from a clear and defensible understanding of Christian ethics. It works from a commitment to the Scriptures as the norm of Christian ethics without committing the error of biblicism. The editors make an appropriate distinction between Biblical and Christian ethics. They recognize that the task of Christian ethics is to interpret or understand the meaning of the Word of God for all of life. The book's rationale could have been strengthened by a clearer statement of its implied Christocentrism and evangelical character. An excellent example of such a statement may be found in Helmut Thielicke's first volume of *Theological Ethics*.

Readers will find especially helpful the chapters by Victor P. Hamilton,

Jerry Mercer, Lane Scott, Howard Snyder and Leon Hynson. Through his review of Wesley's ethics, Mercer clearly demonstrates the evangelical character of Wesley's ethics and its power to transform society without an attending architectonic ethical program. Mercer effectively avoids wooden adherence to Wesley for our day by identifying the lasting principles of Wesley's ethics. This is especially helpful with regard to Wesley's view of the state. Lane Scott presents an especially sensitive and creative approach to divorce and remarriage. While he allows the Bible and church history to speak, he applies neither in a wooden or casual manner. Scott identifies a New Testament theology of sex and marriage (the concept of marriage is a fully personal community between a man and a woman) in light of which the specific passages on divorce and remarriage must be understood. He concludes that acts other than infidelity and desertion can destroy a marriage and allow for divorce. He then develops clear conditions under which marriage is permissible. Howard Snyder's chapter is perhaps the most creative of the book. By carefully investigating the New Testament's use of *oikonomia*, he develops a highly—integrated Christian ethic of ecology and economics. "Economics, ecology and spiritual reality are not three isolated spheres. They are three ways of viewing the one sphere that is our human environment, our *oikos* or house" (p. 214). Leon Hynson's chapter is a carefully developed and balanced treatment of the New Testament's estimate of the state.

The book omits any discussion of bioethics, sociobiology, the threat and morality of nuclear war, racism and sexism, crime and punishment, the challenge of secular humanism to the Christian ethic, world hunger, and first world/third world conflicts. The range of the "inquiry" could have been greatly increased had the chapters been more tightly conceived, rather than, for example, giving an entire chapter to abortion or homosexuality. It is not clear why a chapter that reviews Wesley's ethics should be followed by one on "Christian Perfection as Love of God" when the substance of the latter is already present' in the former. This seems to be a less than judicious use of space.

At points in the review copy, the book—making is poor. Hynson's chapter breaks off at page 282 and picks us again on page 287. The intervening pages reappear after page 290. The last chapter also offers a surprise: Hynson's end notes are completed in the middle of Duane Thompson's chapter on a Christian view of the arts.

Nevertheless, the book's writers and publisher are to be complimented for giving attention to a long—standing need in the Holiness tradition.

Charles Edwin Jones. *A Guide to the Study of the Pentecostal Movement*, 2 Volumes. Metuchen, New Jersey: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1983. 1199 pp. Reviewed by Harold E. Raser, Assistant Professor of the History of Christianity, Nazarene Theological Seminary, Kansas City, Missouri.

Only a confirmed "bibliophile" (?) could relish the kind of work that goes into a product like *A Guide to the Study of the Pentecostal Movement*,



and Charles Jones clearly relishes what he does. Yet we can all relish the product, for by painstakingly compiling and organizing mountains of material on modern Pentecostalism, Jones has provided an invaluable tool for the rest of us who would wish to learn more about this "third force in Christendom." The sheer volume of the entries is staggering—and these relate only to "traditional Pentecostalism," omitting the more recent "charismatic movement"—running to over 1,000 pages in two volumes. W. J. Hollenweger's contention that although Pentecostalism has often been branded a religion of the poor, it is not a "poor religion" tends to be borne out by Jones' testimony to the literary output by and about Pentecostals.

As a companion set to Jones' earlier *A Guide to the Study of the Holiness Movement*, this new work follows the logic of those scholars who see a close historical and doctrinal relationship between holiness and pentecostal forms of Christianity. In fact, its organizing principle is the assumption that Pentecostal groups may best be compared and distinguished by reference to the degree of their fidelity to or departure from the Wesleyan—Arminian—Holiness tradition's understanding of sanctification. So, we have one set of bibliographic entries under the "Wesleyan—Arminian Tradition" (sanctification is a second distinct work while the baptism with the Holy Spirit is a third, separate work accompanied by tongues or else an aspect of sanctification) and a second set under "Finished Work of Calvary" bodies (two works, but sanctification is fully accomplished in justification, the second work being the baptism with the Holy Spirit accompanied by tongues). The historical sketches of the various groups included in the Guide also assume—and provide much evidence for—a kind of evolution from Wesleyan—Arminian—Holiness beginnings.

Using a four—part scheme, Jones brings admirable order to the mass of material cited in the two volumes. Part I lists the literature of the movement alphabetically by author without regard for denominational affiliation or doctrinal distinctives. Part II lists the literature according to doctrinal traditions broken down into individual denominations and organizations, some worldwide in scope and some local or regional and having only a few hundred members. Included is a brief historical sketch of each of these groups. Here the literature is also arranged according to type—e.g. doctrinal and controversial works, catechisms and creeds, periodicals, etc. Part III covers pentecostal schools, giving data on their founding, location, and affiliation and listing any relevant bibliographical entries. Part IV gives biographical information about persons who are leaders in Pentecostalism or who have written about it. Also contained in Volume II is an index which helps one find topics and persons through various approaches not incorporated into the general plan of organization.

A great strength of the Guide is that it casts the net widely and pulls in most everything and anything relating in any way at all to Pentecostalism (inclusion in the Guide indicates only a "relationship at some point to the Pentecostal movement.") This promises to be immensely helpful to those who desire to study the movement in depth and it helps to illuminate the breadth of "pentecostal" concerns throughout recent Christianity. Its world concern is a plus, too; this is not just a guide for studying American Pentecostalism. However, this wide scope along with the rather broad

definition of "Pentecostalism" employed throughout ("stress on tongues-speech and physical healing") can also be seen as a weakness in that it obscures significant distinctions among groups and could lead the less careful student to some odd conclusions (e.g. some will be surprised to find the British Calvary Holiness Church, now part of the Church of the Nazarene, listed here). Yet the biggest drawback may be the cost, a horrendous \$77.50 for the two volumes. Libraries will probably gulp and buy them, but the individual researcher is likely to be priced out of the market. Still, if affordable, the work is packed with helpful "handles" for the diligent student, and even the not—so—diligent will likely find such things as the sketches of over 400 organizations and 168 schools very helpful.