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# **THE QUEST FOR THE HOLY: "The Darkness of God"**

"Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die."

by  
Frank G. Carver

"When the people saw the thunder and the lightning and heard the trumpet and saw the mountain in smoke, they trembled with fear. They stayed at a distance and said to Moses, "Moses said to the people, " 'Do not be afraid, God has come to test you, so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning.' "The people remained at a distance, while Moses approached the thick darkness where God was." Exodus 20:18-21 (NIV)

"I said to my soul, be still and let the dark come upon you  
Which shall be the darkness of God." T.S. Eliot

## **Introduction**

This presentation comes out of a study(1) concerned with the spiritual heart of my own heritage, the Wesleyan heritage, but more particularly, the "holiness" heritage as it has taken shape in North America and come to distinctive expression in the Church of the Nazarene. As I have lived and worked in the midst of the behaviors of holiness institutions and their people, I have at times agonizingly asked, What is it really, that we are all about?

So I have a concern. Inspired in the labors of the classroom by Exodus 20:8-21, I set out on a personal quest for the holy, or a quest for the bottom line of my own heritage as a professed "holiness" person. I was convinced that the four verses of Exodus 20:18-21, which follow the giving of the Ten Commandments in the midst of the theophany at Sinai, when examined in the literary-theological context of the Exodus narrative, would afford a credible clue to the core meaning of the "holy" as it relates to my heritage. My quest is for the essence of a "holiness people." What does it mean for

us to hunger for the holy, we who make Scriptural holiness our ecclesiastical distinctive?

In this quest I have acquired a fascination, a fascination for "the darkness of God." I have been profoundly moved by the use of the metaphor of darkness for the presence of God in the Old Testament. At the same time I discovered that classic and contemporary writers on spirituality use the darkness theme in provocatively similar ways.(2) The early fathers of the church testified to their repeated experience of God as darkness. God came to them from out of the darkness.(3) Reflecting on this experience of the ancient in Fathers Ladislaus Boros wrote in the 70s that

God comes towards me from out of the darkness. To affirm this darkness, to submit oneself to it, can heal my life from within, give it strength and courage.(4)

This darkness language, frequent in Catholic spiritual writers from Saint John of the Cross(5) to Thomas Merton and Henri Nouwen(6) and found as well in Protestant writers,(7) I find promising as a kind of catalytic bridge for reflection on the Biblical darkness of God in relation to our faith as a contemporary holiness people.

In Exodus 20:18-21 Moses' distinctiveness from the rest of the Israelites at Sinai was that he "approached the thick darkness where God was." In Exodus 20:21 this Hebrew word for darkness, *arafel*, in eight of its fifteen Old Testament occurrences refers to the presence of the Holy God. Psalm 97:2 is representative:

Clouds and thick darkness surround him; righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne. (8)

Designated by "thick darkness," writes Samuel Terrien, is

a total darkness which is a symbol both of the divine presence to and the divine hiddenness. It was a symbol of divine power in both its danger and its blessing, and it came to designate the complete blackness of the innermost room in the Jerusalem sanctuary.(9)

When Solomon brought the ark to the newly constructed temple and "the priests withdrew from the Holy Place, the cloud filled the temple of the LORD, . . . then Solomon said, 'The LORD has said that he would dwell in a dark cloud!' (10)

Moses experienced "the darkness of God." Darkness has been said to be "perhaps the most distinctive and existentially most significant of the 'names of God.' God lives 'behind the clouds.'" (11) Exodus 20:18-21 confronts me inescapably with the darkness of God as it epitomizes the central witness of the book of Exodus. This Scripture talks to me about a pressing personal quest-my holiness heritage! For the book of Exodus in recent years, in its structure and theology has been informing my heart concerning what it means to be part of a genuinely holiness heritage. I am discovering that it has to do with a Presence, the presence of the Holy One!

Born and reared a Methodist, I was first attracted to the holiness movement by an overwhelming sense of the holy. I met it in a godly mother, now

90 years old and still teaching an adult Sunday school class. I sensed it in an old-fashioned Methodist holiness preacher grandfather whose picture hangs on my campus office wall today. It found me in the interdenominational holiness camp meeting in the Sandhills of Nebraska. In a word, I encountered it at my mother's knee, and often on it!

For this reason above all, I was led to cast my lot with a distinctively holiness people. A pervading sense of the holy was unmistakable when I merely walked through the door of that little make-shift white wooden building which was the Church of the Nazarene in Valentine, Nebraska. And can you guess who took me there? It was my Methodist mother!

But where now is that profound awareness of the holy? I do not often sense it deeply in the ongoing life of the Church. Has something happened to us? Or, what has happened to me? How do I, how do we, discover again that absolutely necessary sense of a transcendent Presence?

I am moved to wonder, could our problem be our hesitancy, even our unwillingness, to walk into the darkness of God! that is, to plant one "faith-foot" on Mount Sinai, to set the other foot of faith on Mount Calvary, and to stand there empty, naked, and helpless before God in the world! Could it be that God is only truly "known in the darkness of Sinai and of Calvary"? (12) Moses bore witness that Mount Sinai "blazed with fire to the very heavens, with black clouds and deep darkness." (13) The Gospels testify that at the moment of Jesus' crucifixion "darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour." (14)

But instead of the darkness of God it is all too often the dark side of our heritage that we encounter in the life of our holiness communities. We cross that thin, almost imperceptible line between the holy and the demonic. The dark side of the holiness heritage comes most frequently into community life when our Christian concern to live in the atmosphere of reconciliation, for example, is eclipsed by our demonic compulsion to be "right." For then we are flirting with what Thomas Merton describes as "the moral theology of the devil" in which "the important thing is to be absolutely right and to prove that everybody else is absolutely wrong." (15) Then the Cross becomes in fact "no longer a sign of mercy," but "the sign that Law and Justice have utterly triumphed." With this mind-set we "have come to an agreement with the Law" and "no longer need any mercy." (16)

Therefore I am coming to believe that the heart of my heritage is the holy, transcendent presence of the God who manifests Himself in the darkness, ultimately in the dark hiddenness of the cross. My language reflects that of Thomas Merton who speaks of "the darkness where God is hidden" (17) and that of Martin Luther who in his theology of the cross writes of "having entered into darkness," (18) that is, "into the event revealed to us in Jesus Christ." (19) It is the unmistakable presence of the holy that puts our common lives unavoidably in the perspective of God, the vision of God penetrating our historically limited and fallen humanities.

How else dare we define ourselves as the people of God unless by the presence of God? After the disastrous moment of the golden calf at the foot of Mount Sinai (20) Moses, in a debate with God, was bold to cry out,

If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here.  
How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and

with your people unless you go with us? What else will distinguish me and  
your people from all the other people or, the face of the earth? (21)

“What else will distinguish your people from all the other people on the face of the earth?” Whatever else the professed concern for Christ and holiness means, it has to mean an almost desperate quest for the holy presence of the God with whom we are to live in acute awareness, the God whose numinous, yet hidden presence is felt by the world around us, both in attraction and repulsion, an unseen perhaps, yet inescapable witness!

I believe that the Holy Spirit of the holy God, the Spirit of the Christ of the cross, is saying to me that my heritage as the son of a Methodist mother, as an heir of the holiness tradition, and as a member of the people called Nazarenes, is “the face of God,”(22) that holy transcendent Presence without which all our doctrinal formulas say nothing all our moralistic life-styles prove nothing all our humanistic enthusiasms accomplish nothing all our ecclesiastical systems protect nothing!

So it is that Exodus 20:18-21 is penetrating my meditation from mind to heart as to who we are as children of a holiness heritage, as to who I am. But it also suggests some reasons why our heritage so often eludes our best efforts to capture and preserve it. Verse 21 informs us that “the people remained at a distance, while Moses approached the thick darkness where God was.” There is a haunting sense in which these are sad and tragic words. For they continue to live themselves out from that day to this in the history of the people of God, not least among us who are prone to distinguish ourselves as a holiness people.

So out of an event from Israelite antiquity, leaping from the narrative of the Sinai theophany which climaxes in the report that “Moses approached the thick darkness where God was” (Exodus 20:21), comes my quest for the holy, my search for a authentic heritage. Exodus 20:18-21 stirs up within me a threefold confession:

I hesitate before the holiness of God-20:18-19

I must have the presence of God-20:20

I dare to approach the darkness of God-20:21

May I project my confession on the holiness heritage as it exists and functions in the present?

We hesitate before the Holy

We must have the Presence

We dare to approach the Darkness.

So I suggest first that as a heritage

### **We Hesitate Before the Holy**

“When the people saw the thunder and lightning and heard the trumpet and saw the mountain smoke, they trembled with fear. They stayed at a distance and said to Moses, “ ‘Speak to us yourself and we will listen But do not have God speak to us or we will die’ ” (20:18-19).

I fear the Presence of the Holy! There is an aspect of my approach to Christian faith and life which is akin to the fear of the Israelites at Sinai, an aspect that resonates in their words to Moses: “Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die.”

Do we as a holiness people fear the genuinely holy? Do we not feel an inner discomfort when we come near the visible fire of Sinai and the invisible fire of Calvary? Are we bothered by the uniform Biblical witness that "our God is a consuming fire"?(23) Why do we draw back from the real presence of a holy God?

When we open our day-to-day spiritual existence to the Biblical witness to the Presence, I fear we discover that . . .

We desire a mediated presence: "Speak to us yourself and we will listen." Following their traumatic deliverance from Egypt, Israel had an overwhelming experience of the presence of God. After three days of solemn preparations at Sinai, the senses of the assembled people were completely captured by the thunder, the lightning, the trumpet blasts, and a smoke-billowing, trembling mountain. Unforgettable for centuries was this witness to the Presence for "the LORD descended on [the mountain] . . . in fire."(24) In this setting the covenant will of God is heard: "The LORD our God has shown us his glory and his majesty, and we have heard his voice from the fire."(25) The Ten Commandments came, not "as the mere summation of the conscience of humanity, but as the Word of God issuing from out of the mystery of the Godhead."(26)

As determined forever by the experience of Sinai, the faith of Israel was something more than a humanly mediated religion. "God has come"(27) was Moses' declaration to the fearing people, characterizing the immediate Sinai event including the giving of the Ten Words. The total Mosaic law, the torah(28) of Israel, finds its divinely intended function in this constitution of the kingdom-"a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." The Ten Words were a sign and expression of the covenant presence and will of God with His people. In the torah of Israel then, epitomized in the Ten Words in their Sinai context, "the accent is that not of the legal mind but of the prophetic attunement to a living power which surrounds and penetrates the wholeness of human existence."(29) The Mosaic law, the role of Moses as covenant mediator, was designed to bring them into the presence of God.(30) The religion of Israel, in Biblical intention, transcended the limits of human mediation.

"Speak to us yourself...." But the Israelites had had enough of Sinai and its fiery, frightening Presence. They cried out for the human words of Moses in place of the Word of God. They decided that the mediating presence of a man was more to their soul-comfort than an immediate divine Presence.

". . . we will listen." They desired a God-substitute, someone who could stand in for God, something or someone between them and a transcendent God who wills to be present with His people. They sought a humanly-formed creed and code structure on which they could depend, which they could trust to take care of the God-dimension imperatives of their now "liberated" existence. They were dissipating their deliverance. They were compromising their newly won freedom! Israel, in the very event of Sinai, was denying who she was by Yahweh's redemption, cutting the very ground of the mountain of God from under her feet. At Sinai they were refusing Sinai! So it was not

long until instead of a Presence, their lives centered around a golden calf.(31) Their “we will listen” was a self-deceptive lie!

I am a lot like the Israelites of the Exodus and Sinai. I am a frail and fallen human too. I all too often grumble my way through a wilderness of God’s gracious provision from Egypt to Sinai. And in sight of Sinai, I too grasp for a belief system to affirm, a rule structure to follow. I am attracted to a theology I can accept and an ethic I can adhere to as the substance of my acceptance with God. The truth at the heart of it all is that in the interest of psychological comfort, perhaps even of ego-safety, I find myself settling for something less than God, a good but false dependency between myself and the real presence of God.

Put severely plain, I prefer a mediated presence, one at a distance from me, one that appears not as darkness, but as light. I want a religious presence that I can see and get my hands on, one that I can control, keep within bounds, one that is comfortable, manageable, and within my own system. I like my theology rationalistic and my ethics legalistic, or at best moralistic. My flesh cries out for a religious security, we could even call it a carnal “god security”! A box for the holy which no box can contain. Even the box called the ark of the covenant was simply a place for Yahweh to sit-the Mercy Seat!(32)

I abhor darkness, I want my religion earthly and concrete, within my categories of understanding, founded on my ability to conform; in a word, on my terms. So am I too far out when I suggest that....

We are afraid of the darkness of God: “But do not have God speak to us or we will die.” Precisely! Who wants to die? Deuteronomy’s report of Israel’s reaction to the Sinai theophany reinforces our understanding of the situation. Their tribal leaders came to Moses and said The LORD our God has shown us his glory and majesty, and we have heard his voice from the fire. Today we have seen that a man can live even if God speaks with him. But now, why should we die?

This great fire will consume us, and we will die if we hear the voice of the LORD our God any longer.(33)

They fully realized they had experienced the presence of God. They had “heard his voice from the fire.” Further they knew they were still alive and knew from their own experience that “a man can live even if God speaks to him.” Sinai had brought them to an awesome privilege. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was making Himself known to them, even as to their fathers.(34) The God of the burning bush had come to them in as direct a relationship to Himself as He did to Abraham and Moses. Open to them as a people was life in personal fellowship with a transforming Presence. But they were afraid even to hear the voice of God for themselves. The fire was too close: “Why should we die? This great fire will consume us, and we will die if we hear the voice of the LORD our God any longer.”(35)

So to Moses they said, “Go near and listen to all that the LORD our God says. Then tell us whatever the LORD our God tells you. We will listen and obey.”(36) The Israelites wanted God, but they wanted Him on their own turf. This man, Moses! A charismatic figure, a proven success as a military

leader.(37) He had led them out of Egypt. Now they were most willing to transform him into an authoritative rule-giver. They asked only that he take responsibility for them in the presence of God.

Who wants to die? I too fear for God to come to me on His terms. I do not want to die either. The darkness of God is too contrary to my usual view of my own identity. It contradicts my understanding of who I am. To step into the darkness of God with Moses is to step out beyond my own perspectives of the right, especially of my own rightness! For crucially at stake is my religious "rightness," that rightness which is defined in terms of my theological system and ethical structures.

Mount Sinai is the pinnacle of the holy in the Old Testament.(38) It is the climactic point of God's revelation to Israel, the revelation on which the Hebrew people, God's "treasured possession," is forever founded. Mount Sinai looks ahead and finds its ultimate definition in the Mount called Calvary, where the supreme revelation of the holy indeed took place. The final revelation of the holy took place within our history on a Roman cross-"Jesus Christ and him crucified."(39) The holy is now forever defined by that infamous result of insecure political and religious institutions, a callous execution on a cross! It is before the darkness of that cross that all of my rightness dies-"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live."(40)

Second, as a heritage

### **We Must Have the Presence**

Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid. God has come to test you, so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning" (20:20).

Israel at Sinai was struck with fear. They had no problem, or so they thought, with living in obedience to God's revealed "rules" so long as they could hear them from Moses: "speak to us yourself and we will listen." But they shrank back from living in daily dialogue with the God of radical judgment and grace. They lacked the spiritual courage to live in "the fear of God," in the presence of the holy. Yet Moses boldly insisted that into their now "liberated" history, revealing His covenant will and presence, "God has come" at Sinai (1) "to test" them and (2) "to keep" them "from sinning." How else could they live in obedience to the covenant will of God! For this purpose . . .

God comes in judgment: "God has come to test you." The Mosaic law, the Ten Words enfolded in the cloud of the Sinai theophany, was given to Israel to prove their lives by God's covenant will and presence. In the granting of the torah, God was not only coming to His people, He was coming to "test" or "probe" them, to measure their lives by His revealed will for them.(41)

It was the fulfillment of what He had already been doing as He led them from Egypt through the wilderness to Sinai. We need only to read the account of Exodus 15:22-7:7 to perceive that God's testing or probing of Israel was to reveal not only God but also the character of His people. He came to prove what kind of people they were in relation to the God who brought them out of Egypt. As we read of Hezekiah: "God left him to test [or 'probe'] him and to know everything that was in his heart."(42) Yet God had not left them. It was ironic that in the midst of their grumbling, "they looked toward the desert, and there was the glory of the LORD appearing in the cloud."(43)

Incomprehensible, yet illustrative of Moses' interpretation of the Sinai revelation to Israel as "God has come to test you," is God's testing of Abraham in Genesis 22:1-19. The quality of Abraham's obedience was tested all the way to the point of his faith in the promise, to the mysterious depth- could we say darkness?-of the contradiction of the promise as Abraham knew it.(44) The function of the Mosaic revelation in the giving of the torah on Mount Sinai was certainly at heart no less than that of the proving of Abraham on Mount Moriah.

The relation of Abraham to God in terms of Isaac, the child of the promise, illumines the relation of Israel to God in terms of Israel's being children of the torah. What God has given has to be sacrificed in order to be possessed! Here we are led directly from law to grace, for a proper view of law makes one a seeker after grace: "A low view of law leads to legalism in religion; a high view of law makes a liar a seeker after grace."(45) As a search- light of judgment, the law, although inadequate in isolation, leads the faithful in Israel to Him who gave it, who like Abraham can only really live by naked trust in His word. At Sinai, God came to prove His people by means of His word uttered in the Ten Words(46) in order to drive them irrevocably to grace! The Psalmist was not far off when he craved.

Keep me far from the way of deceit, grant me the grace of your law.(47)

Such was the Israelite need of the Presence!

A recent study of this verse which examines the Hebrew root (*nsh*) of our word "to test" makes the point even more vivid. Although not exclusive of the meaning of "test" or "prove," the basic sense of the verb is "cause to have experience Of "(48) The primary meaning of Exodus 20:20 then is that God has come in the giving of the torah that they may so experience Him that the fear of Him may be present to keep them from sinning.(49) Such a Presence makes the need of grace absolute!

If grace was the intention of the revelation of the old covenant on Mount Sinai, how much more it is the intention of the climax of the coming of God in the new covenant revelation on Mount Calvary. Jesus said of His approaching death, "this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many."(50) At Sinai, God's presence was signified by fire.(51) At Mount Zion, now in virtue of the resurrection of Jesus "the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God,"(52) it is still true that "our God is a consuming fire."(53) The mode of His revelation may have changed from Sinai to Calvary, but God has not changed: "He remains a consuming fire."(54)

So God comes to us at Mount Calvary even more radically in judgment(55) than He came to Israel at Mount Sinai with its thunder, lightening and violent trembling.(56) The test, the proof, that is now revealed is no longer the Mosaic torah, (57) but the new Torah that is in essence the self-offering of Jesus: "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us."(58) God's measure remains His mysterious self, but now that self is revealed in the crucified and resurrected Jesus, His only Son.(59)

Jesus is the Word I am to hear from God, my call to covenant obedience. In Jesus, God's real presence has come that I may experience the probing of His presence. To His penetrating judgment of my life I am daily exposed. With me as with Abraham, His probing is deep, the probing of His cross,

until I too have to surrender my hope in the promise of the flesh. I must have that probing Presence. As with the Israelites, when they asked Moses to speak to God for them "and we will listen," such moralism misses the point of God's holy surgery. As a shield against the presence of God, "moralism is a sure sign of an obdurate conscience and a heart closed to God."(60)

Therefore I rejoice in this test of the new covenant: "Test me, O LORD, and try me, examine my heart and mind."(61) As the apostle Paul understood the grace of the cross, "when we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world."(62) We are those privileged to live ultimately and utterly out of forgiveness. At Calvary God has come to prove me.(63) He has so uttered His Word in Jesus that I am driven inescapably and always to grace!

So the positive function of God's self-revelation is that God comes in grace. "God has come . . . so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning." Israel's trust in a mediated presence was a failure. Their intent to live out of the words of Moses was misguided. The law let them down. Moralism has the spiritual strength only of mere human resolve. They did not even have the ability to listen faithfully to Moses.

So the torah became for the Israelites a ministry of death. Following Sinai they visibly demonstrated the insight of that unique child of their heritage, Saul of Tarsus, Paul the Apostle of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, who testified, "I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death."(64) They illustrated in animated color that law in itself is ineffective and without moral power. Rules and minute regulations cannot produce spirituality: "For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the (flesh)(65) God did. (66) In the story of Exodus, after Moses had shared with the people the Book of the Covenant(67) and led them in the covenant confirmation ceremony,(68) he "entered the cloud as he went on up the mountain" to receive the instructions for the tabernacle.(69) After he disappeared from their sight, the people soon fell into flagrant idolatry-the story of the golden calf(70) whose "cutting edge is its penetrating insight that religion itself can be the means to disobedience."(71)

Coupled with their frail human nature the quality of the Israelites' faith was such that the only way the law could even begin to work was for it to be personified, or caught up, in a charismatic authority figure to whom blind, unthinking, and absolute loyalty could be given. We too often place such figures on a deified pedestal and delegate our responsibility before God, and therefore our spiritual freedom, to their benevolent tyranny. We "listen" to them and they are to guarantee our relation to God. We are obeying a god-substitute.

Note what took place in the covenant community of Israel when their authority figure, Moses, with his spell-binding charisma, was absent from them for forty days on the mountain with God. When "the people saw that Moses was too long in coming down from the mountain" they confronted Aaron with the cry,

Come, make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him.(72)

Then Aaron, whom God had appointed to speak for Moses due to Moses' own reluctance to obey God's call,(73) made them a god in place of God. They had

deified the now absent Moses so he had to be replaced quickly. The result was a religious orgy, a worship that was highly sensual, for after they "sacrificed burnt offerings and presented fellowship offerings . . . they sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in revelry."(74) Their approach to law, dependent upon the charisma of a "present" authority figure, led them to ethical license. This incident took place "when Israel had no human security left to fall back upon."(75)

In the worship of the golden calf, Israel was defying the only security they had, their covenant relationship with God. For the maintaining of this relationship the torah had been given. They were to prove their lives by the covenant will of God, to live under its judgment, and thus be drawn to rely on the God of the Exodus and Sinai-the God of all grace. But in their subsequent history, they turned their basically prophetic faith(76) into a law religion.(77) This was personified in the legalism of the Pharisees in Jesus' day, a use of the law that Paul saw as eventually demonic.(78) For Israel, for the early church, and for us, the law, "holy, righteous and good,"(79) has in itself no power to keep us from sin, from either license or legalism; that is, from sin as disobedience or from sin as unbelief. The line between legalism and license is subtle and dangerously thin, for both cater to the priority of the human over the presence of the divine. Both are a "flesh" rather than a "spirit" based approach to the issue of spiritual freedom and responsibility They belong to the realm of law that leads to death in contrast to the realm of grace which leads to life.(80)

So like Israel of old, I must have the presence of the holy to live in the realm of grace, in true spiritual freedom and ethical responsibility. "God has come to keep you from sinning"-a new covenant morality is possible only out of a new covenant Presence. How else can we recognize sin when we see it or know what sin really is, and have the power to refuse it? Jesus spoke of His continuing presence in the world through the Holy Spirit the Counselor,

When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me.(81)

It takes the vision of God to see our own lives in His perspective for "the eye is the lamp of the body."(82) Where else is the dynamic, the ability to meet the challenge of the covenant-will of God in Jesus except in the personal Presence of the risen Christ? The holy is now Jesus, His quality of life in the world before us, His grace as the ultimate foundation of our ethical existence.

Otherwise we are open to the demonic compromise of the holy, vulnerable to some form of golden-calf religion. It appears among us often in what I describe as "the dark side of our heritage," the demonic necessity to be right, the irresistible impulse to save face. When ethics run to legalism, we have a pagan rather than a Biblical spirituality. For when we are caught in the legalistic seduction of our heritage we have to be "right" to be "spiritual"-we cannot be wrong!

We are reminded again of Thomas Merton's characterization of the moral theology of the Devil of which he writes:

Another characteristic of the devil's moral theology is the exaggeration of all distinctions between this and that, good and evil, right and wrong. These distinctions become irreducible divisions. No longer is there any sense that we might perhaps all be more or less at fault, and that we all might be expected to

take upon our own shoulders the wrongs of others by forgiveness, acceptance, patient understanding and love, and thus help one another to find the truth. On the contrary, in the devil's theology, the important thing is to be absolutely right himself or to attach himself to another who is absolutely right. And in order to prove their rightness they have to punish and eliminate those who are wrong.(83)

The satanic, Biblically, is simply legalism personified. From the accuser to the seducer is an automatic movement!

My need is a Presence, the new covenant Presence, an awesome presence:

The new covenant is not a substitution of a friendly God for the terror of Sinai, but rather a gracious message of an open access to the same God whose presence still calls forth awe and reverence.(84)

"God has come to test you, so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning"—a Presence of judgment and grace.

Third, as a heritage

### **We Dare to Approach the Darkness**

"The people remained at a distance, while Moses approached the thick darkness where God was" (20:21).

The original report reads that "while Moses approached the thick darkness where God was, . . . the people remained at a distance." The contrast is sharp between Moses as a truly spiritual leader and the Israelites who wanted their religion in a manageable package. Spiritual leadership dares to approach the darkness, it risks trust in the darkness of God. But the participants "at a distance" desired a safely mediated faith, one dependent on a visible human authority. They wanted a moralistic, a law-contained faith not law as a means of grace.

They had experienced the holy presence of God at Sinai, God had come, but they wanted none of the terror of His dark presence. Although they were called to be "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation,"(85) in their unholy fear they missed the point that the basis of all ministry in the world, as Henri Nouwen comments in *Gracias!*, "rests not in the moral life but in the mystical life. The issue is not to live as well as we can, but to let our life be one that finds its source in the Divine Life."(86)

As a holiness people whose primary warrant is the Biblical testimony, we dare not remain "at a distance," but must enter the thick darkness of God's most holy presence now experienced at the cross of Jesus and in His way in the world. Saint Augustine in his *Confessions* addresses a God who is "most hidden, yet most present."(87) The truth is that the God of Sinai is most fully in our midst in the cross of Christ where He is also most hidden. Karl Barth has declared that "one must know the darkness of Sinai and Cal-

vary, and must have faith to know the God who is above us and his hidden nature.”(88) The eighth century prophet Isaiah addresses the Holy One of Israel and declares:

Truly you are a God who hides himself.(89)

So in line with Isaiah’s witness . . .

We risk the darkness of God. The mystics speak of “the creative darkness of entering into the mystery of God.”(90) The language is suggestive of the Biblical testimony to God as holy, the One who, in Rudolph Otto’s phrase, is the “Wholly Other.”(91) “I am God and not man-the Holy One among you,” is the divine declaration to disobedient Israel in Hosea 11:9. The highest acknowledgment of God is to speak of Him as holy. The holy denotes the innermost secret and essence of God’s being; it designates His uniqueness as over against everything else-the Wholly Other One. For instance, Rowen Williams identifies this understanding as the controlling theme of the writings of St. John of the Cross, “God is not the same as anything else.”(92) God is ultimate beyondness. He is beyond our human understanding, for “a God comprehended is no God.”(93) Karl Barth writes that

God’s revelation is precisely his revelation as the hidden God. And therefore faith in God’s revelation can only give a very humble answer to the question “Who is God?”, and it is faith which will confess God as the God of majesty, and therefore as the God unknown to us. It is faith in God’s revelation, which is deadly fear of God’s mystery, because it sees how God himself veils himself in mystery.(94)

Merton suggests that “He who is infinite light is so tremendous in His evidence that our minds see Him as darkness.”(95) Therefore, the nearer we get to God the greater can be the darkness. Merton elucidates:

If nothing that can be seen can either be God or represent Him to us as He is, then to find God we must pass beyond everything that can be seen and enter into darkness.... And it is in the deepest darkness that we most fully possess God on earth, because it is then that our minds are most truly liberated from the weak, created lights that are darkness in comparison to Him; it is then that we are filled with His infinite Light which seems pure darkness to our reason.(96)

St. John of the Cross, in whom Merton is deeply read, writes of God as “intolerable darkness to her when He is spiritually near, for the supernatural light darkens with its excess the natural light.”(97) In Frederick W. Faber’s lines, God as holy is

Darkness to the intellect,  
But sunshine to the heart.(98)

Thus, contemplative prayer has been defined as “a sharing in the darkness of mystery, a darkness in which God reveals himself.”(99) It is in a sense a “knowing through unknowing.”(100)

Although the tradition of apophatic theology pushes the metaphor of darkness eventually beyond its Biblical use, yet these writers point up some-

thing important in the Biblical witness. The metaphor of darkness helps us to appreciate the meaning of God as holy, as hidden in His otherness, as experienced as absence(101) or a far off God:

"Am I only a God nearby," declares the LORD  
"and not a God far away?"(102)

And yet, continues Jeremiah as the divine spokesman,

"Can anyone hide in secret places so that I cannot see him?" declares the LORD.  
"Do I not fill heaven and earth?"(103)

We need a sense of the transcendence of the Holy One. We must risk an unmediated presence, one that often appears as darkness, one that is ever beyond us, above the comprehension of our minds, above our carnal control, and even above our tenacious sense of the right. The insight of Carlo Carretto, reflecting on "the friendly night of the North African desert" is true to the Biblical metaphor in its full Sinai and Calvary content: "The darkness is necessary, the darkness of faith is necessary, for God's light is too great. It wounds."(104) "Paradoxically," writes Williams of Martin Luther's thought, "the real and absolute transcendence of God can only be understood in circumstances and experiences where there are no signs of transcendence, no religious clues."(105)

So also . . .

We risk the darkness of faith. The modern spiritual writers who identify with the tradition of apophatic theology make frequent use of the concept and phrase, "the darkness of faith." Carlo Carretto(106) opens his Letters from the Desert with the words, "God's call is mysterious; it comes in the darkness of faith."(107) This call, he writes,

is so fine, so subtle, that it is only with the deepest silence within us that we can hear it.(108)

Henri J. M. Nouwen, who is presently being widely read across the Catholic-Protestant divide, cries out in a book of prayers from the Genesee,

Are you asking me to stay in the darkness of faith and surrender to you that feverish and impatient desire for a direct, sensible experience? Are you inviting me to live my life in simple faith, obedient to the witnesses who saw you after your death and who based their teaching on the fact that they indeed saw you alive?(109)

Thomas Merton makes extensive use of the concept of darkness in relation to faith, particularly in his New Seeds of Contemplation (110) But only once in my reading have I come across the precise expression, "the darkness of faith": "The darkness of faith bears fruit in the life of wisdom."(111) Merton makes his meaning clear as he writes,

The very obscurity of faith is an argument of its perfection. It is darkness to our minds because it so far transcends their weakness. The more perfect faith is, the darker it becomes. The closer we get to God, the less is our faith diluted with the half-light of created images and concepts. Our certainty increases with this obscurity, yet not without anguish and even material doubt,

because we do not find it easy to subsist in a void in which our natural powers have nothing of their own to rely on. And it is in the deepest darkness that we most fully possess God on earth. (112)

Thomas Merton's own strain of apophatic mysticism"(113) was apparently strongly indebted to Saint John of the Cross. For example, in his *The Ascent to Truth* Merton's exposition of the theology of Saint John of the Cross appears to be identical with his own views:

We have now returned to the central paradox of apophatic mysticism. Faith is a vision of God which is essentially obscure. The soul knows Him, not because it beholds Him face to face, but because it is touched by Him in darkness. Now, as Saint John of the Cross has just said, the purer our faith, the more perfect is our union with God. But since faith is essentially obscure, the purity of faith is proportionate to its darkness. Therefore, as Saint John points out at the very beginning of *The Ascent*, pure faith is "as dark as night to the understanding."(114)

Later on in *The Ascent*, Saint John can write that this "road is faith, and for the intellect faith is also like a dark night."(115) Saint John of the Cross is the one through whom in a definitive way the long apophatic tradition has flowed into the stream of modern writing on the "darkness of faith." All of them would no doubt identify with Thomas Merton when he writes,

In the vivid darkness of God within us there sometimes come deep movements of love that deliver us entirely, for a moment, from our old burden of selfishness, and number us among those little children of whom is the Kingdom of Heaven."(116)

There is something indispensably authentic in our approach to God as Holy, to the faith that centers in Sinai and rests in Calvary, even though we cannot identify the "darkness" of Moses' approach to God one on one with the "darkness of faith" in the writings of those who are in the apophatic tradition.

As we go on to explore "darkness" in relation to the cross of the New Testament, we look once more at the faith of Abraham and Isaac in Genesis 22:1-14 in the light of the contrast seen in Exodus 20:18-21, the contrast between the faith of Moses and the faith of the Israelites at Sinai, with our perspectives informed by our earlier discussion of "the darkness of God" and "the darkness of faith."

Abraham is our paradigm of Moses' "presence-faith." Isaac is our paradigm of the Israelites' "law-faith." First, Abraham knew where he was going and why (22:1-2), but Isaac did not really know where he was going or why.

Second, Abraham went with a humanly insecure faith, but with a holy security: "God himself will provide" (22:8). Isaac, on the other hand, went with a religiously secure faith, one secure in the answer given by a mediator-his father who was responsible for him (22:6-8).

Third, Abraham's was an unmediated walk with God, for all he knew was the divine promise and the instructions for the moment at hand, but now all he thought he knew of God's promise to him was at stake. The divine instructions contradicted the divine promise. Isaac's, however, was a medi-

ated walk with God. No anxiety, no dread, for his trust was in a human authority.

As the story concludes in verses 9-14, Isaac had walked in a light that turned out to be darkness. He had no idea of the spiritual issues at stake. He had been obedient only to Abraham his father! But Abraham had walked in a darkness that turned out to be light. He had been obedient to a God whose ways were hidden from him! In his "darkness of faith," the contradicted promise had been kept intact: "So Abraham called that place 'The LORD will provide.'" (22:14).

But the "darkness of faith" can take on truly Christian content and lead us to the very heart of the holy, to the Mercy Seat in the Holy of Holies, so . . .

We risk the darkness of the cross. To approach "the thick darkness" in the New Testament is to find God most of all in the cross of Jesus Christ. I find it more than symbolic that at the historic moment of Jesus' death "darkness came over the whole land."(117) If the holy means the hiddenness of God, nowhere did He more hide Himself than in the cross of Christ. As Merton phrases it, in the cross "Christ manifested the holiness of God in apparent contradiction with itself."(118) He explains,

So God Himself was put to death on the cross because He did not measure up to man's conception of His Holiness.... He was not holy enough, He was not holy in the right way, He was not holy in the way they had been led to expect. Therefore He was not God at all."(119)

Luther's theology of the cross would say, "Only here, in what negates and mocks all human conceptions of God, can God be himself."(120)

So God is most made known to us in the cross, in that which most appears to contradict Him. Therefore the "test of honesty," comments Williams on the agreement between Luther and Saint John of the Cross concerning the implications for faith of the cross of Jesus,

is whether a man or woman has looked into the darkness in which Christianity has its roots, the darkness of God being killed by his creatures, of God himself breaking and reshaping all religious language by manifesting his activity in vulnerability, failure and contradiction. (121)

Without such a theology of the cross we "misuse the best in the worst manner,"(122) wrote Luther in thesis 24, particularly the annihilating effect of the law, reminding us of our impotence, which "must never be softened by a legalism which treats law as a simple task to be performed."(123) Therefore, as Williams interprets Saint John of the Cross, "Christian experience . . . is drawn again and again to the central and fruitful darkness of the cross." And that is what we are after, "the fruitful darkness of the cross."(124)

Where does the quest for the holy lead us but all the way to the radical grace of the cross, to the reality of forgiveness. The Psalmist saw the connection:

If you, O LORD, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness; therefore you are feared.'(125)

When are we the most like God? Is it not when we dare the darkness of his kind of forgiveness and "go beyond justice?"(126) No wonder Morton Kelsey wrote of divine love and grace "as a difficult tradition to convey to human beings."(127) It goes beyond all they normally consider to be human and to be right. It is "Wholly Other"!

It is Exodus itself that expresses "a theology of grace unsurpassed in the OT."(128) Its understanding of the faith of Israel is not merely of the faith formed by the experiences of the Exodus and Sinai, but of a faith formed just as much by the tragic religious apostasy of the golden calf episode in their history.(129) The faith of Israel is in fact a faith formed yonder side of the golden calf divide.(130) Here in Exodus chapters 32-34 is where we find most of all in the Old Testament a fully Biblical "holiness" faith.

The first two stages of Moses' intercession for an apostate Israel (131) left the problem of God's full forgiveness of Israel unsolved for Moses, for God has said.

I will send an angel before you, . . . But I will not go with you, because you are a stiff-necked people and I might destroy you on the way.(132)

So Moses from his stance of "favor" with God(133) continues to intercede as he asks first to know God's intention and character (33:12-13) and second as he insists on the assurance of God's presence with him and with the Israelites (33:1~). The presence is promised, but Moses is not yet fully convinced, for he asks to see God's glory, he seeks to go beyond the darkness of faith to the unambiguous light of God's person (33:18)! The form but perhaps not the substance of his request is denied, for from the cleft of the rock he is allowed a vision of the back of God, of the "goodness" of God which has now taken precedence over his judgment:

And he [the LORD] passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin."(134)

Then, as Moses bows low and worships, the narrative comes to an astounding climax of grace, "If now I have found favor in your eyes O Lord, let now the Lord go in our midst, because [or 'although indeed'] they are a stiff-necked people, and forgive our iniquity and our sins, and take us as your inheritance."(135)

The heart of the holy is now fully known by Moses, for the revelation of how the supremely holy God most of all relates to his people has reached the point where "the same factor, the sin of Israel, which caused Yahweh's wrath, also brings about his mercy."(136) Only God's own character, breaking through the mystery of divine holiness as the "goodness" of radical grace, can allow God to be intimately present,(137) present with such a people as the Israelites, and with you and with me! In short, in the whole of Exodus chapters 32-34, Israel's experience of the holiness of God in radical judgment is met ultimately by the holiness of God revealed as radical grace, which, as the chapter continues, makes both possible and mandatory a holy obe-

dience (34:10-28)! Perhaps the reason our obedience as a holy people is often so moralistically domesticated is that we have not yet fully experienced the holy as grace! We have not faced our apostasy!

Hosea 11:1-9 gives us another most fascinating "prism of the holy" with which to look at the "darkness of the cross." In this prophetic oracle God declares that he has every right to come in wrath upon Israel. The prophet begins with Yahweh's complaint about Israel's failure to be a grateful son and the apparent inevitability of divine judgment (11:1-7). Yet God's compassion on them is changeless:

"How can I give you up, Ephraim?  
How can I hand you over, Israel?  
How can I treat you like Admah?  
How can I make you like Zeboiim?  
My heart is changed within me;  
all my compassion is aroused.  
I will not carry out my fierce anger,  
nor devastate Ephraim again.  
For I am God, and not man-  
the Holy One among you.  
I will not come in wrath."(138)

The text of Hosea expresses a formula: the holy as "the holy" equals "utterly different from man" equals "radical forgiveness"- "the quite irrational power of love,"(139) Eichrodt calls it here. But sadly Israel would not receive it; they turned their back on the holy at its deepest level. So we can in turn say that the darkness of the holy is the darkness of radical forgiveness is the darkness of the cross is the darkness of God!

Therefore we approach the darkness of God, entering and living a forgiving life, which more often than not is darkness to the onlooker. For we are living beyond what is normally understood of human behavior, we have become a mystery, perhaps even a threat, but therefore most of all a witness.'(140)

Forgiveness is the aroma of the eternal presence of the holy, the principle at the very heart of its earthly manifestation. Forgiveness is the real presence of the holy, as near to it as we can concretely get in this life, and the real presence of the holy becomes in turn the only adequate resource for a forgiving life.

Is not worship best defined as the celebration of a radical forgiveness? Perhaps here is the clue as to why the Presence of the Holy One is not more manifest in our corporate gatherings. In our preaching, praying, attitudes, conversations, and behavior do we dissipate the vision of the holy with our evangelical moralism? Do we contradict the essence of the holy with our holiness legalism?

Our holy calling is to approach the thick darkness where God is in the cross of Jesus, first for our own drastic and continuing need of grace, and second in the threatening risk of our utter forgiveness of others. For we must be saved from "the unholiness of the holy" as Merton calls it:

the most striking thing about the Gospel is that in saving the adulteress Jesus was also saving Himself. Defending and delivering a sinner from the injustice of the legally "just" he was sav-

ing the Truth from defilement by the unholiness of the holy. For these ascetics were so holy that they hated Mercy and thus their holiness was sin.”(141)

We are too much seduced into the “unholiness of the holy,” therefore we remain “at a distance” from the darkness of grace. No wonder we hesitate before the Holy and thus miss the knowledge of that awesome Presence that is so necessary to keep us from sinning. With Moses I want to approach the thick darkness where God is! For that is the essence of my heritage!

Now can our eyes spring free to see the night,  
And the darkness that is vibrant with our God.’(142)

## NOTES

1This personal study, worked on since 1979 and written, as Wesley would say, “to save my own soul,” resulted in a 56-page paper which was presented in part as a lecture to the faculty of Point Loma Nazarene College on April 29, 1987.

2 Philo, Gregory of Nyssa, Denys the Areopagite, Tauler, Ruysbroeck, John of the Cross, Merton, Chapman, etc. See Rowen Williams, “Dark Night, Darkness,” *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, ed. Gordon S. Wakefield (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1963), pp.103-105, for a brief survey. A discriminating discussion of the differences in use of the “darkness” theme from Philo to John of the Cross is found in Andrew Louth, *The Origins of Christian Mystical Tradition: From Plato to Denys* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), pp. 179-190. An even more recent survey can be found in Kenneth Leech, *Experiencing God: Theology as Spirituality* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1985), pp.162-198, in a chapter entitled “God of Cloud and Darkness” which concludes with remarks on “Darkness and Contemplation Today.” He has a shorter treatment of the use of the darkness metaphor in his *Soul Friend, The Practice of Christian Spirituality* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1977), pp. 160- 174. The tradition from which they all draw is that of apophatic spirituality or “negative” theology.

3 Ladislaus Boros, *Open Spirit*, tran. Erika Young (New York: Paulist Press, 1974), pp. 59f

4 Boros, pp. 59f.

5 Saint John of the Cross, *Dark Night of the Soul*, tr. E. Allison Peers (Garden City, New York. Image Books, 1959), p. 98: “in the darkness of my understanding and the constraint of my will, in affliction and anguish with respect to memory, remaining in the dark in pure faith.” A frequent image is the “dark night of contemplation” or “dark contemplation.” See pages 121, 92, 61.

6 Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation* (New York: New Directions Publishing Corporation, 1962), p. 141: “The darkness of faith bears

fruit in the light of wisdom." Henri J. M. Nouwen, *A Cry for Mercy: Prayers from the Genesee* (Garden City, New York: Image Books, 1983), p. 142: "Are you asking me to stay in the darkness of faith and surrender to you that feverish and impatient desire for a direct, sensible experience?"

7 Leech, *Soul Friend*, pp. 160-174, and *Experiencing God*, pp. 162-198.

8 The eight are Exodus 20:21; Deuteronomy 4:11, 5:22; 2 Samuel 22:10; 1 Kings 8:12; 2 Chronicles 6:1; Psalms 18:9, 97:2. All Biblical quotations unless otherwise indicated are from *The Holy Bible: New International Version* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Bible Publishers, 1973, 1978).

9 Samuel Terrien, *The Elusive Presence: Toward a New Biblical Theology* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1978), p. 128.

10 1 Kings 8:12; see 2 Chronicles 6:1.

11 Boros, p. 60.

12 Leech, *Soul Friend*, p. 162.

13 Deuteronomy 4:11. "Deep darkness" translates 'arafel.

14 Mark 15:33.

15 Thomas Merton, p. 96.

16 *Ibid.*, pp. 91-92-

17 Thomas Merton, p. 219.

18 Walther von Loewenich, *Luther's Theology of the Cross* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, p. 83, quoting from the Weimar edition of Luther's works, *the Operationes in Psalmos*, vol. v. 176, 16ff.

19 *Ibid.*, p. 84.

20 Exodus 32:1-35.

21 Exodus 33:13-16.

22 See Genesis 32:30; Exodus 33:11, 20, 23; Deuteronomy 5:4; 34:10, for the rendering of *panim* as God's "face," Exodus 33: 14, 15 as His "presence," and Exodus 25:30; 35:13; 39:16, for the expression "the bread of the presence."

23 Hebrews 12:29; Deuteronomy 4:24.

24 Exodus 19:18. See 24:17.

25 Deuteronomy 5:24.

26 George A. F. Knight, *Theology as Narration: A Commentary on the Book of Exodus* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1976), p. 133.

27 Exodus 20:20.

28 Torah does not mean law in a legal sense, but "instruction," "guidance," "direction": "Torah is that which points the way for the faithful Israelites and for the community of Israel. W. J. Harrelson, "Law in the OT," *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), K-Q, 77. James A. Sanders in a very illuminating discussion suggests "that the oldest and most common meaning is something approximate to what we mean by the word revelation." He concludes that "the Torah par excellence, is basically a narrative, a story, rather than a code of laws." *Torah and Canon* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972), pp. 2f.

29 Terrien, p. 130: "the decalogue provides a key to the Hebraic understanding of the theological basis of ethics. The call for the exclusive worship of Yahweh is explicitly made in terms of the overwhelming experience of his presence," precedes our quote.

30 For discussions of the tensions, both literary and theological, which appear to be imbedded in the traditions which inform us of Moses' office of covenant mediator, see Childs, pp. 340-384, and Terrien, pp. 106-160. The tension can be clearly seen by comparing Deuteronomy 3:4, which stresses the lack of mediation, with 5:5 in which Moses acts as mediator. We are attempting to work from the text as it stands, in canonical context, with the tension being itself an intended part of the Biblical revelation which we are to interpret.

31 Exodus 32:1-35-

32 Exodus 23:22: "There, above the cover between the two cherubim that are over the ark of the Testimony, I will meet with you and give you all my commands for the Israelites."

33 Deuteronomy 5:24-25.

34 Exodus 3:6, 15. See Genesis 12:1-3, 15:1-19, 17:1-22, 18:1-33, 22:1-18 for Abraham; 26:23-25 for Isaac; and 28:10-22, 31:3, 32:22-32, 46:1-3 for Jacob.

35 The reason given is the almost proverbial statement that the one who has seen God face to face must die: "For what mortal man has ever heard the voice of the living God speaking out of the fire as we have, and survived?" (Deuteronomy 5:26) See Exodus 33:20; Judges 6:22-23; Isaiah 6:5. The comparison of this account, Deuteronomy 5:22-32, with our Exodus passage, 20:18-21, reflects the apparent tension between Moses as the appointed intercessor and as an ad hoc delegate imbedded in Mosaic traditions which have been employed in the making of the Pentateuch. See Terrien, p. 128, and Gerhard von Rad, *Deuteronomy*, The Old Testament Library (London: SCM Press, 1966), p. 60.

36 Deuteronomy 5:27.

37 Terrien, p. 106, asserts, "the historical Moses was primarily a military leader of charismatic character."

38 This is to be understood, of course, in the context of the whole of the Exodus narrative, not just chapters 19-20. Also we need to remember that

the last word on the holy in Exodus is spoken in chapters 32-34 with the final note in 40:34-38.

39 1 Corinthians 2:1.

40 Galatians 2:20.

41 Childs, p. 373: "The first reason focused on the critical testing of the revelation." The Hebrew is *nsh* as in Exodus 15:25, 16:4, and 17:7. Exodus 15:25, 16:4, Deuteronomy 8:16 and 33:8 all use the Hebrew verb, *nsh* (to test, try or prove), in similar contexts with God as the subject. The other Old Testament uses with God as the subject are in Genesis 22:1, 2 Chronicles 32:31. and Psalm 26:2.

42 2 Chronicles 32:31: "To test him, that He might know . . ." (NASB). See Moshe Greenburg, "*nsh* in Exodus 20:20 and the Purpose of the Sinaitic Theophany," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 79 (1960), 275.

43 Exodus 16:10.

44 Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis; Interpretation* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), p. 189, notes that "the problem of this narrative is to hold together and embrace the dark command of God and his high promise."

45 J. Gresham Machen, *Origin of St. Paul's Religion*, n.v.

46 Knight, p. 141: The Ten Words are "a set of guidelines for a community that must now live together in an exalted fellowship where loyalty to one another is understood and expressed as the response to the loyalty of him who first loved his covenant people. This love Israel has now seen in an historical situation, that is, it is revealed love. That is why Israel now fears the Lord, v. 18; for God has come to prove his people by means of his Word uttered in the Decalogue."

47 Psalm 119:29, *The New Jerusalem Bible* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc. 1985).

48 *Nsh* appears only in the pi'el conjugation in the Hebrew Old Testament.

49 Greenberg, p. 276.

50 Mark 14:24. See Matthew 26:28, Luke 22:20, and 1 Corinthians 11:25-26.

51 Terrien, p. 110, writing on the burning bush and the meaning of fire in the context of theophany, suggests that "fire is a symbol of prompt becoming. It suggests the desire to change, to hasten time, to bring life to its beyondness. In the entire history of religions the contemplation of fire amplifies human destiny; it relates the minor to the major, the burning bush to the life of the world, and the desire for change to the vision of renewal." He cites G. Bachelard, *Lapsychanalyse du feu* (Paris, 1947; reprinted 1949), p. 35. See E. M. Good, "Fire," *IDB*, E-J, pp. 268ff., and bibliography.

52 Hebrews 12:22.

53 Hebrew 12:29.

54 Childs, p. 377.

55 See 1 Corinthians 11:32; 1 Peter 4:17-19; and Hebrews 12:1-6, 9-10.

56 Exodus 19:18f. Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus* (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, The Hebrew University, 1967), p. 232, writes, "these details concerning the smoke and the fire and the quaking of the mountain belong to the literary tradition of theophany descriptions. ... there is no reference here ... to volcanic activity.... there are no volcanoes in the regions that merit consideration in our attempts to identify Mount Sinai." He views the phenomenon as an electric storm accompanied by a howling wind: "the smoke is the mist rising from the mountains; the fire is that of lightning, which is regarded as accompanying God in His descent from heaven; and the trembling of the mountain (only the mountain is referred to, and not the ground on which the people stood, is not an earthquake, but a tremor due to the force of the crashing thunder."

57 See Romans 7:1-6, 10:4.

58 1 John 3:16; see 2:6.

59 John 1:14, 17-18.

60 Urban T. Holmes, *Spirituality For Ministry* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1982), p. 152

61 Psalm 26:2.

62 1 Corinthians 11:32.

63 See John 16:5-15-

64 Romans 7:10.

65 The Greek is *sarx* or "flesh" (NASB). NIV translates "sinful nature" in passages where *sarx* is used ethically by Paul. This in my opinion does not improve "flesh" for it too gives the impression that sin is some kind of "substance" penetrating human nature.

66 Romans 8:3.

67 Exodus 20:22-23:33-

68 Exodus 24:1-18.

69 Exodus 25:1-31:18.

70 Exodus 32:1-6.

71 Childs, p. 580.

72 Exodus 32:1.

73 Exodus 4:10-17.

74 Exodus 32:6.

75 Knight, p. 183.

76 Moses is viewed in the Old Testament as essentially a prophetic figure (Deuteronomy 18:15, 18; 34:10-12). See Patrick D. Miller, Jr., " 'Moses My Servant': The Deuteronomic Portrait of Moses," *Interpretation* XLI, No. 3 (July 1987), pp. 243-255.

77 See Wayne G. Boulton, *Is Legalism a Heresy?* (New York: Paulist Press, 1982), who explores the legacy of the Pharisees in Christian ethics.

78 Galatians 4:1-11.

79 Romans 7:12.

80 Romans 7:1-8:17; Galatians 2:1-5:26.

81 John 16:8-9-

82 Matthew 6:22a.

83 Merton, p. 96.

84 Childs, p. 384-

85 Exodus 19:6.

86 Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Gracias! A Latin American Journal* (San Francisco: Harper Row Publishers, 1983), p. 49.

87 *The Confessions of St. Augustine* (New York: Airmont Publishing Company, Inc., 1969), Book I. 4.

88 Karl Barth, *The Knowledge of God and the Service of God* (London: Hodder, 1928), p. 28, quoted in Leech, *Soul Friend*, p. 191, who comments that this "darkness is not a description of a psychological condition. It is an integral part of the revelation."

89 Isaiah 43:13.

90 Kenneth Leech, *True Prayer, An Invitation to Christian Spirituality* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1980), p. 154.

91 Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, translated by John W. Harvey from *Das Heilige* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1923), p. 129. This phrase is a chapter title.

92 Williams, *Christian Spirituality: A Theological History from the New Testament to Luther and St. John of the Cross* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1979), p. 162. The quote continues: "Nothing can 'substitute' for God; once he is tasted by the soul, all earthly or creaturely beauties become tantalizingly inadequate hints and reflections."

93 "Ein begriffener Gott ist kein Gott" (Tersteegen) quoted in Otto, p.39.

94 Barth, p.28. Quoted from Leech, *Experiencing God*, p. 190f. The quote continues as follows: "Skepticism, which thinks that it also knows that God is hidden, has not reached the point of such fear unto death. Skepticism has not been taught by God himself that he is hidden, but is a human answer

to a human question. One must know the darkness of Sinai and of Calvary, and must have faith to know the God who is above us. and his hidden nature.”

95 Merton, *New Seeds*, p. 131. He quotes John 1:5: “The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.”

96 Ibid, p. 131, 135. See also pp. 208f.

97 *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, translated by Kieran Kavanaugh, O.C.D. and Otilio Rodriguez, O.C.D. (Washington: ICS Publications, 1979), p.457. Quoted from Mary Paul Cutri, O.C.D., “Desire Becoming Other,” *Spiritual Life* (Fall 1985), 167f.

98 Quoted from A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, p. 18.

99 Leech, *True Prayer*, p. 177.

100 This language reflects Denys the Areopagite, often known as Pseudo-Dionysius, as well as others who followed him in the tradition of apophatic theology such as the famous Cloud of Unknowing. See Leech, *Experiencing God*, pp. 170ff.

101 Anthony Bloom in *Living Prayer* writes about a young woman with an incurable disease who after years of the awareness of God’s presence, “suddenly senses God’s absence-some sort of real absence-and she wrote to me saying, ‘Pray to God, please, that I should never yield to the temptation of building up an illusion of his presence, rather than accept his absence.’ Her faith was great. She was able to stand this temptation and God gave her this experience of his silent absence.” Quoted from Reuben P. Job and Norman Shawchuck, *A Guide to Prayer for Ministers and Other Servants* (Nashville: The Upper Room, 1983), p. 241.

102 Jeremiah 23:23.

103 Jeremiah 23:24.

104 Carlo Carretto, *Letters from the Desert*, tr. Rose Mary Hancock (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1972), p. 140.

106 Williams, *Christian Spirituality*, p. 146.

107 Carretto, *Letters*, pp. vii, xv, 140. See pp. 12, 57, 62, 69, 145. George A. Maloney, S.J., *Singers of the New Song: A Mystical interpretation of the Song of Songs* (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 1985), p.59 uses the phrase typically: “Your spouse, Christ, is calling you into a deeper darkness, the darkening of your own rational knowledge, to enter into a new way of receiving the communication of himself in the ‘luminous darkness’ of faith.”

107 Carretto, p. xv.

108 Ibid, p. xvii.

109 Nouwen, *A Cry for Mercy*, p. 142.

110 Merton, *New Seeds*, pp. 131-5, 141, 157, 187, 208-232, 256, 264. See also his *Contemplative Prayer* (Garden City, New York: Image Books,1969), pp. 68, 77f.

111 Ibid., p. 141.

112 Ibid., pp. 134-135. The last half of the quotation documented by note 13 completes this paragraph from Merton.

113 Holmes, *History*, p. 134, characterizing Merton's spirituality, writes that he "was generally kataphatic and speculative, although he advocated the apophatic approach."

114 Thomas Merton, *The Ascent to Truth* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publishers, 1951, 1979), pp. 256-257. The metaphor of "darkness" or "night" would be found throughout this exposition of the apophatic theology of Saint John of the Cross. Definitive studies of Saint John include E. Allison Peers, *Spirit of Flame: A Study of St. John of the Cross* (Wilton, Connecticut: Morehouse-Barlow Co., Inc., 1946), and Karol Wojtyla, *Faith According to Saint John of the Cross* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1981). This is the published form of Pope John Paul II's doctoral thesis.

115 Kavanaugh, *The Collected Works*, p. 74. Quoted from G. Gutierrez, *Spiritual Journey*, p. 85.

116 Merton, *New Seeds*, pp. 231-232.

117 Mark 15:33.

118 Merton, *New Seeds*, p. 62.

119 Ibid, pp. 61-62-

120 Williams, *Christian Spirituality*, p. 146.

121 Ibid., p. 177.

122 Ibid., p. 145, quoting Luther.

123 Ibid.

124 Ibid, p. 178.

125 Psalm 130:3-4.

126 Carretto, *Letters*, p. 126.

127 'Morton T. Kelsey, *Companion on the Inner Way: The Art of Spiritual Guidance* (New York: Crossroad, 1983), p. 57.

128 R. W. L. Moberly, *At the Mountain of God: Story and Theology in Exodus 32-34* (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1983), p. 90.

129 Exodus cc. 32-34

130 The confession of 34:7-8, at the heart of the divine reconciliation with apostate Israel, is central to the faith of Israel for it occurs in Psalm 86:15; 103:8; 145:8; Numbers 14:18; Joel 2:13; Nahum 1:3; Nehemiah 9:17; Jonah 4:2. Childs, p. 612, comments that "the community which treasured these traditions stood beyond the great divide caused by the sin of the golden calf." See John I. Durham, *Exodus*, Volume 3, *Word Biblical Commentary*, ed. John D. W. Watts (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1987), p. 434.

131 According to Cassuto, pp. 414-437, there are three distinct stages in Moses' intercession for Israel focused in 32:7-14; 32:30-33; and 33:12-34:9.

132 Exodus 33:2-3.

133 The appearance of the Hebrew noun *chen* (favor) in 33:12, 13 (2), 16:17, and 34:9 as basic to Moses' intercession is significant. He has "found favor" with God as his called servant to lead the Israelites out of Egypt in fulfillment of God's covenant with the fathers (Exodus 2:24; 19:5; 24:7-8; 34:10) which contradicts God's refusal to go up with the people (33:2-3). The success of the Moses' intercession is interestingly indicated in the narration in part by the appearance of the verb (twice in 33:19) and the adjective (34:6) now characterizing God's attitude toward Israel! The *chen* Moses has experienced deepens in the passage until it can also belong to Israel!

134 Exodus 34:6-7.

135 Exodus 34:9 (my translation). The particle *ci* is usually translated as concessive (although), but Moberly, pp. 88-93, convincingly demonstrates that it should be seen either as causative (because) or as emphatic concessive (indeed although).

136 Moberly, p. 89.

137 Revealing to the understanding of the progress of the intercession is the fact that the Hebrew *immanu* (with us) does not appear with the verb *halach* (go) until verse 16.

138 Hosea 11:8-9.

139 Wilther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, Volume One, translated by J. A. Baker (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1961), p. 251.

140 1 John 3:1. See John 20:22-23.

141 Thomas Merton, *The Sign of Jonas* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1953), p. 291.

142 Sebastian Moore and Kevin Maguire, *The Experience of Prayer* (Darton, Longman and Todd, 1969), p.85. Quoted from Leech, *Experiencing God*, p. 198.

# THE KINGDOM OF GOD

by  
Mortimer Arias

My attendance at this meeting of the Wesleyan Theological Society is not a thing of my own doing. Rather, it is sheerly an act of God's grace, mediated through the persistence of dear friends and colleagues such as Howard Snyder and Donald W. Dayton.

I was attracted and intrigued by Dr. Snyder's original suggestion of a paper on "The World Parish from the Perspective of the Kingdom of God" and by the unique opportunity to be present at an annual meeting of the WTS. But I knew that I would have no opportunity to do the research and the writing required by such an assignment while carrying a full semester of teaching at the School of Theology at Fuller and keeping up with my responsibilities as President of the Latin American Biblical Seminary in Costa Rica. So, I resisted the invitation. But they came back, saying that all that they wanted was the thrust of my book, *Announcing the Reign of God*, and that I would not be required to present an original paper. I could not resist this second assault. I was caught between God's "irresistible grace" and "the perseverance of the saints"!

I hope that you will agree with what they are attempting to accomplish. Since the time of my conversion, I have been haunted by the subject of the kingdom of God, for about that time I read E. Stanley Jones for the first time and I continued to read his works in my seminary days and in the beginning years of my ministry in my native Uruguay. By the turn of the present decade, as a member of the World Council of Churches' Commission on World Mission and Evangelism, I was engaged in the preparation of the World Conference, scheduled for Melbourne in 1980, the theme of which was "Your Kingdom Come."

Here, I thought, was a great challenge to the world church to look at mission and evangelization from the perspective of the kingdom. And, by then, I had a hunch that the kingdom perspective was what we needed in order to recover the vision, the motivation, the creativity, and the thrust for mission and evangelization in the contemporary world. Those circumstances and that hunch, working in both personal and corporate ways,

led to the writing of my book, to which I had given the tentative title, *Announcing the Reign of God: From the Subversive Memory of Jesus*.(1)

I still believe that Jesus' paradigm for His mission is essential for our mission today, and is a challenging perspective for the renewal of theology. I would venture to say that this would include our Wesleyan point of view, and that it would dare us to understand the World Parish in a Biblical way.

## **I. THE GOOD NEWS OF THE KINGDOM**

Nobody would dispute the assertion that Jesus had only one theme: the kingdom of God. And Jesus gave a name to His Gospel; "the Gospel of the Kingdom." "I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other cities also; for I was sent for this purpose" (Luke 4:43).

"Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every disease and every infirmity" (Matthew 9:35).

"And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world as testimony to all nations; and then the end will come" (Matthew 24:14).

A well-known writer of the Church Growth school confessed that he had been reading the Bible daily for thirty years without noticing the fundamental importance of the kingdom of God motif to the Biblical message. He said that he had read the Bible with "Church Growth eyes" and had filtered out the kingdom of God!(2) Could it be true of many Christians that they have been reading the Bible in a frame of mind dictated by certain doctrinal commitments or in a frame of mind dictated by ecclesiastical tradition, or by a particular brand of spirituality, and have filtered out the perspective of the kingdom?

Ponder the importance of the idea of the kingdom to the Biblical message. In the first three gospels we have 122 direct references to the very phrases "the kingdom of God" and "the kingdom of Heaven." And ninety of these times the words are on Jesus' own lips. Then, what is the subject of Jesus' parables? Is it not "the kingdom of God"? What is the subject of the Sermon on the Mount, or of the Beatitudes, or of the Lord's Prayer? It is, of course, "the kingdom of God."

Everyone in the gospel story was aware of what Jesus was about. His disciples may have misunderstood the nature and the timing of the kingdom and they may have misunderstood the nature of their role in it, but they certainly knew that Jesus was about the Reign of God. That is why some were asking for special status at its coming and some were hanging around and asking the same question even as the resurrected Lord prepared to leave His disciples: "Are you going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Mark 10:35-45; Acts 1:6).

The Devil itself knew what was in Jesus' mind immediately after His baptism, so the Devilself tempted Jesus with "the kingdoms of this world" as the appropriate strategy for bringing about the kingdom of God on earth. (Matthew 4:8-9).

The crowds were confused and misled, and they were after Jesus, wanting to kidnap Him and make Him a king by force. (John 6:15). At other times, they were manipulated into accusing Jesus of pretending to be a king or into making fun of Him for not acting as a king during His passion and crucifixion (Matthew 27:42). The religious leaders and the political authorities were accusing Jesus of subverting the nation and claiming to be a king (Luke 23:2). But all of them converged at one point: Jesus was about a kingdom!

Jesus' companions at the execution were also aware of that. One on the cross joined the multitude in scoffing: "Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us" (Luke 23:39). The other guerrilla, who was condemned together with Jesus, was having second thoughts about his own strategy for the kingdom and beginning to see the point of Jesus' strategy: "It is fair enough for us," he said in his agony, "but this man never did anything wrong in his life." He was moved to join Jesus on His way to the kingdom: "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom" (Luke 23:40-42). At the end of this man's historical failure in quest of the kingdom, there was plenty of room for him, and Jesus opened wide the gates just before they died together: "I tell you truly, this very day you will be with me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43). With His last breath, Jesus accepted this unexpected first-fruit of His proclamation of the kingdom. When the historical dimension of the Kingdom was clouded by suffering, apparent failure, and death, the good news of the eternal kingdom was shining through.

Even Pilate played the game of the kingdom, theatrically holding Jesus up to the crowds and saying, "Here is your king!" He stubbornly insisted on publicizing in the inscription on the cross the charge that had brought on the death penalty: "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews" (John 19:22). There it was, up there to be seen by everyone, written in Latin, Greek, and Hebrew, the three languages of the *oikoumene*. The kingdom title is still there to be read and seen by all generations, in the sacred text and in paintings by the world's great artists.

Jesus had only one theme, only one gospel, to the very end of His life and on into His existence as resurrected Lord: the kingdom of God. This is the overwhelming evidence of the three synoptic gospels. Luke, in his book of the Acts of the Apostles, projects Jesus' kingdom ministry beyond the resurrection: "To them he presented himself alive after his passion by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days, and speaking of the kingdom of God" (Acts 1:1-3). Jesus' message was monothematic, He had only one gospel-the good news of the kingdom.

New Testament scholars, whether Protestant, Catholic, or Conservative Evangelical, after one century of scrutiny of the gospels and the teachings of Jesus, are of one accord about the dominant paradigm of the kingdom in Jesus' original message. As it is said by the American scholar, Norman Perrin,

"The central aspect of the teaching of Jesus was that concerning the kingdom of God. Of this there can be no doubt and today no scholar does, in fact, doubt it. Jesus appeared as one who proclaimed the kingdom; all else in his message and ministry serves a function in relation to that proclamation and der-

ives its meaning from it. The challenge to discipleship, the ethical teaching, the disputes about oral tradition or ceremonial law, even the pronouncement of forgiveness of sins and the welcoming of the outcast in the name of God—all of these are to be so understood or they are not understood at all. Of all of the descriptive titles that have been applied to Jesus through the centuries, the one that sums up his historical appearance best is the one whose currency owes so much to Bultmann: Jesus is the Proclaimer of the Kingdom of God.(3)

So, one would expect the kingdom of God to be the center of the evangelistic *kerygma* throughout the ages, and the original paradigm for preachers and evangelists. How surprising it is to discover that this is not the case! If the kingdom of God was the climax of God's revelation as Jesus saw it, one might expect it to be the key to understanding God's mission, Jesus' mission, and the mission of the church, and, consequently, the decisive category for Christian theology. How strange it is to discover that the kingdom of God as such is not a subject in the theological curricula nor a topic with its own chapter in what is called systematic theology. We have Christology, Pneumatology, Hamartiology, and Anthropology, but no one would dare suggest a Basilealogy! Of course, one may come across a reference to the kingdom of God paradigm in a course on the Teachings of Jesus or as part of the last chapter in a theology, namely, Eschatology.(4)

Have we been through an eclipse of the kingdom in theology and mission?(5) Let's approach this question with a quick look at the evidence concerning Jesus' original paradigm in the synoptic gospels.

## **II. JESUS' PARADIGM OF THE KINGDOM**

The problem begins when we take seriously Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom. What does it entail? It is the most powerful and inclusive paradigm in the whole Bible: it is multidimensional and all-embracing; it is a sweeping vision and a dynamic reality which includes history and eternity God's creation and its consummation, the personal and social, the material and the spiritual, the private and the public, the interpersonal and the cosmic, the human and the divine.

So, it is the most elusive subject if we try to reduce it to rational and verbal categories. To begin with, Jesus never defined the kingdom of God the way we would do it in a theological course. It is not a territory, a realm with boundaries, nor a program, nor a set of rules, nor an ideal. Jesus points to this reality through metaphors, parables, images and actions. The kingdom is flashed through striking paradoxes. It is gift and work. It is the manifestation of God's mercy and God's judgment. It is free but demands everything. It is not a human program but it can be resisted or promoted by human action and prayer. The kingdom of God is the apparently seamy side of our world as it is: the first will be the last, the last will be the first; those who are in will be out, and those who are out will be in. Like the pearl of great price, once you find it, nothing else matters—and everything matters!

No wonder theologians and interpreters through the generations have tried to label it, to get a handle on the kingdom concept, to reduce it to manageable proportions! Scholars who have agreed that it is the original

message of Jesus have tried to encompass its meaning in terms of "futurist eschatology," realized eschatology," or "progressive eschatology."(6) As a didactic device, I suggest that we look at the kingdom message in the gospels in its three dimensions-past, present, and future.

### **A. The past dimension: the kingdom has come**

In the first place, Jesus announced the kingdom as an event that was taking place in history, in His own presence, words, and actions. "The time has come at last! The kingdom has arrived! Repent and believe the good news!" With this striking proclamation He began His ministry in Galilee.(7) This was an historical event, occurring at a given place and time-just when John the Baptist was put in jail. A threshold has been crossed: "The law and the prophets were until John; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is preached and everyone enters it violently . . . (Matthew 11:12; Luke 16:16). Jesus' message in His own town of Nazareth strikes the same note of fulfillment: "This very day this scripture has been fulfilled while you have been listening to it!" (Luke 4:21).

Jesus pointed to His exorcisms and healings as signs of the presence of the kingdom: "If it is by the finger of God that I am expelling evil spirits, then the Kingdom of God has arrived!" (Luke 11:20)(8) And to those who were asking for apocalyptic signs of the kingdom in the sky, Jesus responded, "The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; nor will they say, 'Lo, here it is!' or 'There!' for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you" (Luke 17:20). Read in its context, this means that Jesus was pointing to His own presence and ministry as the presence of the kingdom.(9)

So, the kingdom is experience, not only hope and promise. The Old Testament proclaims God's eternal kingdom (Psalm 145:13), but Jesus is now proclaiming the coming of the kingdom in history.

How is the kingdom to be experienced? The overwhelming answer of Jesus is, "By grace, as a gift": "Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father is pleased to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12:32). This is why the kingdom is good news to the poor, to those who are nothing and who have nothing (Luke 6:20; Matthew 11:5). This is why it has to be received as a child would receive it (Matthew 18:1-3).

Jesus announces the kingdom-that-has-come through his unique parables: the kingdom is like a seed already sown and growing secretly; it is like yeast already fermenting in the dough; it is a joyful discovery like the pearl of great price or the treasure in the field (Mark 4; Matthew 13). The parables of grace become experience in the forgiveness of sins, in the healing of the sick, in the openness to public sinners-prostitutes and tax-collectors, in the acceptance of and preferential option for the marginal, the outcasts, the poor, the sick, women, children, and the ethnically mixed Samaritans. Most powerful as an act proclaiming the presence of the kingdom of grace is Jesus' open table at meals, and it is the most irritating stumbling block for the religious establishment (Mark 2:10-11; Luke 19:1-10; 7:36-50; 11:37; 14:1; 15:2; Mark 2:16-17; Matthew 9:11-13; Luke 5:30-32).

The kingdom of God is gift-the kingdom of grace. It has come. It is to be received by grace, as grace. To put it in terms of a perception dear to Wesleyans: in Jesus, the kingdom is prevenient grace!

## **B. The future dimension: the kingdom will come**

Second, Jesus announced the kingdom of God as a future reality. The kingdom has come, but not in its fullness. The time is fulfilled but we still await the consummation. The kingdom is both experience and hope. It is "already" and "not yet." We live in a world resistant to the kingdom's presence, a world of sin, suffering, and death. This is why the disciples of the kingdom are the people who wait-the people of hope.

Jesus proclaimed the kingdom-that-will-come in many ways. Even those parables pointing to the realized dimension of the kingdom have a future reference. The seed is already sown but the harvest is not yet Mark 4:3-8; cf. Isaiah 9:3; Psalm 126:6; Joel 3:13). The mustard seed is growing already but is not yet the full tree for all nations, and the leaven is already in contact with the dough but is not yet fully effective (Mark 4:30-32).

More specifically the so-called parables of "crisis" or "parousia parables" point to a future consummation of the kingdom: the Nocturnal Burglar, the Doorkeeper, the Supervisor Servant, the Talents, the Ten Maidens, the Wedding Feast (Matthew 24-25; Mark 13:33-37; Luke 21). God has in store for the future a great harvest, a wedding feast. The world is not going to wrack and to ruin, as the consistent apocalypticists believe, but to a great consummation, namely, the fullness of creation, the final wedding of God with humanity and all creation.

The kingdom is present reality and indestructible hope.

There are also futurist proclamations of Jesus. These portray the universal dimension of the consummated kingdom (Matthew 8:11-12; Luke 13:29; Matthew 5:20; 7:20; Luke 14:11).

Particularly significant in terms of the future consummation of the Kingdom are the references of Jesus to the Son of Man, who is coming with the kingdom "in power and glory," in contrast to its present form as Suffering Servant (Mark 8:38; 13:26; 14:62; Matthew 10:23; 24:27,37; Luke 17:22,24, 26). In the parable of the Judgment of the Nations, the Son of Man and the King are one and the same (Matthew 25:31-46).

The Lord's Prayer is also oriented towards the future kingdom: "Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:9-10). The same is true with the Beatitudes, with their promise of fulfillment of consolation, justice, peace, and the vision of God (Matthew 5:1-12).

The future kingdom is proclaimed, enacted, and celebrated not only through works but through symbolic actions. Jesus' meals are a proclamation of the coming kingdom and the original setting of the unforgettable parables of the wedding feast.(10) Those meals at Jesus' open table, including the Last Supper, are not only social events, they are signs of the presence of the kingdom and future-oriented celebrations: "Believe me, I shall not eat the Passover again until all that it means is fulfilled in the kingdom of God" (Luke 22:18 [Phillips]; cf. I Corinthians 11:26).

There is no question that Jesus' message is eschatological. Whether it is also an apocalyptic message is another question. That He used apocalyptic images is the natural assumption of the gospel documents as we have them. But it cannot be sustained that Jesus shared the dualistic and speculative characteristics of the apocalypticist writers or their deterministic view of the world and history. The amazing thing is that, inside the so-called

"apocalyptic discourse" of Jesus, He strongly warns against the "false prophets" who point to signs in nature or history as the coming of the kingdom. Jesus soberly His hearers: "Don't believe them! Watch out and pray." As to the date, "Nobody knows the day or the hour, neither the angels nor the Son, only God knows." But this is a warning not taken seriously by the preachers of doomsday who apparently know more than the angels or the Son Himself. In the midst of the apocalyptic chapter, Jesus is disavowing apocalyptic speculation and terrorism.

In sum, in Jesus "the kingdom is our ultimate challenge and our ultimate hope."(11)

### **C. The present dimension: the inbreaking kingdom**

The reign of God has come: it is experience, centered in Jesus Christ and His ministry. The reign of God will come: it is hope and mobilizing promise in history. At the same time, the reign is coming, in-breaking into our minds, our lives, our institutions, and our world. The in-breaking kingdom is the moving edge of a tremendous struggle and confrontation with the world as it is. The in-breaking kingdom suffers violence and makes violence.

This is the meaning of that strange saying of Jesus in Matthew 11:22 and Luke 16:16, which has come to us in two forms, using the passive and middle voices in the Greek texts:

"From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and men of violence take it by force."

"The law and the prophets were until John; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is forcing its way and demanding a powerful reaction."

The use of the passive voice emphasizes the fact that the kingdom is suffering violence. The use of the middle voice suggests that the kingdom itself is creating violence, forcing its way, and provoking a reaction. The exegetes have not been able to agree on the original form of the saying nor on the appropriate translation of it. But when one looks at it in the context of Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom, it is obvious that it was both suffering violence and creating violence.

Jesus faced mounting opposition from the very beginning of His ministry, as is dramatically illustrated in the first chapters of the Gospel of Mark: the anti-human forces that kept captive those "possessed by evil spirits" (1:21-27); the clash with the teachers of the law over the declaration of the forgiveness of sins with the accusation of blasphemy (2:1-12); the angry reaction to Jesus' eating and drinking with "sinners and tax-collectors" (2:16-17); the questions of fasting regulations for Jesus and His disciples (2:18-22); the tense confrontations over the plucking of wheat grains or healing on the Sabbath (3:4-6). Here was an escalation of hostility that eventuated in the conspiracy to destroy Jesus and His movement.

The arrival of the kingdom produces a crisis. God's new order confronts the old order with its values and structures and attitudes-the kingdom is judgment. As such it is not welcomed, neither by the world nor by the church

nor by the religious establishment. The world is not ready for the kingdom and it breaks in as confrontation and crisis.

This crisis is reflected in the metaphors of the new wine bursting the old wineskins, the new cloth tearing off the old dress, the fire set upon the earth, the sword of division cutting across the most sacred relationships of friends, families, or religious communities (Mark 2:22; Matthew 10:34; Luke 12:49). The memory of the message of the kingdom is a subversive memory, a power for transformation, confrontation, and subversion.

This confrontation comes to the disciples in the kingdom as a call to conversion and repentance (*metanoia*, *epistrephein*), a call to put themselves in line with the in-breaking kingdom.<sup>(12)</sup> "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is coming near: repent and believe the good news" (Mark 1:14-15). Conversion in the kingdom is turning around and joining the movement of the kingdom.<sup>(13)</sup> This conversion implies the total commitment of discipleship (Matthew 19:23; Luke 19:1-10; 14:15-26; Mark 8:31-35; Luke 9:57-62).

Finally, the call to participate in the kingdom movement means an invitation to participate in Jesus' passion: "If anyone wants to follow me, s/he has to forget him/herself, take the cross and follow me" (Mark 8:34f).

### **III. AN ECLIPSE OF THE KINGDOM?**

In the overall paradigm of the kingdom, we can distinguish these three dimensions but we cannot separate them. Today we are familiar with the concept of a paradigm as a worldview, as an integrated frame of reference, a model, through which we see and interpret reality and to which we relate our experiences and our data from reality. This concept was first used in relation to science. Once in a while, with new experiences, new data, and new perceptions, a shift of paradigms is necessary, like the shift from the pre-Copernican to the Copernican view of the universe. This has also happened in theology and mission throughout the history of the church. The sixteenth-century Reformation or the Evangelical Revival or the Enlightenment are good examples of periods of major shifts of paradigms.

#### **A. The apostolic shift of paradigms**

What happened to Jesus' paradigm? Apparently there was an eclipse of the kingdom already in the New Testament writings. Watch what happens when we move from the Gospel of Luke to the Acts of the Apostles, books by the same author. The proclamation of the kingdom by Jesus becomes the proclamation of Christ (the Messiah) in the apostolic kerygma.<sup>(15)</sup> What we have is a christological concentration. The shift was from the kingdom to the king! The kingdom for the apostolic generation has now a name and a face: Jesus Christ!<sup>(16)</sup>

This shift is in both continuity and discontinuity with the original message and mission of Jesus. The apostolic proclamation was a continuation of Jesus' proclamation, with attention now given to some new events in the story of God's action in the world as part of the Christian message of the kingdom: the crucifixion and the resurrection of Jesus and the experience of the Holy Spirit. According to Luke, these changes were taking place inside the paradigm of the kingdom (Acts 1:3 provides the link). Jesus is acclaimed and proclaimed as the Messiah, the King, who had come and was expected to come in the future with power and glory. Philip the evangelist was evan-

gelizing Samaria, "preaching Jesus and the kingdom of God" (Acts 8:12). Paul was preaching Christ and the kingdom of God, persuading with the Scriptures throughout the synagogues in Asia and Macedonia (Acts 14:22; 19:8; 28:23). Luke ends his second volume with Paul in the capital of the Roman Empire, "preaching the kingdom of God and teaching about Jesus Christ quite openly and unhindered" (Acts 28:30-31).

## **B. Translation and Contextualization**

When we go to the letters of Paul, however, the kingdom of God is no longer the dominant paradigm. When the Apostle mentions the kingdom, it is more in terms of the inheritance of the eternal kingdom or its present reality in terms of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (Romans 14:17). In Paul's eschatological vision, the kingdom of God is presently the kingdom of Christ, until "God will be all in all" (I Corinthians 15:24-26,28). The lordship of Christ over the believer, the church, and the world has become, actually, the equivalent of the kingdom of God!

In its effort to contextualize the Christian message to the non-Jew in the Graeco-Roman world, a new paradigm is taking shape in terms of salvation and its cognate words: reconciliation, justification, sanctification, glorification. (These are precisely the terms that have become so familiar in the Wesleyan tradition). This emerging and complex paradigm in the making might be called the soteriological paradigm.

With the Gospel of John we have a different form of translation and contextualization. The kingdom is mentioned on just one occasion, namely, in the dialogue between Jesus and Nicodemus in chapter 3. After that, the message is coined in a totally new set of images and vocabulary, most particularly in forms of the polemic connotations of "light" and "life."

In this process of translation and contextualization, the shift of paradigms was opening up new meanings and closing off some others from the original message of Jesus. It is to the credit of the early church that, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, this shift was taking place side by side with the process of preserving and passing on the original tradition of Jesus on the kingdom of God, the process which turned into the substance of the synoptic gospels. Without this dialectic between tradition and translation (contextualization) the world would have lost the substance of the Christian gospel and its meaning for future generations.(17)

## **C. Reductionist versions of the kingdom**

So, the kingdom of God paradigm has not been under total eclipse at any time in the history of the church, but it has been partially appropriated. And the problem has been that a partial dimension of the kingdom has been taken as absolute, as the total meaning of the Christian gospel. This reductionism of the kingdom to one dimension has happened now and again in the "World Parish."(18)

1. For instance, we had the patristic reduction of the kingdom, transferring it to a transcendent realm, something like Plato's realm of eternal ideas. The kingdom was reduced to its eternal dimensions, without any historical significance. We might call this type a metaphysical paradigm. It is quite evident in some of the ecumenical creeds of the patristic centuries. John Wesley inherited this metaphysical paradigm through the Church of England

and its Articles of Religion but part of his creative contribution was to go beyond the metaphysical limits of traditional interpretations through a fresh experience of the Spirit in his own life and times. Unfortunately, his theologizing was done before the maturation of historico-critical exegesis of the gospels, which brought to the fore the kingdom of God paradigm in Jesus' teaching.

2. Then we had the ecclesiastical reduction of the kingdom of God under the decisive influence of St. Augustine. He began his converted life as a millenarist who expected the millennium on earth. But he later affirmed that the church was itself the millennium. The church is the kingdom of God on earth; to enter the church is to enter the kingdom. This ecclesiastical paradigm is still dominant. For instance, the Church Growth school holds to a practical identification of mission and church growth, of the church and the kingdom on earth.

3. The monastic reduction came as a protest of the worldliness of the church. The monastic and ascetic movements tried to incarnate the kingdom in saintly lives and the beloved community, taking seriously the challenge to discipleship in the kingdom, but forsaking God's working in the world in all of life. Its vision of mission was to raise islands of the kingdom in the ocean of a world contaminated by sin.

4. A step forward was the evangelical reduction of the kingdom, which located the working of the kingdom in the inner life of the believer-the kingdom of God in the human heart. The presence of the kingdom is manifested in the forgiveness of sins, conversion, justification or sanctification. The realm of God's sovereignty is the individual heart and only indirectly, through individuals, does God rule the rest of creation. Lutherans stressed justification as the sign; the Reformed insisted on sanctification; John Wesley tried to recognize both ways of God's working in human hearts and proclaimed God's working for us and in us.

John Wesley was a direct inheritor and the most influential propagator of the evangelical paradigm in the eighteenth century. He received it through the pietistic religious societies of his times and it became a decisive experience in Aldersgate. Wesley made the best possible use of this personal dimension of the kingdom in his sermons on the Sermon on the Mount and in his Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament, where he speaks of "the present inward kingdom," manifested in happiness and holiness, and described with Paul's words as "righteousness, and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Explanatory Notes . . . on Matthew 5:3; 6:33; etc.)

5. As a reaction to the ecclesiastical and evangelical reductions of the eschatological message, now and again in the history of the church, particularly during the Reformation and in the last century, we have had an eruption of all sorts of apocalyptic reductions of the kingdom. In these cases, the kingdom is pushed away from history and is seen as a cataclysmic event at the end. There is nothing we can do about it, history has no meaning, there is no room for improvement or transformation. The kingdom is not here in this life.

6. Finally, we had, by the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth, the social reduction of the kingdom. The kingdom of God on earth is a program of social reform and transformation through the application of the teachings of Jesus. This was the interpretation of the so-called

Social Gospel. Blended with the ideology of scientific progress and democratic social ideas, and in some cases mixed with the ideology of Manifest Destiny, it became a partial recovery of the original message of Jesus on the kingdom of God in its social and historical dimension.

#### **IV. THE KINGDOM AND THE WORLD PARISH**

So, when we select one dimension of the kingdom of God paradigm, we miss fundamental dimensions of the Christian gospel and we run the risk of distortion and even infidelity.

This is why I believe that we need to expose ourselves to the total paradigm of the kingdom in Jesus' original proclamation and to put in context our own inherited paradigms, be they metaphysical, ecclesiastical, evangelical, or social.

C. Peter Wagner confessed that he had read the kingdom with Church Growth eyes. What he is supposed to do is to read Church Growth with kingdom eyes! In like manner, we may be reading the kingdom message with Holiness or Liberation eyes. What we are supposed to do is to read holiness or liberation with kingdom eyes! It is not a matter of selecting texts in the line of our concern with sanctification of believers or the liberation of people, but to see the place of sanctification and liberation in a kingdom perspective.

We currently may be attempting to domesticate the kingdom to our "World Parish," or to our Wesleyan tradition, instead of putting the church under the judgment and at the service of the kingdom.

#### **V. JOHN WESLEY AND THE KINGDOM PARADIGM**

This would be the time to ask where our Wesleyan tradition, and John Wesley in particular, fit into this. I have wished for a long time to explore Wesley's stance concerning the kingdom, but so far I have not been able to do it. The opportunity to learn from Leon D. Hynson excites me, for he has worked with the subject and is going to share with us in this meeting of the WTS.

But let me wrap up our proposed subject by noting which dimensions of the kingdom paradigm, as we have summarized it, were prominent in the preaching and teaching of John Wesley.

A. It is clear that Wesley was very strong in proclaiming the gospel as a gift of grace. His emphasis on prevenient grace and the universality of grace, over against predestinationism, are right there. Wesley joins the sixteenth-century evangelical reformers in holding to the doctrine of justification by faith, and, like them, he believes Christian spirituality to be a gift of grace. This actually means affirming the presence of the kingdom-that-has-come in Jesus Christ.

B. On the other hand, his rejection of antinomianism, his emphasis on "holiness of heart and life," and his life-long insistence on Christian perfection in love, put Wesley in the present dimension of the in-breaking kingdom as challenge, confrontation, and total commitment. The Wesleyan movement is a movement of discipleship in the kingdom-costly discipleship. This movement, for Wesley, is not apart from the world but in the midst of the world.(19) The greatness of Wesley as pastor and theologian lies pre-

cisely in his dialectic between justification and sanctification. The one without the other cancels the tension of the in-breaking kingdom.

C. It is not clear to me just how important the future dimension of the kingdom is for Wesley. On the one hand, his hope and affirmation of the eternal kingdom are evident and strong.<sup>(20)</sup> But on the other hand, it does not appear that this hope in the future kingdom bears on our human hopes and needs for the transformation of society—the meaning of the kingdom hope for our present historical tasks. Pragmatically, Wesley related his hope to human endeavor; theologically, I do not know that he was able to articulate it.

After all, Wesley used the resources of Biblical scholarship that were accessible in his time, but he lived before the great explosion in historical and exegetical studies of the last one hundred years. He lived in an era just prior to the advent of scientific social analysis with its criticism of social structures as well. I am sure that were he alive today, Wesley would make good use of those tools, exegetical and sociological, in order better to understand the word of God and to proclaim with integrity and power the gospel of the kingdom.

Wesley's search for a Biblical foundation and for a holistic gospel would be richly rewarded by the contemporary recovery of the kingdom of God paradigm.

Charles R. Wilson, in his chapter, "Christology: the Incarnate Word of God," recognizes that the kingdom of God was the dominant theme of Jesus and after mentioning some famous historical founders and their dominant themes, he says, "For Wesley, the theme was Christian Perfection . . . for Jesus Christ the Kingdom of God."<sup>(21)</sup>

I am sure that John Wesley would agree that his life-long concern had to be judged and seen in the perspective of the kingdom, and not the other way around.

The World Parish, the church in the world, is not the kingdom, but she is at the service of the kingdom as witness and sign.

## NOTES

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2 C. Peter Wagner, *Church Growth and the Word of God: A Biblical Mandate* (New York: Harper and Row, 1981), pp. 2-4.

3 Norman Perrin, *Rediscovering the Teachings of Jesus* (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), p. 54.

4 Arias, op. cit., pp. xv-xviii. 7-9.

5 Ibid., p. 12.

6 Ibid., pp. 132-133. 1-4.

7 On the words "at hand" and "has come near" (*engiken*) see W. G. Kummel, *Promise and Fulfillment: The Message of Jesus* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1957), pp. 105-109.

8 Perrin, pp.63-67; C. H. Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom of God* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1961), p. 28nl, on the verb "has arrived"(ephthasen).

9 On the phrase "in the midst of you" (*entos humon*), see W. G. Kummel, pp.32-35; J. Jeremias, *New Testament Theology: The Proclamation of Jesus* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971), p. 101.

10 Etienne Trocme, *Jesus de Nazareth* (Neuchatel: Delachaux et Nestlé, 1971), pp. 101-110.

11 Georgia Harkness, *Understanding the Kingdom of God* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1974), p. 55.

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16 Leslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret* (London: SPCK, 1978), p. 44.

17 Arias, op. cit., chapter 5, "The Eclipse of the Kingdom."

18 Mortimer Arias, *Venga TuReino* (Mexico, D. F.: CUPSA,1980), chapter II, "El Eclipse del Reino de Dios."

19 Cf. David Lowes Watson, *The Early Methodist Class-Meeting: Its Origin and Significance* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1985), pp. 42, 91,129-133, 137-140, 145.

20 Cf. John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament*, key passages on the future kingdom.

21 Charles R. Wilson, "Christology: The Incarnate Word of God" in Charles W. Carter, gen. ed., *A Contemporary Wesleyan Theology* (2 vols.; Grand Rapids: Francis Asbury Press of Zondervan Publishing House, 1983),I, 336.

# JOHN WESLEY'S THEOLOGY OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

by  
Leon O. Hynson

The Kingdom of God! *Was ist Das?* Evidently it says something about God, about God's rule and about a realm of rulership, and of the citizens of that realm. Richard Niebuhr defined American Christianity by the rubric: "The Kingdom of God in America." Sometimes the concept referred to God's sovereignty, the kingdom on earth, or in heaven, or the reign of Christ in the hearts of women and men. It may have reference to the liberal goal of a truly redeemed society, a post-millennialist view of the victory of Christ, or a pre-millennialist's view of the second coming of Jesus. J. S. Whale has discussed "The Crown Rights of the Redeemer" to describe the rights of Jesus among the nations of the earth.(1) This is a theme emanating from Reformed theology found later in the hymns of Charles Wesley.(2)

Richard Niebuhr extravagantly criticized the liberal perspective on the kingdom:

The romantic conception of the kingdom of God involved no discontinuities, no crises, no tragedies, or sacrifices, no 1099 of all things, no cross and resurrection. In ethics it reconciled the interests of the individual with those of society by means of faith in a natural identity of interests or in the benevolent, altruistic character of man....

Christ the Redeemer became Jesus the teacher or the spiritual genius in whom the religious capacities of mankind were fully developed....

A God without wrath brought men without sin into a kingdom without judgment through . . . a Christ without a cross.(3)

If liberal theology of the Kingdom could be disposed of by such a sophisticated blast, neo-orthodoxy felt the contrary winds of criticism:

"O pity the pupil of Barth!  
Though he seeks to drive sin from his heart,  
And by evil he's frightened

Then his fear is more heightened For he knows that there's no way to start."

William Temple, after hearing Reinhold Niebuhr, wrote,

"At Stanwick, when Niebuhr had quit it,  
Said a young man:  
At last I have hit it,  
Since I cannot do right  
I must find out tonight  
The best sin to commit—and commit it."(4)

Niebuhr reputedly compared the church in the world with Noah in the Ark: "If it weren't for the storm on the outside we couldn't stand the smell on the inside."

Perhaps the new orthodoxy was so preoccupied with the rule of evil, with such a radical sense of historical tragedy, that it made human exigency rather than divine promise the realistic factor for humanity. In essence, the Kingdom of God was so transcendent that its power in history was muted.

What about the Wesleyan heritage? To answer this question we must go back to Wesley (the task at hand), but it will also require the subsequent tracking of the concept through his theological inheritors (a future task). With regard to our tracks, it sometimes isn't clear whether we are coming or going. Durwood Foster has described as a deficiency in Wesleyan theology,

The lack of an eschatological envisagement of God's realm as an embracing frame of reference for the salvific process.... The blessed community of mankind and christic dominion over the whole world, including nature, hang therefore loosely related to the Wesleyan *ordo salutis*.

Foster appeals for recognition of "the fructifying of all the potencies of life . . . in the vision of God's realm: the tilling of the earth . . . the release into liberty of the whole traveling creation.(6)

From my perspective, this thesis lacks conviction. There is an "eschatological envisagement of God's realm . . . for the salvific process." Wesleyan theology does not stop with the order of salvation. Wesley proposed a comprehensive concept of salvation which surely bursts beyond the borders of the *ordo salutis*. The *ordo salutis* is indicative of Wesley's preoccupation with the conversion and sanctification of men and women. To express the comprehensive conception of salvation, Wesley's theology of the Kingdom should be brought into consideration, for it functions more broadly than the *ordo salutis*. That doesn't deprive the latter of its specialized value when Wesleyan theologians speak of personal salvation or evangelical transformation. We ought in fact to question whether Wesley proposed a bifurcated view of salvation, separating the personal and comprehensive. I do not think he did, although every theological craftsman divides in order to analyze and discuss. And Wesley was a craftsman!

Evidences of the comprehensive, redemptive possibilities in Christ are seen in Wesley's sermons: "The General Spread of the Gospel," "The New Creation," "The General Deliverance," "The Sermon on the Lord's Prayer," the "Thoughts Upon Slavery" and the sermon "The Reformation of Manners." Certainly the dominant motif in these is the gradual transformation

which comes through the Gospel and the church's ministry to reform the nation. Yet no matter how we view this, there is continuity between the order of salvation and the process of social transformation. Clarence Bence is correct in describing the manner by which Wesley's sermon "The General Spread of the Gospel" extrapolates from individual salvation to the whole of society. The "theology of grace is certainly transformational." (6)

The best synopsis of Wesley's theology of the Kingdom may be one of his sermons on The Lord's Prayer:

In order that the name of God may be hallowed, we pray that His kingdom, the kingdom of Christ, may come. This kingdom then comes to a particular person, when he "repents and believes the gospel"; when he is taught of God, not only to know himself, but to know Jesus Christ and Him crucified. As "this is the life eternal, to know the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom He hath sent"; so it is the kingdom of God begun below, set up in the believer's heart; "the Lord God Omnipotent then 'reigneth,' " when He is known through Christ Jesus. He taketh unto Himself His mighty power, that He may subdue all things unto Himself. He goeth on in the soul conquering and to conquer, till He hath put all things under His feet, till "every thought is brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ."

When therefore God shall "give His Son the heathen for His inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for His possession"; when "all kingdoms shall bow before Him, and all nations shall do Him service"; when "the mountain of the Lord's house," the church of Christ, "shall be established in the top of the mountains"; when "the fullness of the Gentiles shall come in, and all Israel shall be saved"; then shall it be seen, that "the Lord is King, and hath put on glorious apparel," appearing to every soul of man as King of kings and Lord of lords. And it is meet for all those who love His appearing, to pray that He would hasten the time; that this His kingdom, the kingdom of grace, may come quickly, and swallow up all the kingdoms of the earth- that all mankind receiving Him for their King, truly believing in His name, may be filled with righteousness, and peace, and joy, with holiness and happiness, till they are removed hence into His heavenly kingdom, there to reign with Him for ever and ever.

For this also we pray in those words, "Thy kingdom come"; we pray for the coming of His everlasting kingdom, the kingdom of glory in heaven, which is the continuation and perfection of the kingdom of grace on earth. Consequently this, as well as the preceding petition, is offered up for the whole intelligent creation, who are all interested in this grand event, the final renovation of all things, by God's putting an end to misery and sin, to infirmity and death, taking all things into His own hands, and setting up the kingdom which endureth through all ages."(7)

Wesley's theology of the kingdom is wholistic, including many differing, yet complementary elements. There is at its center a soteriological dimension which imbues all other aspects. We may identify this as the "gospel dispensation," or to paraphrase Jesus, "a kingdom purchased by my blood,

for all who have believed in me, with the faith which wrought by love" (Mt.25:34), (8)"The inward present kingdom" (Mt. 13:31, 35), the "Gospel" (Mt.21:43), "true religion" (Rom. 14:17), "real religion" (I Cor. 4:20), "the kingdom of grace" (Mt. 6:10), "heaven already opened to the soul," "the proper disposition for the glory of heaven rather than the attainment of it" (Mt.3:2), a "spiritual kingdom " into which realm enter those who repent (Mt.4:17). The kingdom is in the hearts of believers, but it is also observable (Mt.4:17). For Wesley it is a state to be presently enjoyed, especially visible in the context of a society formed on earth (Mt. 3:2). It denotes individuals but also the "whole body of believers" (Mt.4:17). Here and now, in our hearts and everywhere "we want Christ in His royal character to reign in our hearts and subdue all things to Himself" (Mt.1:16). This is the "evangelical transformation of the world.(9)

The process by which this subduing develops is gradual, but sure. While the kingdoms of earth have sustained long rebellion, usurping the rule of our Lord Christ, we wait the day when "The kingdom of the world is become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever."(Rev. 11:15)

This province has been in the enemy's hands: it now returns to its rightful Master.... Is become-in reality, all things (and so the kingdoms of the world) are God's in all ages: Yet Satan and the present world, with its kings and lords, are risen against the Lord and against His anointed. God now puts an end to this monstrous rebellion and maintains His right to all things. (Rev.11:15)

Wesley commenting on the Lord's Prayer, petitions God:

May thy kingdom of grace come quickly and swallow up all the kingdoms of the earth! May all mankind receiving Thee, O Christ, for their king, truly believing in Thy name, be filled with righteousness, peace and joy, with holiness and happiness, till they are removed into Thy kingdom of glory, to reign with Thee for ever and ever. (Mt. 6:10)

"All things that were or are created are God's by sovereign right-Yours is the Kingdom." (Mt. 6:13)

Those who live by the rule of Christ ("a kingdom cherishes willing subjects," Col. 1:13), live in the world for the world. The kingdom is a state to be enjoyed on earth (Mt. 3:2), a state of "happiness and holiness." A Christian life-style, lived in the society of those who are happy and holy, is to season others (Mt. 5:13). The subjects of Christ are examples of the rule of Christ in all the world. Like lights on the brow of a hill, they cannot be hid. Bearing the realized kingdom of heaven in their hearts ("grace . . . is glory begun," Rom. 8:30), seeking to salt the earth with their presence, they progress toward the kingdom of glory, to the consummation of all things. Jesus is crowned Lord, head over all. God is gathering together into one in Christ all things, that He "might recapitulate, reunite, and place in order again, all things under Christ, their common Head." (Eph. 1:10)

To repeat, the soteriological concern is central, giving continuity to the theme of the Kingdom of God/Kingdom of Heaven (which to Wesley means

the same-cf. Mt. 3:2). However, there are other sub-themes which comprise and complete the soteriological. Identified broadly in the prior discussion, they should be detailed more specifically and carefully.

First, we should consider the evangelical aspect in Wesley's theology of the kingdom. We recognize his fundamental belief in the promise of Christ, through His death and rising again, to free humanity from sin's bondage and raise us to new life (Mt. 10:11). Following the apostolic paradigm (see I Cor. 15:1-4), Wesley gives particular attention to the *ordo salutis*. When Wesley deals with the kingdom it always possesses a Christological referent, with the royal character of Jesus central and the kerygmatic aspects (death and resurrection) largely assumed. The "gospel dispensation" signified in kingdom theology describes the work of Christ in its soteriological expression, i.e., referring to conversion, justification, and sanctification. Through these stages, Christ's reign is begun and develops until the consummation. The experience of conversion is the inauguration (renewal) of the kingdom in us. Through justification and sanctification, the comprehensive rule of Christ at the end of history is experienced in foretaste. We may call this "inaugurated" or "realized eschatology." Wesley accepts the Pauline concept of the earnest of the Spirit as both pledge and foretaste (Eph.1:14) of our inheritance. "There is a difference between an earnest and a pledge. A pledge is to be restored when the debt is paid, but an earnest is not taken away, but completed. Such is an earnest of the Spirit. The first fruits of it we have, Rom. 8:23, and we wait for the fulness." (II Cor. 2:22)

The kingdom of God/heaven is, secondly, defined corporately. It describes the formation of a society, the church comprised of those in whose heart God reigns. Begun on earth, it is meant finally for heaven, the kingdom of glory. (Mt. 3:2) All that the church is, the church in ebb and flow, in majesty or invaded by the "mystery of iniquity"; the church as willing subjects, saints in whom holiness and happiness are to be epitomized; the ecclesia as the reforming agency for Church and State; the church as salt and light in the world, are aspects of the church in the world. In the parable of the wheat and the darnel, a parable of the kingdom of heaven, Wesley sees the difference between imitation (darnel) which is "very like wheat" and the authentic (the wheat). "Darnel, in the church, is properly outside Christians, such as have neither the form nor the power." Such persons must not be uprooted lest some genuine wheat be destroyed! That appearances may be very deceiving, Jesus taught and Wesley recognized. (See Mt. 13:24-30)

It is the church, the society on earth, which is the divine agency for transforming human society. Wesley holds no illusions about the establishment of the kingdom of God in any temporal form. However, there is no doubt about the final kingdom to be founded in the end of history. Between the earnest of the Spirit, the first fruits of the kingdom, and the fulfillment of the kingdom in glory, is the gradual leavening effect of the yeast, the growth of the mustard seed into the great tree. The "already" and the "not yet" are in continuity and identical in nature although not in degree. Hope is based on the final harvesting in glory. The first fruits are the early promise of far more to come, like the first taste of strawberries in spring, like the tiniest stirrings of a baby whose birth is months away, like the dream house which in the beginning is yours but still under the control of the mortgagor (and the future?). Wesley's concept of hope is not illusory, but is fed by preliminary

samplings of the future kingdom's banquet feast. When the church is truly a *koinonia*, the breaking of bread from house to house is a sign of the kingdom when believers shall come from east and west, and "will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven" (Mt.8:11). Wesley here thinks of the gospel promises, covenanted with Abraham and shared with many who "shall embrace the terms, and enjoy the rewards of the gospel covenant established with Abraham." (Mt. 8:11)

In this paper, if we are to see the significance of the church in the world, i.e., the kingdom of heaven among the people of earth, we should study Wesley's view of the church, "the theater of the divine wisdom" (Eph. 3:10). What precisely is its role as a society of saints? Wesley's position on the kingdom leads us to conclude that the real presence of the kingdom is found in redeemed persons, and in the social organism called ecclesia. The kingdom is active among men and women, of all conditions, experiences, religions races, or opinions, through the church of the Holy Spirit.

Thirdly, the kingdom is understood in eschatological terms. The kingdom within the hearts of believers is given earthly incarnation in the church, the society of subjects "gathered to God by His Son" (Mt. 3:2). This same society is to be with God in glory (Wesley speaks of the ecclesial society, more than of individual Christians, as living on earth and in heaven). The Church in glory is the church triumphant.

The eschatological significance of the kingdom is critical to the inaugural and the extended dimensions of the kingdom. If we accept Wesley's interpretation, the kingdom of glory not only completes the kingdom within us and in the ecclesia, but most importantly, gives the preliminary its significance. Without glory, the present kingdom is truncated; it promises more than it can produce. Dreams and hopes are greater than the prospects they envision, if there is no kingdom of glory.

Arthur Miller's "After the Fall" describes Quentin's search for lost transcendence and hope: "the string that ties my hand to heaven has been cut." As Flannery O'Conner expresses it, the Kingdom of Christ gives us worth. A young Southern boy is baptized by an itinerant evangelist.

"Have you ever been baptized?" the preacher asked.

"What's that?" he murmured.

"If I baptize you," the preacher said, "you'll be able to go to the Kingdom of Christ.... You won't be the same again," the preacher said. "You'll count."

After baptism, the preacher declared: "You count now. You didn't count before."(10)

## **COMMENT**

In Wesley's theology of the Kingdom, clear lines of continuity exist between (1) the kingdom inaugurated in conversion and sanctification leading to holiness and happiness, (2) the Kingdom incarnated in and extended through the church (the fellowship, i.e., society, of believing, holy persons), and (3) the kingdom in glory, the complement and perfection of the kingdom on earth. Unlike some, who see no connection between hope and the future achievement of hope's content, Wesley believes in the dynamic unity of first fruits and final harvest. An essential identity exists between beginning and completion.

## **EXTENSION OF THE KINGDOM**

Recognizing the unity or connectedness of Wesley's theology of the kingdom, we may inquire concerning his strategy for the extension of the kingdom here on earth. I have sought elsewhere to show the theology for social reformation which Wesley gave his heirs.(11)

Critical to that analysis are the trinitarian themes focusing on the creation of persons as moral and spiritual beings, made in God's image; on the words of Christ as reconciler and example; and on the Spirit as God's presence among us for empowerment and our "presence" in the world. The church is the earthly vehicle of that divine work.

### **The Royalty of Christ**

Basic to the expansion of the kingdom in the world and the transformation of society is Christ's royal preeminence. In establishing the premise of Christ's authority Wesley recognizes the continuing patience Christ displays toward earthly powers. Human authority, whether founded in democratic or totalitarian governments, is always sustained uncertainly. Monarchs wear their crowns nervously, presidents and prime ministers always walk the tight rope over questions of personal ambition, popular sovereignty, and political opposition. King Jesus bears with patient tolerance the rebellion and usurpation of power; power originally given by God to those who hold it.

Since Christ is king, to be revealed in full splendor in the consummation, "The apocalypse of Jesus Christ" (Revelation 1:1), the church may resist evil powers in the sure promise that its work in the world will be crowned with grace and, finally, glory. The Methodists sang their song of praise to Jesus the King:(12)

"Messiah, Prince of Peace, Where men each other tear;  
Where war is learned they must confess; Thy kingdom is not there.  
But shall he (Satan) still devour The souls redeemed by Thee?  
Jesus, stir up Thy glorious power And end the apostasy!

No. 447

Again,

O come, Thou Radiant Morning Star, Again in human darkness, shine!  
Arise resplendent from afar! Assert Thy royalty divine!  
Thy sway over all the earth maintain, And now begin Thy glorious reign.

No. 445

The theology of the kingdom abounds in the hymns of Charles Wesley, in the hymnal edited by John. A review of 280 hymns shows the king / kingdom theme in one out of six. The themes of the kingdom seen in Wesley's theology are in the hymns:

"To us it is given in Jesus to know A kingdom of heaven, a heaven below"  
No. 19

Again,

"Find on earth the life of heaven: Life the life of heaven above, All the life of glorious love."  
No. 20

Or,

"How can it be, Thou Heavenly King, That Thou should'st us to glory bring; Make slaves the partners of Thy throne."  
No. 26

And,

"Bold I approach the eternal throne  
And claim the crown through Christ my own."  
No. 201

Again,

"The unspeakable grace He obtained for our race,  
And the spirit of faith He imparts;  
Then, then we conceive how in heaven they live  
By the kingdom of God in our hearts."  
No. 488

And, last,

1. The Lord is King, and earth submits,  
However impatient, to His sway;  
Between the Cherubim He sits,  
And makes His restless foes obey.  
2. All power to our Jesus given  
Over earth's rebellious sons He reigns;  
He mildly rules the hosts of heaven;  
And holds the powers of hell in chains.  
3. In vain doth Satan rage his hour,  
Beyond his chain he cannot go;  
Our Jesus shall stir up His power,  
And soon avenge us of our foe.  
7. Come, glorious Lord, the rebels spurn;  
Scatter Thy foes, victorious King:  
And Gath and Askelon shall mourn,  
And all the sons of God shall sing:  
8. Shall magnify the sovereign grace  
Of Him that sits upon the throne;  
And earth and heaven conspire to praise  
Jehovah, and His conquering Son.  
No. 280

The royalty of Christ means that the kingdom of God, manifested in our hearts and in the ecclesia will be victorious in God's world. The time between the times shall be viewed hopefully. Wesley's approach contradicts the apocalyptic pessimism of some pre-millennialist theology. May we repeat that Christ's reign in foretaste and fulfillment cannot be separated. Wesleyans are to live in the sure persuasion that the quest for holiness-perfect love for God and our neighbor-is a participation in the blessed hope. They are to live hopefully. That counsel stands despite human inclinations to agree with Alasdair MacIntyre: "I am not a pessimist. Pessimists are people who believe something dreadful is about to happen. I believe it's already happened." (13)

### **Entrance and Participation-Conversion and Sanctification**

Wesley's theology makes conversion the rite of initiation into the kingdom, and sanctification the pilgrimage through the kingdom on earth until the glory of heaven is reached. Conversion conveys citizenship, making us subjects. For Wesley, the kingdom exists in the happiness and holiness of those who have received Christ as king. Conversion creates the moral and spiritual transformation which releases us from the autonomy of our self contained lives into the freedom of the Son.

Those who are converted enter into a new level of loves. New motivational directions are opened. While prevenient grace makes it possible for all humanity to express degrees of love and friendship for others, the unregenerated nature is expressed by a will-to-power, our inclination to be anchored autonomously, rather than being rooted and grounded in God.(14)

Much significant debate has occurred over Wesley's movement from personal to social salvation. Through Rauschenbusch and many more we have learned of the sterility of personal regeneration which experiences arrested development when it is turned inward. Wesley has taught us that conversion changes our very nature from self love, which may be expressed by a circular analogy, to Christian love, which may be characterized by a cruciform figure reaching upward and outward, to God and neighbor. Theodore Runyon writes, "Conversion is decisive for Wesley because it is a participation in a new ontological reality, God's own renewing of the cosmos." It achieves significance as a "sign of eschatological renewal.(15)

The fundamental preparation for the kingdom is grace. Conversion is the decisive inaugural aspect of the divine kingdom. Through the church in this present age this moves finally to eschatological renewal or cosmic transformation. Let no one doubt the Wesleyan hope of "the universal restoration, which is to succeed the universal destruction...." "For all the earth shall be a more beautiful Paradise than Adam ever saw." And the world of humanity will be "an unmixed state of holiness and happiness, far superior to that which Adam enjoyed in Paradise."(16)

Wesley's sermon on "The Lord's Prayer" describes the meaning of sanctification in the kingdom of God:

The meaning [of "Thy will be done"] is, that all the inhabitants of the earth, even the whole race of mankind, may do the will of their Father, . . . as willingly as the holy angels: . . . yea, and that they may do it perfectly. . . (17)

James Logan rightly interprets Wesley's theology:

The crucial importance of this passage is that within the framework of a doctrine of the Kingdom, Wesley states the theological goal itself—"may do it perfectly" or perfection. In contrast to Calvinism, . . . Wesley held to the possibility of doing the perfect will of God within the scope of time and history. When this teleological goal is set beyond history an ethical nerve is severed. When this same teleological goal is set within history an ethical dynamic is unleashed, which in the truest sense is both inwardly and outwardly, in Niebuhr's term, "transformationist."

### **The Kingdom in the Earthly Society of Believers**

Following the theological commitments of the Anglican Church, Wesley recognizes the church as men and women who have achieved a fiduciary relationship with Christ. The church is comprised of the regenerate. The Thirty-nine Articles stressed living faith, not simply assent, as the basis for membership in the church. The church is a grafted fellowship ("grafted into Christ by baptism"-Acts 5:11).

The ecclesia is characterized by the preaching of the pure word of God (Thirty-nine Articles). The New Testament church is a company "called by the gospel" (Acts 5:11). With regard to kingdom theology, preaching is critical to the expansion of the kingdom. In the "General Spread of the Gospel," Wesley asserts the growth of the gospel in the world, until the time the Word has covered the earth. Wesley does not see the gradual diminishing, but the enlargement of the Word's power throughout society and history. God is "already renewing the face of the earth: And we have strong reason to hope . . . that he will never intermit this blessed work of his Spirit . . . until he hath put a period to sin and misery, and infirmity, and death, and re-established universal holiness and happiness...."(19)

How does the church become a transforming agency in the world? How does it penetrate the age and produce reform? By the preached Word. By the Word of God spoken to the political, economic, social, sexual and class circumstances! To reform the nation and the church by the preaching of the Gospel! The Methodists joined reform and the preaching of Scriptural holiness. Later Methodists recognized that the conjunction "and" became the preposition "by" in Wesley's ministry and, sometimes in America, they began to express it with the preposition.(20)

Wesley's doctrine of the church identifies its social character. In his sermon on Matthew 5:13-16, on salt and light, Wesley insists that Christianity is social. Its genius is discovered through public and social expression. The church is called to transform society through the gospel and the gospel spreads through the world in a gradual way (seed to tree, yeast through flour).

Wesley's gradualism is evident in his tract on slavery and his "Reformation of Manners," as well as in the parables. Those who demand immediate change in social abuses sometimes find difficulty with Wesley's strategy for social change. Wesley called for reformation, the use of the law of God as a canon showing the need for social change. He stresses the abolition of slavery as a firm principle based on natural law and salvation history. But, permit a caveat! Do not confuse strategy with principle in reviewing Wesley's ethics. The principle he evoked is this: Slavery is absolutely contrary to God's

law, to justice, mercy and truth. That is specific! The strategy is realistic, evidenced in Wesley's gradualism. Wesley doesn't approve the continued practice of slavery, but he is thoroughly aware of entrenched evil, of original sin. Liberal theology sought the goal of freedom without an adequate sense of the sinfulness in the world and the church which digs in and refuses to give up vested interests.

Wesley believed that war is grounded in sin and pride. Kings call their followers to war for selfish ends, for more territory or power. But with the spread of the gospel, war will finally be finished. Jesus' kingdom is a kingdom of peace. "Messiah, prince of Peace. Jesus stir up Thy glorious power, and end the apostasy!"

Whatever the evils of society-slavery, war, poverty-the gospel becomes the critical catalyst which re-motivates and empowers, it presents Christian morality as the criteria for judging social behavior, and bestows the power for challenging and renewing it. Wesley held no tolerance for the delays which prevent or divert necessary social changes. Rather, he knew that evil will never easily yield its control, the "powers" will not give up their power, until the greater power of Christ prevails.(21) Poverty will exist as long as greed and ignorance last. The church cannot will poverty to end, but it can feed the hungry, clothe the naked, or as Wesley said, "give all you can." The strategy is the achievement of the goal as quickly as possible. There can be no tolerance of delay; there must be no doubt about the conflicts which will arise. Do not expect evil to disappear by incantations or by political, ecclesiastical, or judicial pronouncements, which are too often part of the problem and not the solution. Pray for a brave heart. A pure heart! Pray continually "Thy Kingdom come! Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." And, the sooner, the better. "Come quickly, Lord Jesus."

## NOTES

- 1 The Protestant Tradition (Cambridge: University Press, 1955), 265ff.
- 2 See my To Reform the Nation (Grand Rapids: Zondervan,1984),172, n.8.
- 3 The Kingdom of God in America, cited by Alec Vidler, The Church in an Age of Revolution (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1961), 212-13.
- 4 See Hugh Kerr, "Not Like They Used To," Theology Today (April,1975),3-5.
- 5 "Wesleyan Theology: Heritage and Task," in Wesleyan Theology Today, ed. Theodore Runyon (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1985), 33, 36-37.
- 6 "John Wesley's Teleological Hermeneutic," (Ph.D. dissertation, Emory University, 1981), 258, 59, 241.
- 7 John Wesley, "Upon Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount: V" in The Standard Sermons, I, ed. Edward H. Sugden, 5th ed. (London: Epworth Press,1961), 436, 37.

8 Scripture references in this paper usually refer to Wesley's Notes on the New Testament as well as Scripture passages. In the former sense, they serve as footnotes.

9 Bence, 222 n.1.

10 °Ray S. Anderson, *On Being Human* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 176, 179-80.

11 *To Reform the Nation*.

12 See John Wesley, *Hymn Book* (London: Wm. Reed, 1864), The numbers are for the hymns.

13 Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982), cited by Warren Bryan Martin, "Education for Character," *Faculty Dialogue*, No. 5 (Winter, 1985-86), 10.

14 Hendrikus Berkhof writes: "Sin is the refusal to find our anchoring there [in God]. Refusing the anchoring in God, one may try to find it in the world, or unanchored choose for one's own autonomous I." *Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979). 189, 90.

15 "What Is Methodism's Theological Contribution Today," in *Wesleyan Theology Today*, 11.

16 Wesley "The New Creation" *Works VI*, 290, 294-96.

17 *Works, V*, 337.

18 "Toward a Wesleyan Social Ethic," *Wesleyan Theology Today*, 368.

19 *Works, VI*, 288. See *Works V*, 337.

20 See my "Reformation and Perfection: The Social Gospel of Bishop Peck," *Methodist History* (January, 1978). Professor Logan asserts that "the mandate to 'spread scriptural holiness throughout the land' carries with it the assumption that social structures as well as individuals can be transformed and brought more and more into conformity with the divine law" *Wesleyan Theology Today*, 368, 369.

21 Wesley's gradualism should not be interpreted within the progress mentality characteristic of a century later. The sanctification of individuals is not uniform or continuous lacking deficiencies or failures. The same is true of society. However, the kingdom grows and the king finally reigns absolutely.

# **THE THEOLOGY OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD IN E. STANLEY JONES**

by  
David Bundy

"Kingdom of God" was a recurring theme of the writing and preaching of E. Stanley Jones (1884-1973) throughout his life as a missionary. His various concerns were expressed in twenty-eight books and more than 300 articles, many of which take a conceptualization of "Kingdom of God" as their organizing principle. It is the purpose of this essay to examine the development of the concept of "Kingdom of God" in Jones' work.

E. Stanley Jones was perhaps the best known of the thousands of Anglo-Saxon missionaries active in India in modern times. He is one of very few persons from the Wesleyan-Holiness movement to have made a major impact outside that movement during the twentieth century. The myth of Jones as missionary, revolutionary statesman, charismatic speaker, best-selling author, and spiritual giant remains unexamined. Perhaps because of the superhuman image, Jones has been the subject of very little critical reflection and research. Study has been hampered by lack of access to the papers and records of Jones whose heirs have not yet made them available to scholars. Even after access is eventually given, we may know little more since Jones himself went through his papers destroying many. For the moment, we are left with only the printed works, hundreds of sermons on tape, a few letters found in the papers of recipients, and the interviews granted to C. Chacko Thomas during the early 1950's.

Since little research has been undertaken, the status quaestionis can be quite brief. The earliest dissertation on Jones is that of C. Chacko Thomas presented at the University of Iowa in 1955. He focused on the period 1918-1930 with brief narrative summaries of the earlier periods and of the 1930's and 1940's. He describes Jones' missionary activity and methods and attempts to suggest their significance in the context of India. While the result is a superficial analysis, his work was, for more than three decades, the only serious scholarly treatment of Jones. It is particularly valuable for the interviews recorded with Jones and several of the people who knew him best. He noted the centrality of the "Kingdom of God" to Jones' thought but was forced to conclude, "the term 'Kingdom of God' seems to have no definite

meaning in his mind. He uses it indiscriminately to refer to something mystical which he cannot explain.'(1)

The dissertation of Martin Ross Johnson, presented in 1978, was a major advance. Giving up any effort to detail the work of the "historical Jones," Johnson focused on the "Christian Vision of E. Stanley Jones: Missionary Evangelist, Prophet, and Statesman." Despite the drawbacks in critical perspective suggested already by the title, Johnson presents an extensive, though uncritical summary of Jones' teaching and theoretical structures. He argues that the "Kingdom of God" was a central concern for Jones but fails to understand the significance of Jones' experience and context for his theological development.(2)

Richard W. Taylor, in an article in the *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, published in 1982, took quite another approach. He placed Jones in his Indian context and recognized elements of Jones' thought and method which drew upon Indian culture and which were therefore innovative missiological practices.(3) The most recent dissertation, and by far the most significant, is that of Sigfrid Deminger, defended in 1985 at Uppsala, who builds upon suggestions in Taylor's all too brief article. As Thomas, Deminger limits his discussion primarily to the period 1918-1930 when, influenced by Indian Christian theologians centered at Madras, Jones sought to rethink mission method and the forms of Christian faith. Deminger notes that he did so in terms of "Kingdom of God." The analysis is helpful in that it establishes Jones firmly in the context of the discussion of inter-religious encounter and dialogue which was developing in India during the 1920's.(4)

Deminger was asking the right question when he began to move the theological questions into the context of biography. The drawback to his method was to treat the published works as classical theological treatises. In his writings, Jones recounts and reflects on his activities and discussions with various people, usually with several years' hindsight and normally while on trips continents away from his files and acquaintances. Many of his books were produced quickly at the request of publishers and tailored for their audiences. One has no idea as to the identity of persons cited in his works and described as "an Indian boy," or "a certain Hindu judge," or "a Hindu teacher," or "an Indian businessman." Jones was a folk theologian, an evangelist with virtually no serious theological or missiological education. His vision of Christian life developed through the telling and retelling of stories and experiences as well as through his sensitive involvement with a wide variety of people of diverse backgrounds. As the important projects and persons in his life changed for various reasons, and as mind-changing events occurred, his theology reflected those changes. Jones was no "ivory tower" theologian and made no pretense of being an academic theologian. To attempt to see a coherent system or perspective in his works is counterproductive and patently unfair.

At this point, we are confronted with a historiographical problem: traditional scholarly tools available offer scarce results from the analysis of folk or narrative theologians. How then is one to use the documents produced by Jones so that they may be drawn upon for our own reflection? The method of this essay draws upon the insights of French structuralism, especially Martial Gueroult and Michel Foucault.(5) Out of the narrative structures of the life of Jones, we will establish the socio-economic nexus, explore various

relationships and experiences, noting both disjunction and conjunction when that is the agenda, and offer an interpretation of "Kingdom of God." It is not an effort at biography or traditional historical theology, but rather an investigation of a concept as it is variously articulated in life structures. Thus, this essay does not attempt to systematize but to suggest the complexity of life and thought.

### **The Making of a Missionary**

E. Stanley Jones was born into a middle class family which struggled throughout his early years to maintain that status. His father worked as a bailiff, shoemaker and toll collector, his mother as a teacher in public school.(6) At age fifteen, Jones experienced an initial conversion. Two years later, attracted by the style and person of Robert J. Bateman, a converted alcoholic, he became integrated into the Methodist class-meeting structure: "My estrangement, my sense of orphanage were gone."(7) A year later, aged eighteen, he had a subsequent religious experience which he interpreted in light of Hannah Whitall Smith's *The Christian's Secret of a Happy Life*.(8)

After his conversion he dreamed of studying law, having dropped out of public school. He secured employment in a law library "getting books and putting them back on the shelves for rich lawyers!"(9) He lost interest in law and decided to enter the ministry on the model of Bateman, much to the anxiety of his mother.(10) He managed to save enough for a year of college when "calamity struck us as a family. My father lost his political job; court cases swept away the home we owned and the beds we slept on."(11) Jones sold insurance for a year to maintain the family and was able to secure his mother's blessing to attend Asbury College only when he promised to send home enough money each month to cover the rent.(12) He remembered: "I knew what poverty meant, knew it for myself, and had to listen to tales of poverty from people not being able to pay."(13)

Jones' recollections of his father and mother in *A Song of Ascents* are few. He remembered his mother's strictness,(14) his father is mentioned only in conjunction with the loss of his "political job."(15) His brother is mentioned in terms of the relief felt when as a medical doctor, heir to an established practice, he was able to take over the support of the family.(16)

His strongest relationship was with Miss Nellie Logan, a single school teacher, a Methodist who had prayed with him at his first conversion, and who was the object of perhaps Jones' most intense affections.(17) Jones wrote "Miss Nellie," as he called her, frequently for many years and she preserved many of those missives. They provide an intimate view of Jones and of his struggles.

At the time Jones was ready for college, we find a sensitive youth alienated from his social and economic structures who found meaningful relationships only in the context of the revivalist wing of the Methodist church. In that group the only name we have is Nellie Logan.

Jones arrival at Asbury was less than auspicious. He was embarrassed by the loudness of President J. W. Hughes on the train from Lexington to Wilmore.(18) He was frustrated by the curriculum and instruction: "The curriculum isn't hardly what I had expected although I might find out that it is really better than I expect at the present time."(19) Two weeks later, he had somewhat revised his opinions: "Prof. Hughes teaches Butler's *Analogy* and

theology . . . he is one of the finest theologians of the South being a graduate of Vanderbilt University and he isn't all shout."(20) He was also frustrated by his fellow students whose competition for preaching appointments forced him to accept a distant and not very desirable assignment, "(We are) going . . . for with all these young preachers just panting to let the world know how much they know, preaching assignments are scarce."(21)

Each successive letter reveals a further cooptation by the Asbury style, language, and an increased involvement in that community. The letters reflect his struggle with the perfectionist goal of "self- control." "Self-control" became a recurring rhetorical feature of the letters throughout his Asbury experience as did the exhortations to Miss Nellie that she experience sanctification. Otherwise the letters are filled with schoolboy bragging about his grades, observations of his professors,(22) and narrations of his exploits.

Despite the slow start, he adapted at Asbury. He became student body president, achieved success on the preaching circuit, and was invited to remain as an instructor. However, he was still unable to adapt to the larger social context. He narrated with the bravado of self-righteous indignation a social mishap:(23)

On Thanksgiving day they gave a social for the students. The teachers superintended the affair and every five minutes (so it seemed) they changed partners and we were truly driven "like dumb cattle." Several times I was in the middle of a sentence and had to break it off when it was announced or rather asked who I would like to go to next. Well my independent spirit revolted and I (was) actually left . . . to talk to one of these fair Southern girls . . . I was invited out to supper with several young ladies and what do you think? I got into a fight-with the devil. Several young men from Lexington were there-the flip kind-and began to talk all kinds of worldliness when they were rebuked by a young lady who said that there was a preacher in the room (meaning me). They then began to talk what rascals they were, of course I wasn't supposed to hear for I was talking to someone else-but I heard. And oh how the fire burned within me while I mused and when my chance came-well I hope it "soaked" in.

In Song of Ascents he remembered the time at Asbury in light of its emphasis on experience. It clearly did not teach him to think as a classical theologian. It did not teach him about missiology. The Methodist Mission Board did not help. His acceptance as a missionary was brief and impersonal. The appointment was to India. He was provided "a Hindustani grammar, forty pounds in British gold, a ticket to Bombay via Britain, a handshake and sent off." (24) He reflected:(25)

As I look back I see that the most valuable thing about me in those days was my colossal ignorance. I had no knowledge of what to do and not to do, for I had gone through no course in Indian evangelism or briefing. So I had no inhibitions. All I knew was evangelism-people needed to be converted, to be hanged. So I proceeded to act on that faith.

## **The Personal Kingdom, 1907-1916**

The blissfully unaware missionary from Wilmore arrived in Bombay on 13 November 1907. He proceeded to Lucknow where he was assigned to be pastor of the large English-language church.(26) Jones was immediately amazed at the "inertia" of India and at the imposing presence of Methodism in Lucknow: "Methodism is here to stay."(27) He threw himself into the assigned pastoral role and because of his energy and enthusiasm the church's report to the Annual Conference was that "Lucknow has had a splendid year under the pastorate of E. S. Jones and conversions are continually receiving, while the congregations have been built up."(28) During every evening church service, altar calls were given as opportunities for individual conversion.(29)

However, despite the successes in the English church, Jones was frustrated. He was eager to be part of the larger process of converting India to Christianity, an expectation which was regarded as inevitable by the majority of missionaries in India during this period. Jones was realistic enough to realize that the "inevitable" would not happen without intense work, and so he began to hold evangelistic services in the villages, especially among the lower classes. Notices of these meetings and the attendant successes are frequently described in the Methodist paper, *The Indian Witness*. The converts were being invited into an individualistic and perfectionistic Kingdom of God. Jones maintained the American Wesleyan-Holiness ascetical rigorism into which he had been acculturated in Baltimore and Wilmore. He argued that all believers, and especially the missionaries, should conform to this spirituality, stating that a personal experience of Christ (as he defined it) and an irreproachable lifestyle were necessary for evangelism. In a series of articles in *The Indian Witness* (1911) Jones developed his model of Christian spirituality. It used the language of athletics, personal striving and renunciation.(30)

The recurring term in Jones' essays about life and mission in India during this period is "souls."(31) As the people of India became increasingly aware of the need for change in and relief from the sociopolitical structures imposed by the British empire and lived most fully by those who became part of the imperial governing structures and/or the church, the "souls" became harder to enlist for the Kingdom. Christian India was, by 1915, becoming a fading vision.(32) Jones perceived the changing attitudes toward Christian conversion as a failure of mission in general and of his own life and spirituality in particular. His frustration with his own limitations and those of his fellow missionaries was reflected in the poignant plea:(33)

We left America for souls. Are we now content to live without them? Are we willing the missionary should be lost in the administrator? God forbid. Then, oh, for a passionate passion for souls! A passion that will eat up lesser passions until the soul shall cry out like the Master, "The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up." We must see a revival. Lord send it.

This was largely autobiographical. After four years Jones left the pastorate in Lucknow for the nearby city of Sitapur. He was appointed Conference Evangelist and placed in charge of the Methodist work in Sitapur. Jones was frequently absent evangelizing in the villages and so responsibility

for the Sitapur Boys' Boarding School fell increasingly to his wife, Mabel Lossing Jones (1887-1978).(34) He could not escape administrative duties, however, as he became increasingly responsible for Methodist ecclesial structures in India. He was named District Superintendent of the Sitapur District and soon his responsibilities were extended, because of a lack of missionaries to include the Lucknow, Hardoi and Bareilly Districts. He was also made the Agent for the Methodist Publishing House. There was little time for evangelism and the stress combined with internal conflict frequently provoked his temper.(35) During this period, he sought with his personal efforts to energize the Methodist Church in India and to turn each pastor into an equally ambitious American-style evangelist. He himself recalled two decades later, "I was more of a boss than a brother."(36) Jones reported to Miss Nellie that his wife professed to have "found a fitting phrase to describe me . . . 'a chased rabbit.'"(37)

He later reflected,(38)

Physically I lacked poise, but mentally too I was not at rest. I came to India out of a very conservative training. There were no doubts because I had closed out all problems. I had a closed mind, closed upon the fact of the satisfying Christ within. If walls shut out other things they also shut within one this precious Fact. But as the first disconcerting years of a missionary went by and my contacts with educated non-Christians became more intimate, my walls began to be assailed . . . only my experience of Christ held me steady.

The demands on him, complicated by tetanus and depression, led to a mental breakdown, and a furlough. He wrote Miss Nellie:(39)

I think it is finally decided now that we are to go home next year. As much as I long to see you dear people again, I feel a strange sadness in dropping the work. Perhaps it is because I have not been all I should have been in these years of opportunity.

By the end of 1915, Jones and his understanding of the Kingdom of God had collapsed. He had come to the hard-earned realization that an imperialistic alien Christianity rooted in disdain for India and for the Indian intelligensia would not lead Indians to an experience of Christ. He had also begun to realize that the social structures of India had to be taken seriously and respected. Jones found new direction in the discussions of Indian Christianity taking place in the context of the National Missionary Society. Specially significant at this point were the (never acknowledged) suggestions of H. A.Popley(1911)and G.E. Phillips(1912)in their National Missionary Intelligencer articles about the need and desirability of "the evangelisation of the middle classes of India"(40) and the reports of successful lectures to "educated Hindus" in the same periodical by P. O. Phillip.(41) Drawing on these theologians, Jones developed a missionary agenda but had not yet arrived at a theoretical framework. He remained unsure of himself and uncertain of how to transform his pattern of failure into success.

### **The Indian Kingdom, 1917-1933**

Furlough to North America relieved the tension but did not resolve the issues. Jones returned to India somewhat against his will and better judg-

ment. On route, he confessed to Miss Nellie that, "I did not want to come back to India at this time."(42) At an evangelistic crusade during a stopover in the Philippines, Jones suffered another mental and physical collapse. Once in India, Jones spent considerable time "in the hills" recovering from the recurring breakdowns. He confided again in a letter to Nellie Logan, dated 17 August 1917: "I am sorry that I did not take another year at home, my head is troubling me and I must go off tomorrow for a rest in the hills again, though I just came down a little over a month ago."(43)

During this period of adjustment, Jones experienced a major reorientation of his theological categories. He wrote:(44)

I knew my message was Jesus Christ, but since I had been brought up conservatively, I was out to defend everything I held. I was on the defensive. My theology was neat and tied up with a blue ribbon-unchanging.... I inwardly turned pale as I let go of the securities of blocked-off faith to follow truth to unknown destinations.

About a year later he reflected:(45)

After about a year, I began to take stock of where I had come out. I had offered the securities of my faith on the altar of freedom and found to my surprise and delight that all I had offered had come back to me, now no longer nervously held; they held me.... I was free-free to explore, to appropriate any good, any truth found anywhere....

This allowed several other perspectives to change. Most importantly, Jones came to love rather than pity India. This permitted him to look critically at his own North American political and religious heritage. The agenda proposed by Popley and Phillips was revised and elaborated. They had argued, inter alia, that evangelism should take Indian forms, be undertaken in "homely and sympathetic" contexts avoiding all subterfuge, refrain from western formulated dogmatism but tell of the "humanity of our Lord" emphasizing the who not the what, maintain a respectful attitude toward those being evangelized, and seek to communicate that God is love.'(43)

Acting on this model, Jones transformed his ministry. Invitations were numerous and the crowds enormous. In a letter to Miss Nellie written sometime late in 1917, Jones could say:(47)

I have begun my work among the educated and it is going beyond my highest anticipations. Everywhere there are calls and doors wide open. I really did not know there was such an opportunity. I am not sorry that I came back when I did. Never till now have I felt that I was really where God wanted me.

The theoretical structure for this new pattern was not sought until the early 1920's when there was time to reflect. Once again, Jones turned to the National Missionary Intelligencer! An article by D. M. Devasahayam (1922), based on an address delivered at the Pasulamai Christian Ministers' Conference, discussed "Indian Characteristics That Should Be Preserved in the Indian Church."(48) Devasahayam argued for a breaking of the bond between Western cultural structures and the Gospel and a search for Hindu values

and "correctives to some of its (Christianity's) perversions and aberrations, and that Christianity as an Eastern religion may be better understood through Indian spectacles." (49) He stressed the religious sensitivity of Indian culture, the seriousness of the Indian religious consciousness, the emphasis on passive virtues, the rejection of materialism and personal power by the religious person, the freedom of Hindu religion from denominational politics, the freedom of the spirit by the subordination of professional religious officials, the spirit of toleration of differences, the catholicity, and the sophisticated understanding of the function of religious imagery. (50)

Jones used this analysis as the basis of his 1923 address to the North India Conference and published, in serialized form in *The Indian Witness*, his essay entitled "The Influence of the Indian Heritage upon Christianity." Jones' dependence on Devasahayam is clear (often quoted or thinly paraphrased) and undocumented. However, Jones was even more assertive in arguing that Indian philosophical structures were as valid as Graeco-Roman philosophy for framing an articulation of the Gospel. (51) Jones had found a new way of thinking about the Kingdom of God. It was no longer North American or British culture.

As well, Jones had two formative experiences during 1923. The first was an initial meeting with Gandhi at the Poona Hospital immediately following Gandhi's release from his first imprisonment in India. Jones discussed the similarities of Gandhi's and Jesus' methods and ministries, agreed with him on the values of the spiritual Kingdom as opposed to physical militaristic kingdoms, and pleaded with him to develop a clear witness and allegiance to Christ. (52) Gandhi became for Jones a paradigm of what the new Indian participant in the Kingdom of God would be like. Gandhi, he said, "has taught me more of the spirit of Christ than perhaps any other man in East or West." (53)

The second experience was a visit to the Shantineketan Ashram of Rabindranath Tagore and C. F. Andrews, a former Anglican missionary. K. T. Paul first suggested (1912) the Ashram idea to the National Missionary Society as a possible Indian form for theological reflection, but it was not until 1920, when the suggestion came again from Sasu Sundar Singh, that the National Missionary Society-sponsored Ashram at Tirupattur was organized (1921). (54) The article following the announcement discussed "Methods in the Kingdom of God" which developed Hindu values of Ashram in Christian terms. (55) Another article, by Dr. S. Jesudason permanent resident at Tirupattur, published in the *National Missionary Intelligencer* (1922) described the Tirupattur Ashram as "An Effort for the Fulfillment of a Vision of the Kingdom of God." (56)

Jones described his first Ashram experience: (57)

If the keystone were a clear witness to Jesus Christ and a clear making of Him central, then I could ask for nothing finer, as an expression of Indian Christianity.... The spirit that breathes here, the loving friendliness of every one, the communion with nature, the simplicity of life and dress, and the spirituality of it all-if these were crowned with Christ, as they are now saturated with His spirit, then I begin to see what Indian Chris-

tianity would be, when it begins to gather up within itself all the best in India's past and reinterprets Christ through Indian genius and forms. That will be a day worth waiting for and a product worth having. It will be no hybrid thing, but a fresh, living expression of the Son of Man.

The component parts of a revised theology of the Kingdom of God were in place. The Kingdom of God in India was to be Indian in form, style and philosophical structure as it sought allegiance to the person of Jesus with-out Western theological trappings. The Ashram was an exemplary communitarian structure which allowed Kingdom values to be lived, as Gandhi was demonstrating in his Ashram. Gandhi was perceived to personify Christ/Kingdom life and considered to be on the verge of conversion and world leadership. Interestingly, the efforts of the National Missionary Society in the creation of Christian Ashrams and the theological work done to articulate the Christian significance of the experiment, although obviously seminal for Jones, were never acknowledged. In fact the assertion that his "Christian Ashram movement . . . did not come into being as an official product of the Church"(58) has contributed to the widely held misconception that Jones founded the first Christian Ashram.

Jones articulated the new theological synthesis and its practical missiological implications, during his April 1924 to January 1926 furlough, in *The Christ of the Indian Road* (1925). This book catapulted Jones into international fame and was widely read on all sides of the emerging debate within North America over structures appropriate for mission. He returned to India for two and one half years and chronicled the results of his evangelistic efforts in *Christ at the Round Table* (1928), written during his next furlough (May 1928 to April 1929). During this time he continued his efforts to communicate with the "educated Hindus," and, as the tome reveals, continued to wrestle with the concept of the Indian Kingdom of God.(59) The "Kingdom of God" was still essentially personal, individualistic and separate from the social context of human development. At the same time, Jones was becoming aware that the Christian was obligated to seek the redemption of society. There were social dimensions to the "Kingdom of God:"(60)

Jesus believed in life and its redemption. Not only was the soul to be saved-the whole of life was to be redeemed. The kingdom of God coming on earth is the expression of that collective redemption. The entrance to the kingdom of God is by personal conversion, but the nature of that kingdom is social. The kingdom of God is the most astonishingly radical proposal ever presented to the human race. It means nothing less than the replacing of the present world-order by the kingdom of God. It is the endeavor to call men back from the present unnatural, unworkable world-order to a new one based on new principles, embodying a new spirit and led by a new person.

Jones was beginning to understand the consequence of the intellectual positions at which he was arriving. To have an Indian rather than a North American kingdom did not mean withdrawing from a confrontation of society. It merely meant that the confrontation was to be on a different level, a critique from inside Indian culture. For that critique to be meaningful,

an Indian style of living the new model, the Kingdom of God, was essential. Gandhi's paradigm for struggle with the British Empire was adapted to the struggle against "the present world-order."

The period April 1929 to February 1933, back in India, framed the implementation and some major setbacks for the new synthesis. In 1930, Jones established the Ashram at Sat Tal as an experiment and manifestation of the "Kingdom."(61) It was this quest for a Kingdom-of-God order that drove some of us to adopt the Ashram as a possible mold in which this order might be expressed."(62) It was situated in the foothills of the Himalayas on a large estate and functioned from April to June each summer. Despite the short-term arrangements, interesting discussions took place between persons representing a number of perspectives and traditions. The rest of the year saw Jones continuing his evangelistic ministry.

However, Jones was confronted with a number of disappointments. By 1931, his dream of converting Gandhi was gone as Gandhi reaffirmed his Hinduism.(63) The Sat Tal Ashram came under attack(64) as a two month "vacation Ashram" removed from the real world in which Christians must struggle, and he was beginning to incur the wrath of missionaries for his strong stance on the validity of Indian intellectual and religious structures as well as his stand favoring Indian independence.

### **The Kingdom: Liberation and Economic Restructuring (1934-1940)**

Jones spent the year February 1933 to February 1934 in North America and England. He returned to India via Moscow. The visit to Moscow was a life changing experience and provided an agenda for the next six years. He remembered the experience in A Song of Ascents:(65)

I had to go outside my native land to make a major discovery-the discovery of the Kingdom of God. I found it, of all places in Russia! . . . I had always known it, but there it became vital and all compelling. It possessed me. Russia had inwardly hit me hard.

What did Jones see? In Russia, he saw people energetically revising the social order with the goal of achieving socio-economic justice and equality. The commitment of the people to that purpose, the appeal of the rhetoric and the almost immediate resulting improvement in the lot of the exploited peasant classes was clear. It was also clear that the Russian church was out of touch with the crucial socio-economic and political issues and excluded from the program of social reconstruction. He also noted that because of the lack of involvement on the part of the church in the struggle for socioeconomic justice during the revolution, "religion had collapsed like a house of cards."(66) The Russians were endeavoring to establish the quality of life about which the church had talked but never produced. The new order was not without its faults, but, Jones warned:(67)

Object to it as we may, and as I do, on the basis of its lack of liberty, of its compulsions, of its ruthlessness, and its materialistic atheism, nevertheless it has founded society on a higher principle, namely that of co-operation . . . the end of selfishly striving to be rich when to be rich means that other people become poor.... We may hate it and cast it from us, but in the end it will judge us, for it is a higher ideal.

Jones was quick to see the attractiveness of Marxism and the Russian experiment for the impoverished and disenfranchised of the world: "Every-where this issue is arising in one form or another."(68) The effort to achieve economic democracy would be carefully observed in a world which is "half-starved."(69) The Christian community he noted, was in a position of dangerous opportunity. It would experience, and, he argued, should experience, a crumbling of systems which negatively influence the reception of the Gospel and which tie it closely to Western competitive capitalist structures. Positively, the church needed to "provide something better than Marxian Communism or succumb to it. The issue will not be settled by argument but by the actual production of a better order. The only way to beat them is to beat them to it."(70)

Many missionaries and churchmen had visited revolutionary Russia. Few were as strongly affected.(71) Few instantaneously realized the magic of the Russian agenda for the disinherited. That Jones did has to be understood in light of his disenfranchised youth, the family financial reverses, his increasing alienation from the various ecclesiastical structures, and his identification with India's struggle against foreign domination and poverty.

Despite, or perhaps because of, this alienation, Jones remained committed to a Christian vision. The promise of the atheistic kingdom required a response from the perspective of the "Kingdom of God." Jones took up the challenge represented by Communism on different but related fronts. On the one hand he wrote extensively attempting to articulate a Christian alternative, a vision of the "Kingdom of God." The proceeds of the sale of these books were devoted, at least in part, to subsidizing the practical aspect of his program, the development of another ashram, not in the mountains but in the city of Lucknow. He also began to reflect on the unity of the Church. Let us examine these responses.

**A Theoretical Framework for the Kingdom of God** On his return to India Jones withdrew to Sat Tal Ashram to reflect. He began to read the Bible in light of Marxist social analysis and Marxist social analysis in light of the Bible. He adopted a critical stance toward the received interpretations of both systems. The result was the volume *Christ's Alternative to Communism* which drew heavily upon Marxist social theory and Jones' experience in India as it endeavored to describe the "Kingdom of God." *Christ's Alternative to Communism* was a radical document calling for the abolition of repressive structures and the reformation of the world social and economic orders. He urged that alternatives to exploitative capitalist competition be found, noting that "if Christianity were really applied again, it would result in some form of collective sharing closely akin to Communism."(72) Jones also called upon the Church to reform its goals and structures and to take a more prophetic stance over against injustice and its worldly self-interest.

Jones found the structure of the new order ("the unshakable kingdom") in the "Sermon on the Mount." On the basis of Luke 4:18-21 (what he called the "Nazareth Manifesto"), Jones sought to describe the parameters of a Christian social agenda. It is the task of the Christian community to declare, as did Jesus:(73)

1. Good news to the poor-the economically disinherited.
2. Release to the captives-the socially and politically disinherited.

3. The opening of the eyes of the blind-the physically disinherited.
4. The setting at liberty the bruised-the morally and spiritually disinherited.
5. The Lord's year of Jubilee-a new beginning on a world scale.
6. The Spirit of the Lord is upon me-the dynamic behind it all.

This is the program for the "Kingdom. of God." It was a present agenda, not an eschatological future agenda. There was no longer a distinction between personal and social salvation. Jones argued against both sides of the "Social Gospel versus Individual Gospel" controversy that life is a unity, a coherent structure. Persons cannot be separated from their life experiences. To be coherent the Gospel must simultaneously be individual and social.

How would the "Kingdom of God" be instituted? It would not be actualized by the churches or by nationalistic interests which identify their system or perspective with the Kingdom of God. Typically Jones proposed prerequisites and processes, painted in broad impressionistic strokes unencumbered by detail, necessary to the realization of the "Kingdom of God. "He proposed ten steps:(74)

1. We can say, "As far as I am concerned it begins right now."
2. We can form groups for the practice and study of the new Kingdom life.
3. While we shall look on the church as the probable center of the Kingdom, we shall not confine the Kingdom to the church, even if we could.
4. We can help develop the co-operative spirit instead of the competitive by organizing cooperatives of various types and kinds.
5. Christian businessmen can change the basis of their business from competition to cooperation.
6. We can teach this New Order.
7. We must teach it as though we believed in the inevitability of the Kingdom of God.
8. One of the first steps is the uniting of the Christian forces of the world into a Christian International.
9. When we have a sufficient majority to make this Christian program effective, we should not hesitate to put it through the political order.
10. The next step that each of us can take is to lay hold of the resources of the Spirit of the Lord-the dynamic behind the whole program.

*Bringing in the Kingdom.* Jones set out immediately to demonstrate the vision. He noted, "It was while studying the Nazareth Manifesto of Jesus at Sat Tal that the Lucknow Ashram was born . . . an attempt to make that Manifesto real. The economic basis had to be faced at once."(75) Structures were developed which were intended to model "Kingdom" principles. Distribution of resources was based on need. Community consensus was sought on all policy and administrative issues. Each was expected to con-

tribute to the Ashram's effort to minister to the needs of the surrounding city of Lucknow.(76) Jones continued his reflection and published *Victorious Living* (1936) (used as a devotional volume in North America but, read in the context of 1935-1936, it is a call to radical Christian discipleship), *The Choice Before Us* (1937) which expanded the social analysis to National Socialism/Fascism, *Along the Indian Road* (1939) in which he reflected on the significance of the "Kingdom of God" concept for India, and the volume *Is the Kingdom of God Realism?* in which he presented a vigorous response to criticism and questions directed at his position.(77)

The "Christian International" also received attention. Jones had long been committed to an ecumenical Christianity. He began to realize that understanding between denominations did not diminish the problems which the competitive programs and rhetoric posed for evangelism. A united front was perceived as essential. In a series of articles in *The Indian Witness*, Jones developed ideas which had long been discussed in the *National Missionary Intelligencer*.(78) He took the idea one step further and advocated a sort of "federal union" of churches, a plan not unlike the one he would later advocate for Pakistan and India. He saw that the union would acknowledge the primacy of the "Kingdom of God" of which they were reflections but not the "Kingdom" itself. This understanding brought him into conflict with the North American and European inspired ecumenical movement as he experienced it in the *Tambaram International Missionary Conference* in Madras. Jones' critique of the Conference was scathing:(79)

It blazed no great way. Why? Because of its basic starting point-the Church. It began there and worked out to aU its problems from the Church standpoint.... "The Church is the world's greatest hope!" That is not a chance sentence. It sums up the presuppositions of Madras.... Is the Church the hope of the world? If so, God help us! . . . God is laying hold of other instruments besides the Church to realize the Kingdom of God . . . the Kingdom is a demand upon the total life-the whole of life, personal, devotional, economic, social, international-comes its way.

There was immediate and condescending response from both the North American theological left and right, from Henry P. van Dusen and Walter Horton as well as James R. Graham, Jr. and Robert C. McQuilkin.(80) Jones later reflected, "I have never been forgiven by the hierarchy for that (*Christian Century*) article. I cut across the prevailing accepted emphasis of the ecumenical church as the supreme emphasis. But I am unrepentant."(81)

Finally, Jones became more involved in India's struggle for independence. Since 1923, he had understood that the revolution in India was serious and that empire was a hindrance to evangelism. From the time of his initial interview with Gandhi until his death, Jones watched, offered advice, moral and vocal support as well as friendship to the Congress Party. He was also a persuasive witness of Indian heritage and values to the Anglo-Saxon world. After 1934, Jones had a reasoned basis for his position. By striving for the freedom of India (and in India) he was working to bring the "Kingdom of God" into being.

In January 1940 Jones left India. He expected a furlough but from 1941 to 1946, Jones was not allowed to return to India by British colonial authori-

ties who feared his influence. The Lucknow Ashram was closed in 1940 during the missionary pledge and Kristagraha controversies which developed after Jones had turned over the leadership of the Ashram to Dr. J. Holmes Smith.(82) From this time onward, Jones would continue to draw personal strength from his Indian experience. He continued, in some senses, to view the world from an Indian perspective. However the focus of his energy and the efforts to interpret and actualize his vision shifted to a different world.

### **Restructuring the World and the Church, 1940-1973**

This commitment to liberation and economic justice combined with a concern for the "Christian International" propelled Jones into the role of international statesman (briefly) and ecumenical crusader in North America. The historiographical problems for this phase of Jones' life are enormous. Almost everything we know is from Jones' own writing, and the independent data we have tends to relativize the significance of Jones' impact during this period. For example, the vaunted correspondence with President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, if the available materials are any indication, were the kind of letters that American clergy have often directed to political figures.(83) Perhaps, when Jones' papers are made available for scholars, a different picture will emerge. However, for the moment it would appear that he was an "extra" rather than an "actor."

That is not to disparage his impact on the North American church. His meetings were well attended and Jones' reformist agenda was received gladly by the populace of the nation while at war and later adjusting to a post-war economy. Jones was never able to develop his concept of the "Kingdom of God" into a program, and like many "new ideas," supported neither by a solid philosophical structure or a program for action, the "new idea" faded. Let us look briefly at Jones' reflections on "Kingdom of God" as it related to North America.

*Avoiding War in Asia.* Jones' concern for the conflict in Asia began in the late 1930's after a preaching mission to China. His strategy was three-fold: first, apply Gandhi's non-violent non-cooperation method to Japan; second, isolate Japan economically; third, give New Guinea to Japan thus allowing Japan to "save face;" fourth, work throughout the world to equally distribute resource; fifth, give freely of American resources to right economic wrongs; sixth, strive toward world political self-determination.(84) Jones' irenic but forceful suggestions were soon lost in the aftermath of the attack on Pearl Harbor. For the purpose of our essay it is important to note the continuation of two influences on Jones: India/Gandhi and his Marxist economic and geopolitical analysis.

*Federal Union Plan.* Jones had noted that most church union programs focused on the hierarchies of the churches and that they had little impact on the local churches. Furthermore, union efforts had been accompanied by rhetoric about the consolidation of the "Kingdom of God." Jones believed that church union needed to be reconceptualized on the basis of local experiments and experience. The model for Jones' federal plan became the structure of the American constitution, which led to union through the surrender of some individual prerogatives but which, he believed, drew its force from the local practice of government. Such a restructuring, accompanied by cooperation rather than competition, would allow for the development of the

"Kingdom of God" within the context of the church. Jones was not able to define the vision in terms of processes and procedures. The most coherent attempt was the 1970 volume *Reconstruction of the Church-On What Pattern?* Here on the basis of an analysis of the New Testament church in Antioch he proposed that the church must: (1) look to one head, Jesus Christ; (2) become a church of the laity; (3) be a society characterized by particular and universal caring- (4) be an opponent of injustice and evil; (5) be multi-racial and non-racist; (6) not be legalistic; (7) hold together strong persons of differing views; (8) use its oppositions rather than merely tolerating (bearing) them.(85) The language of the "Christian International" was gone, and there were few references to Western economic imperialism, but the essential vision was similar, albeit, expressed in terms more congenial to North American Christians.

America, Model for the Kingdom of God. Jones moved from an appreciation of American governmental structures (federal union) to becoming tantalized with the possibilities of America as an experiment in "Kingdom of God." He wrote:(86)

What and where is America? America is a dream-unfulfilled. A dream of equality of opportunity, of privilege and property widely distributed- a dream of a place where class is abolished and man is a man, a place where race and birth and color are transcended by the fact of a common brotherhood, a place where humanity as humanity can begin again a fresh experiment in human brotherhood that will be a new beginning for the race as a whole, a place where all our gifts and resources are held not for ourselves alone but as instruments of service for the rest of humanity-that is the dream.

America had potential, he argued, as a model, but his was not a Reagan or New-Right-Moral Majority style model. The vision was the radical Indian and Marxist inspired Christian vision of the redeemed society. Little wonder that the 1944 volume, *The Christ of the American Road*, was not reprinted and has received little hearing. Only in the North American Civil Rights struggles of the 1960's did Jones' social vision bear fruit-in the work of Martin Luther King who found in Jones' analysis of Gandhi a paradigm for action, and in Jones' "Kingdom of God" a program.

Throughout the rest of his life, Jones struggled to articulate a vision of the "Kingdom of God" to North American Christianity. He organized ashrams, preached, lectured and wrote. The writings were usually understood to be primarily devotional in nature and were widely thus read. However, it would appear that these were intended to engage persons in the style of radical Christianity which he understood as normative "Kingdom" lifestyle. Many of these volumes reflect specifically Hindu and Buddhist (rather than North American) values and practice of spirituality. In addition to the volume on the reconstruction of the church mentioned above, the most systematic, if it can be called that, presentation of his perspective was *The Unshakable Kingdom and the Unchanging Person* (1972). (87) Here Jones reiterated central themes which had occupied him since the visit to Gandhi in 1923 and to Moscow in 1934. The pattern remained the "Sermon on the Mount. "The goal was the redemption of the totality of humanity and human social structures.

## **Interpreting E. Stanley Jones**

Sidney Alstrom interpreted Jones as an example of American "harmonial religion." (88) He missed the radical socio-economic, political and religious agenda of Jones as well as Jones' disregard for American cultural comfort and his call for revolution. Thomas and Johnson understood Jones as a prophetic figure, but did not discover the contextual and personal sources of Jones thought. (89) Deminger attempted to interpret Jones in light of Piaget's assimilation theory, but missed the criticism of systems from within which Jones spoke. (90)

As has been argued above, Jones is better understood in light of his own social history, an analysis which Jones, because of his Marxist tendencies, may have found congenial. He was propelled by a passion for political and socio-economic justice as well as personal salvation fueled by his personal experience of social alienation, economic victimization and failure to find meaningful ministry in the established ecclesiological programs.

Jones' controlling hermeneutic was his experience. In adapting forms to articulate that experience, Jones was eclectic . . . and only too ready to borrow (plagiarize) the thoughts of others. The lack of theological training and academic discipline, while it left him open to explore possibilities and accept opportunities which his more educated and socially integrated (into the missionary structures) colleagues were unable to comprehend, hampered him in his efforts to clearly articulate his vision and define a persuasive program for accomplishing the ideal.

Those inside the Wesleyan/Holiness traditions which formed Jones have tended to read Jones as Ahlstrom understood him. It would be more appropriate to recognize Jones as the proto-liberation theologian of the tradition, and to celebrate him as such.

## **NOTES**

1 C. Chacko Thomas, *The Work and Thought of Eli Stanley Jones with Special Reference to India*, Ph.D. Diss. State University of Iowa, 1955, 262.

2 Martin Ross Johnson, *The Christian Vision of E. Stanley Jones: Missionary Evangelist, Prophet and Statesman*, Ph.D. Diss. Florida State University, 1978. There is also the work of Kenneth Ralph Thompson, *The Ethics of Eli Stanley Jones*, Ph.D. Diss. Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1960.

3 Richard W. Taylor, "The Legacy of E. Stanley Jones," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 6(1982), 102-107.

4 Sigfrid Deminger, *Evangelistpa indiska villkor. Stanley Jones och den indiska renässansen 1918-1930* (*Studia Missionalia Uppsaliensia*, 42; Örebro: Bokforlaget I. Ibris, 1985). Cf. review by D. Bundy, *International Review of Mission* 75(1986), 329-331.

5 Martial Gueroult, *Dianoématique, Livre II: Philosophie de l'histoire de laphilosophie* (Collection analyse et raisons; Paris: Aubier Montaigne, 1979),

and Michel Foucault, *Le Mot et les choses* (Bibliothèque des sciences humaines; Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1966); idem, *Language, Counter Memory, Practice. Selected Essays and Interviews* ed. D. F. Bouchard, Trans. D. F. Bouchard and S. Simon (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1977).

6 Thomas, *Work and Thought of Eli Stanley Jones*, 1.

7 Stanley Jones, *A Song of Ascents. A Spiritual Biography* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1968), 28.

8 Jones, *A Song of Ascents*, 52.

9 Jones, *A Song of Ascents*, 63.

10 Jones, *A Song of Ascents*, 63.

11 Jones, *A Song of Ascents*, 64.

12 Jones, *A Song of Ascents*, 64. Later (*A Song of Ascents*, 72) when Jones wrote his mother of his becoming a missionary, she became so depressed that his brother, fearing imminent death, called him home.

13 Jones, *A Song of Ascents*, 64.

14 Jones, *A Song of Ascents*, 45.

15 Jones, *A Song of Ascents*, 64.

16 Jones, *A Song of Ascents*, 64.

17 See Jones' effusive comments in *A Song of Ascents*, 43-44.

18 E. Stanley Jones to Nellie Logan, 3 Sept. 1903, Jeff Blake Collection, Archives, Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore, KY, p. 1.

19 E. Stanley Jones to Nellie Logan, 3 Sept. 1903, Jeff Blake Collection, Archives, Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore, KY, pp. 4-5.

20 E. Stanley Jones to Nellie Logan, 11 Sept. 1903, Jeff Blake Collection, Archives, Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore, KY, p. 6.

21 E. Stanley Jones to Nellie Logan, 3 Oct. 1903, Jeff Blake Collection, Archives, Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore, KY, p. 2.

22 See, for example, E. Stanley Jones to Nellie Logan, 23 Jan. 1904, Jeff Blake Collection, Archives, Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore, KY.

23 E. Stanley Jones to Nellie Logan, 30 Nov. 1904, Jeff Blake Collection, Archives, Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore, KY, 2-3.

24 Jones, *A Song of Ascents*, 75. For the text of the completed form, see, Thomas, *Work and Thought of Eli Stanley Jones*, 287-288.

25 Jones, *A Song of Ascents*, 80.

26 Jones. *A Song of Ascents*, 79.

27 E. Stanley Jones, *Along the Indian Road*, 29; E. Stanley Jones to Nellie Logan, 18 Dec. 1907, Jeff Blake Collection, Archives, Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore, KY.

28 J. W. Robinson, *Annual Report of the North India Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, 1909, 17. The subsequent reports show that Jones' increasingly frequent absences on evangelistic tours had a deleterious effect on church attendance.

29 Jones, *A Song of Ascents*, 80-81.

30 E. Stanley Jones, "Thought for the Month-Progress in Character: The Supreme Motive Power," *The Indian Witness* 42(22 Aug. 1911), 696; idem, "Thought for the Month-Progress in Character: Christian Athletics," *The Indian Witness* 42(29 Aug. 1911), 696; idem, "Thought for the Month Progress in Character: Numerous and Disastrous Foes," *The Indian Witness* 42(5 Sept. 1911), 716; idem, "Thought for the Month-Progress in Character: The Exemplary Life," *The Indian Witness* 42(12 Sept. 1911), 736.

31 E. Stanley Jones, "Conditions Necessary for a Great Revival," *The Indian Witness* 43(27 Feb. 1912), 167-168; idem, "The Revival Month-Some Thoughts," *The Indian Witness* 46(4 Feb. 1915), 96; idem, "Soul Winning Emphasized," *The Indian Witness* 47(10 Feb. 1916), 103.

32 Graham Whitfield Houghton, *The Development of the Protestant Missionary Church in Madras 1870-1920: The Impoverishment of Dependency*, Ph.D. Diss. University of California, Los Angeles. 1981.

33 E. Stanley Jones, "The Revival Month-Some Thoughts," *The Indian Witness* 46(4 Feb. 1915), 96, alluding to Finney, argued, "If we get into line with these laws, revivals will follow. Any people can have a revival if they want it. Moreover let me say it thoughtfully, everyone can have as much revival as he wants. When we get ready we find an already ready God." In early 1913 Jones was still optimistic. See E. Stanley Jones to Nellie Logan, 21 Jan. 1913, Jeff Blake Collection, Archives, Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore, KY.

34 Cf. the discussion by Thomas, *Work and Thought of Stanley Jones*, 28-44. Jones was married during February 1911.

35 E. Stanley Jones to Nellie Logan, 18 Nov. 1913, Jeff Blake Collection, Archives, Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore, KY.

36 Jones, *Along the Indian Road*, 32.

37 E. Stanley Jones to Nellie Logan, 21 Oct. 1915, Jeff Blake Collection, Archives, Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore, KY.

38 Jones, *Along the Indian Road*, 32-33.

39 E. Stanley Jones to Nellie Logan, 21 Oct. 1915, Jeff Blake Collection, Archives, Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore, KY. In E. Stanley Jones, *The Christ of the Indian Road* (New York: Abingdon, 1925), 21-23, he recounted his feelings of failure as well as his mental and physical deterioration. Jones similarly described his breakdowns in his *Round Robin Let-*

ter, 1 Dec. 1917, Jeff Blake Collection, Archives, Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore, KY.

40 H. A. Popley, "The Evangelisation of the Middle Classes of India. Part 1-The Problem," *The National Missionary Intelligencer* 5(1911), 51-53; idem, "The Evangelisation of the Middle Classes of India. Part 2-The Possibilities of Indian Music," *The National Missionary Intelligencer* 5~1911), 63-66; 5(1911), 75-79; G. E. PhiDips, "The Evangelisation of the Middle Classes of India. Part 2-The Message," *The National Missionary Intelligencer* 6(1912), 45-51.

41 G. E. PhiDips, "Work Among Educated Hindus," *The National Missionary Intelligencer* 7(1912), 45-51. Jones first mentioned the idea in a letter: E. Stanley Jones to Nellie Logan, 18 Nov. 1913, Jeff Blake Collection, Archives. Asbury Theological Seminary. Wilmore. KY.

42 E. Stanley Jones to Nellie Logan, 8 Jan. 1917, Jeff Blake Collection, Archives, Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore, KY.

43 E. Stanley Jones to Nellie Logan, 20 Aug. 1917, Jeff Blake Collection, Archives, Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore, KY.

44 Jones, *A Song of Ascents*, 91.

45 Jones, *A Song of Ascents*, 92.

46 Popley and Philips, *The Evangelisation of the Middle Classes of India*. Cf. Jones, *Christ of the Indian Road*, 26, 162-177.

47 E. Stanley Jones to Nellie Logan, no date (1917), Jeff Blake Collection, Archives, Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore, KY.

48 D. M. Devashahayam, "Indian Characteristics That Should Be Preserved in the Indian Church," *The National Missionary Intelligencer* 17(1922~). 170-177.

49 Devashahayam, *Indian Characteristics*, 171.

50 Devashahayam, *Indian Characteristics*, 171-177.

51 E. Stanley Jones, "The Influence of the Indian Heritage upon Christianity," *The Indian Witness* 54(1923), 909-910; 927-928; 54(1924), 5, 6, 11. Johnson noted the centrality of this essay for Jones' thought and based his chapter "III. Jones and Indigenous Indian Christianity," pp. 37-55, on it. Richard W. Taylor, *The Contribution of E. Stanley Jones (Confessing the Faith in India, 9; Madras: Christian Literature Society, 1973), 41-57*, reprinted this text as one of the six seminal texts for understanding Jones. Jones published the material in revised form as Chapter 12 of *Christ of the Indian Road*, 199-210. Neither Johnson nor Taylor recognized Jones' source.

52 Jones recounted the story of his first meeting with Gandhi in *Along the Indian Road*, 124-125.

53 E. Stanley Jones, *Mahatma Gandhi, An Interpretation* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1948). Jones' recollections of Gandhi's suggestions for indigenizing Christianity sound remarkably like Popley and Philips, *The*

*Evangelisation of the Middle Classes of India*. The entire problem of Jones and Gandhi is the subject of dissertation research of Paul Martin at the University of Cambridge, England.

54 K. T. Paul has not been given the credit due. Benarsidas Chaturvedi and Marjorie Sykes, Charles Freer Andrews, *A Narrative with a forward by M. K. Gandhi* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1949), 73-74, attributed the idea of a "Christian Ashram" to C. F. Andrews. The text of the discussion is provided here, in an attempt to correct the historiography, from "Our First North India Conference," *The National Missionary Intelligencer* 6(1912),78-79: "The Ashrama Idea. K. T. Paul then having vacated the Chair in favour of C. F. Andrews recommenced the discussion of the main topic of the noon session, 'The indigenous character of our work.' . . . The problem was to develop an indigenous method which will not be wanting in the advantages of organisation; (5) For this purpose he suggested a Christian Ashrama which will attract the most spiritual of our Christian youths. . . ." On the role of Sadhu Sundar Singh, see, "Notes" *The National Missionary Intelligencer* 14(1920), 62-63.

55 Anonymous, "Methods of the Kingdom of God," *The National Missionary Intelligencer* 14(1920), 63-65.

56 S. Jesudason, "The Tirupattur Ashram: An Effort for the Fulfillment of a Vision of the Kingdom of God," *The National Missionary Intelligencer* 16~1922). 75-79.

57 E. Stanley Jones, "My Stay at Shantineketan," *The Indian Witness* 54(5 Sept. 1923), 622.

58 Jones, *Along the Indian Road*, 181.

59 Jones, *Christ of the Indian Road*, idem, *Christ at the Round Table* (New York: Abingdon, 1928). The former was designated "missionary book of the year in America" by *The Christian Advocate* (NY) 101(7 Oct. 1926), 1370. Cf. James K. Matthews and Eunice Jones, *Selections from E. Stanley Jones: Christ and Human Need* (New York: Abingdon, 1972), 15. The criticism of Jones' position on the "Indian Kingdom" was intense enough to provoke a response from Jones, "Dr. Jones Answers His Critics," *Missionary Review of the World* 52(1929), 603-605 (Jones called for his opponents to compare the results of their evangelistic activity and his), and for the same periodical to publish a report by Paul J. Braisted, "With Stanley Jones in India," *Missionary Review of the World* 53(1930), 411-415.

60 Jones, *Christ at the Round Table*, 90. See also E. Stanley Jones, *The Christ of the Mount* (New York: Abingdon, 1931) and idem, *Christ and Human Suffering* (New York: Abingdon, 1933).

61 On the Theory of Sat Tal Ashram, see E. Stanley Jones, "A Proposed Ashram at Sat Tal," *The Indian Witness* 60(9 Jan. 1930), 27-28, and idem, "The Ashram Ideal," *Indian Church Problems of Today* ed. Bishop Brenton Thoburn Badley (Madras: Methodist Publishing House, 1930), 44-51.

62 Jones, *Along the Indian Road*, 184.

63 See, "Dr. Stanley Jones's Open Letter to Mahatma Gandhi," *National Missionary Intelligencer* 25(1931), 98-101. This was also published in other religious and public newspapers.

64 See, for example, "Ashrams," *The Indian Witness* 65(16 May 1935), 305-306.

65 Jones, *A Song of Ascents*, 148.

66 E. Stanley Jones, *Christ's Alternative to Communism* (New York: Abingdon, 1935), 33. This volume was published in England as, *Christ and Communism* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1937). Reinhold Niebuhr *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1935), 180, dismissed Jones' essay as, "the most perfect swan song of liberal politics."

67 Jones, *Christ's Alternative to Communism*, 17.

68 Jones, *Christ's Alternative to Communism*, 19.

69 Jones, *Christ's Alternative to Communism*, 27.

70 Jones, *Christ's Alternative to Communism*, 35

71 There were those such as Jones' fellow missionary Sherwood Eddy who recounted his impressions in *Russia Today, What Can We Learn from It?* (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1934) and the revised perspective in *Eighty Adventurous Years, An Autobiography* (New York: Harper and Row, 1955). Jones and Eddy provide for interesting comparison. Jones was less naively enthusiastic about the Russian social experiment and therefore less disenchanted when it became widely known that it was not without its failures. Jones was critical of all systems.

72 Jones, *Christ's Alternative to Communism*, 165.

73 Jones, *Christ's Alternative to Communism*, 41-42.

74 Jones, *Christ's Alternative to Communism*, 267-302.

75 Jones, *Along the Indian Road*, 205.

76 Jones, *Along the Indian Road*, 205-213. Jones listed the projects, pp. 208-209: (1) Home management; (2) Medical work with a local dispensary and a traveling medical bus . . .; (3) Newspaper evangelism; (4) Postal evangelism in which we send Christian literature to about 3500 leaders of the depressed classes of India; (5) Women's work; (6) Public contacts through which we get in touch with national leaders; (7) Literature . . . Christian literature with an Indian flavor; (8) Student work where there is no Y.M.C.A. or Y.W.C.A.; (9) Training of a new type of Christian servant for India, the *Kristagrahis*, "men of Christ-force;" (10) Literacy Campaign; (11) Dealing with inquirers who come to study Christianity; (12) A language school for new missionaries; (13) Village center and Mohulla center. It is worth noting that K. T. Paul had suggested in *The National Missionary Intelligencer*

6(1912), 78, that the Ashram should train youth in three ways: "(a) affording evangelistic equipment to meet the best exponents of non-Christian religions on their own ground; (b) giving sufficient knowledge of medicine so as to alleviate suffering by nursing and to treat all ordinary diseases; (c) providing the training of an artisan for example either in carpentry or weaving so as to make self-support possible to every worker."

77 E. Stanley Jones, *Victorious Living* (New York: Abingdon, 1936); *idem*, *The Choice Before Us* (New York: Abingdon, 1937) published in England as, *Christ and Present World Issues* (London: Hodder andoughton, 1937); *idem*, *Along the Indian Road*; *idem*, *Is the Kingdom of God Realism ?* (New York: Abingdon. 1940).

78 E. Stanley Jones, "The Church of Christ in India," *The Indian Witness* 65(26 Sept. 1935), 613; *idem*, "Christians of America, Unite!" *The Christian Century* 52(1935), 1235-1237; "The Branch-Unity Plan," *The Indian Witness* 65(7 Nov. 1935), 710. Cf. the earlier discussions, "Editorial Notes, Freedom," *The National Missionary Intelligencer* 26(1932), 81-82, and P. D. Devanandan, "The Foreign Missionary and the Indian Christian," *The National Missionary Intelligencer* 28(1934), 5-7.

79 E. Stanley Jones, "Where Madras Missed Its Way," *The Indian Witness* 69(9 Feb. 1939), 86-87, also published in *The Christian Century* 56(1939), 351-352.

80 Henry P. Van Dusen, "What Stanley Jones Missed at Madras," *The Christian Century* 56(1939), 410-412; Walter M. Horton, "Walter Horton Pleads Not Guilty," *The Christian Century* 56(1939), 517-518; James R. Graham, Jr. "The Need of the Twentieth Century Revival: The Cult of E. Stanley Jones and the Adulation of Kagawa," *Christian Beacon* 4(1939), 1; Robert C. McQuilkin, "Stanley Jones and the Kingdom of God," *The Sunday School Times* 86(1944), 305-306, 316-318, 321-322, 333, 339-340, 353-354. For the context of this discussion, see, Tomas Shivute, *The Theology of Mission and Evangelism in the International Missionary Council from Edinburgh to New Delhi* (*Missiologian ja ekumeniikan seuran julkaisuja/Annals of the Finnish Society of Missiology and Ecumenics*, 31; Helsinki: Suomen Lahetysseura/Finnish Missionary Society, 1980), 80-89, *et passim*.

81' Jones, *A Song of Ascents*, 154.

82 See Jones' still impassioned account, *A Song of Ascents*, 220. For the larger context, see Taylor, *The Contribution of E. Stanley Jones*, 15-22.

83 E. Stanley Jones to Franklin Delano Roosevelt, 10 Aug. 1942, 5 Jan. 1943, 30 Dec. 1943, Jeff Blake Collection, Archives, Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore, KY

84 E. Stanley Jones, "An Open Letter to the People of Japan," *The Christian Century* 54(1937), 1131-1133- *idem*, "The Christian Attitude in the China War," *The Indian Witness* 67(1i Oct. 1937), 643-644; *idem*, "An Open Letter: To the Christian People of American and Great Britain," *The Christian Century* 54(1937), 1386-1388; *idem*, "Apply Gandhi's Method to Japan," *The Christian Century* 55(1938), 75-76; *idem*, "The Only Door to Peace: An Open

Letter to the Japanese People and the Christians of the World," *The Christian Century* 55(1938), 203-204.

85 E. Stanley Jones, *Reconstruction of the Church-On What Pattern?* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1970).

86 E. Stanley Jones, *The Christ of the American Road* (New York: Abingdon 1944), 60. Indicative of different levels of response to Jones' vision are the letters of B. L. Fisher to Julian C. McPheeters, 26 March 1954, 21 June 1954, McPheeters Collection, Archives, Asbury Theological Seminary Wilmore, KY and the responses, Julian C. McPheeters to B. L. Fisher, 12 April 1954, 1 July 1954, McPheeters Collection, Archives, Asbury Theological Seminary Wilmore, KY. Fisher, President of Lee Telephone Company of Martinsville, VA, stated in the 26 March 1954 letter that, "Stanley Jones is advocating One World Church, does not believe in private enterprise and various other things. I do not believe it is well for the Seminary to sell his books, since we know that his theory is contrary to our belief." McPheeters (12 April 1954), President of Asbury Theological Seminary, at first defended Jones' integrity and role as a theologian and evangelist. However, after the second letter from Fisher, McPheeters (1 July 1954) lamented, "Your evaluation of Dr. Jones (sic) statements were correct. It is distressing indeed that he has been misled in these areas to a degree that it is distressing and grievous to multitudes of God's people. Some of his ideas are quite contrary to the scripture as well as being economically unsound." J. Neal Hughley, *Trends in Protestant Social Ethics* (Morningside Heights, NY: King's Crown Press, 1948), 37, described this volume as "an incredibly sentimental glorification of American culture."

87 E. Stanley Jones, *The Unshakable Kingdom and the Unchanging Person* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1972).

88 Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 1019-1036 (on harmonial religion); 1031-1032 (on Jones).

89 Thomas, *The Work and Thought of Eli Stanley Jones*; Taylor, *The Contribution of E. Stanley Jones*; Johnson, *The Christian Vision of E. Stanley Jones*.

90 Deminger, *Evangelisk pa Indiska villkor*.

# **A WESLEYAN READING OF H. RICHARD NIEBUHR'S THEOLOGY**

by  
W. Stanley Johnson

## **INTRODUCTION**

To a Niebuhr scholar, it is noteworthy that Wesleyans have not yet assumed the responsibility of addressing the theology of H. Richard Niebuhr in a comprehensive manner. Can justification be offered for serious consideration of H. Richard Niebuhr's theological and ethical contributions? I believe so, for the following reasons.

First, most interpreters of religious history in America include Richard Niebuhr among those who have most influenced the development of recent theology in America. James Fowler judges that

Across the thirty years of his teaching career at Yale Divinity School, H. Richard Niebuhr contributed to the preparation of more persons who today are influential as professors, heads of departments of religion, deans, and pastors than any other American theologian of the twentieth century. He wrote seven books, [all] of which remain in print. Each of these books has shown a remarkably durable ability to interest, intrigue, and inform contemporary students. Through his books he has gained a lasting place in the formative literature of sociology of religion and of American church history, as well as in Christian theology and ethics which were his chosen field.<sup>1</sup>

Because Niebuhr's influence has been so great, we must assess the strengths and the weaknesses of his theology to adequately serve the theological needs of the holiness community. No responsible interpreter would want to ignore the evident positive contributions which Niebuhr makes to recent religious thought. At the same time, no responsible Wesleyan will want to avoid the necessary duty to point out the limitations and weaknesses of Niebuhr's theology.

Secondly, Niebuhr's work should be considered by the holiness movement because we address similar issues from a similar standpoint. Niebuhr's

theological background was pietistic and generally "orthodox." Although his church tradition was tinged with social gospel liberalism, Niebuhr's assessment of issues came from the standpoint of a desire to conserve the universal values and truths of his theological heritage without accommodating to simplistic restorationism. We share this vantage point today.

The approach taken in our investigation draws on Niebuhr's dialogical methodology as we review certain salient points which address us in our time.

We shall expose Niebuhr's doctrines of the Kingdom of God which (1) reigns in *power*, (2) emerges as *creative* life amidst structures of decay, (3) *transcends particularity* of all kinds, and (4) is moved by fundamental *hope*, a hope which is kept alive within the confessional community which we call *the Church of Jesus Christ*.

### **THE KINGDOM OF GOD AS TRANSCENDENT POWER**

Niebuhr offered to persons without hope, persons without power, the doctrine of God as powerful being. Grace has been identified with power by many writers of the Christian Church. Unbelievers have doubted precisely the kind of doctrine of power that Niebuhr presents. They offer a "logic of unbelief" which denies the existence of God and universal order. They conclude that the "power" which governs the universe "is either blind in its willfulness" or "careless" of the destiny of that which issues from it.<sup>2</sup> For Niebuhr, however, grace is seen as transcendent power, known to us in revelation.

Usually when people talk about revelation in religion they seem to me the first kind of thing: communication of propositions in which you believe—for instance, that there is a God. More fundamentally it is the second kind of disclosure—the disclosure of power, *being which has something of the character of a faithful subject on whom you can put your lives, in whom you can trust* (my italics), and to whom you can be loyal. Now this is the fundamental mystery of life to us in a way—that we have somehow been endowed with the ability to conceive faith in the central principle of being itself and say to it "God." This is the mystery, and the wonder with which we are concerned.<sup>3</sup>

Niebuhr speaks of the endowment of this revelation of the God in whom we can trust as powerful being. Grace is the revelation of God as power.

God's grace *is* power, not merely an abstract idea known in revelation. It is the God who is acting in the processes of history which Niebuhr worships. Of this God there is much doubt in the world, and much anxiety and sin results from such doubting. Niebuhr explains:

The great anxiety of life, the great distrust, appears in the doubt that the Power whence all things come, the Power which has thrown the self and its companions into existence, is good. The question is always before us, Is Power good? Is it good to and for what it has brought into being?... We recognize goodness in that which maintains and serves being. But our great question is whether goodness is powerful, whether it is not forever defeated in actual existence by loveless, thoughtless power. The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, the establishment of Jesus Christ in power, is at one and the same time the

demonstration of the power of goodness and the goodness of power. . . . When Jesus Christ is made known as Lord it is to the glory of God the Father. And the Absolute is made known as Father in glorification of the Son.<sup>4</sup>

The ultimate "resurrection" of Jesus, which for Niebuhr was the continuing influence of his life, is the sign of the power of God acting on behalf of men. Niebuhr supports this view in the following quotation:

We see the power of God over the strong of the earth made evident not in the fact that he slays them, but in his making the spirit of the slain Jesus unconquerable<sup>5</sup>

The revolutionary way of thinking which is summed up in the life and faith of Jesus requires belief in God as power, indeed this faith is essential to any adequate theology, according to Niebuhr. He writes:

Revelation is no less the revolution in our thought about divine power. In order that any being may qualify as a deity before the bar of religious reason it must be good, but it must also be powerful. There may be beings we can adore for their goodness which are as powerless as the self-subsistent values and the eternal objects of modern philosophy. But what is powerless cannot have the character of deity; it cannot be counted upon, trusted in; to it no prayers ascend. When goodness and power fall apart and when we have no confidence in the power of the good or in the good of power our religion turns to magic-to the exercise of our own power whose goodness we do not doubt. Our adoration then may be directed to eternal values but our petitions descend upon congressmen and senators, who both exercise power and can be moved. Deity, whatever else it must be to be deity, must be *powerful in its goodness as well as good in its power* (my italics).<sup>6</sup>

Niebuhr believed that the reduction of God to the status of idea tends to anthropocentrism and inability to transcend the viewpoint and concerns of particular selves. Under this kind of thinking one "may come to a Stoic resignation to the world" which is necessarily understood as a "vast conspiracy of natural powers which surround him and have him at their mercy."<sup>7</sup> Only now and then does the self courageously protest or even rebel against the course of fated existence.<sup>8</sup>

When one listens to Niebuhr to discover what kind of power moves in history it becomes apparent that Jesus' relation to the powerful God is not that which men of the world of power would expect and comes as a total surprise to them. His power is not that of Marxism. Niebuhr asserts:

And yet we strangely-must revise in the light of Jesus Christ all our ideas of what is really strong in this powerful world. The power of God is made manifest in the weakness of Jesus, in the meek and dying life, which through death is raised to power.<sup>9</sup>

This language is not unusual in Christian tradition, but Niebuhr goes on to get at his own unique theology of the cross:

We see the power of God over the strong of earth made evident not in the fact that he slays them, but in his making the spirit

of the slain Jesus unconquerable. Death is not the manifestation of power; there is a power behind and in the power of death, which is stronger than death. We cannot come to the end of the road of our rethinking the ideas of power and omnipotence. We thought that we knew their meaning and find we did not know and do not know now, save that the omnipotence of God is not like the power of the world which is in his power. His power is made perfect in weakness and he exercises sovereignty more through crosses than through thrones. So with revelation we must begin to rethink all ideas about deity. We cannot help ourselves. We must make a new beginning in our thought as in our action. Revelation is the beginning of a revolution in our power thinking and our power politics.<sup>10</sup>

Here the language of the cross introduces the assent form of relation to the power of the world. Niebuhr begins to underscore the point that grace is that which may allow our death and apparent failure to work Christ's higher work in the realm of power, which is beyond the power of the world.

Niebuhr observed that God's power *includes* all the powers of the world. It is not that His power does not include death, the slaying of others, the conquering of other powers. It is to understand that the way God's power works includes the suffering of His servants even when it seems quite apparent from the point of view of one who believes in a loving, just and holy God, that His justice does not seem to be served. Niebuhr's point is that the justice of God is served in God's own way and God's own time. A universal perspective of the whole of history of power must be adopted. The grace of this power is the grace that is good. That grace and that goodness may not be apparent from our limited and finite perspective. From the perspective of the universal knower, the absolute power which, spans all of history, the good is known, the grace is apparent, it is for us only to trust. As such a trusting man, then, Jesus is a demonstration of grace. He died not for my sins in the substitutionary way that classical theology proposed, nor in the sense that the bodily resurrection gives evidence that God has supernatural power, nor in the hope that I too will be given a bodily resurrection and eternal life; but in the special sense that Jesus was aware of the goodness of God, and confident of His omnipotence, even when all the natural indicators, especially as interpreted from the sinful viewpoint of defensive "survival faiths," pointed to the fact that God had failed or forsaken him-utterly.

## **THE KINGDOM OF GOD AS CREATIVITY**

The grace of God is known also to Niebuhr as creativity. In his unpublished lectures on Christian Ethics he shows that the ground of the goodness of all things is to be found in the fact that all things were created by God. He cites Genesis 1, Psalm 104, Psalm 8 and II Isaiah to support this claim.<sup>11</sup>

The presence of God's grace is discussed in *The Responsible Self* as he speaks of

. . . the *primacy of God's action*: in making himself known by the revelation of his goodness rather than allowing himself

to be found by search; in giving the faith, the love, and the hope that aspire toward him; in *creating and re-creating, making and remaking*.<sup>12</sup>

Henri Bergson's work, *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, initiates his presentation of the essentials of his theory about creativity and "Dynamic Religion" with these words:

Let us cast a glance backward at Life, this life which we had previously followed in its development up to the point where religion was destined to emerge from it. A great current of creative energy is precipitated into matter, to wrest from it what it can.<sup>13</sup>

The influence of Bergson is evident from the very first writings of Niebuhr. In his first published scholarly article, *An Aspect of the Idea of God in Recent Thought*, published in 1920, Niebuhr explains the values of Bergson's point of view:

The argument against pantheism and in favor of the theory of a finite God on the basis of evolutionary thought has received a great measure of support from BERGSON, of course. In the vast world of change he discerns the action of a "life-force penetrating matter" like a broad current and issuing in a ceaseless flowering forth of life-forms. Matter and mechanism are the bitter opponents of this force and conflict can end in victory only at the cost of much blood and many tears. In the fountain of the life-force and in its continuity Bergson discerns God, "who is a creator and is free, and whose creative effort continues on the side of life thru the evolution of species and the formation of human personalities." In this definition of God as creative activity, absolutely free, the philosopher sees a refutation of all pantheism and mysticism.<sup>14</sup>

Several themes emerge from this statement which point to the compatibility of Bergson with Niebuhr's theology, even if it cannot be absolutely determined that Bergson was the most formative influence upon Niebuhr's development of those themes. At a Yale conference on science and religion, Niebuhr said:

The question concerning creation is extremely unsatisfactory to me as a theologian. To speak about creation as something that happened at the beginning is not terribly interesting to us theologically. This is to confuse religious concern for the presence at the source. . . of something to which you can ascribe something like intelligence, something like goodness with the Genesis account. I think the discussions of theology and science have been dominated entirely too much, not by genuine theological concerns, but by biblicistic concerns as though creation means what Genesis is taling about and not what II Isaiah for instance is talking about.<sup>15</sup>

The principle of the *elan vital* Bergson develops is very similar to the Niebuhrian God who is the "principle of being." For Niebuhr, however, the *total* process of structural reality is essentially creative, whereas, for Bergson, special attention and emphasis is given to *humanity*.<sup>16</sup> For Bergson,

humanity is the result of "a special outburst" of the *elan vital*, which is to be deemed more valuable, or, which is the same thing, a higher form of the creative impulse, than is the relatively lesser level of being which is matter. This distinction is not true for Niebuhr. He criticizes Bergson for opting for a "closed society" of being, which is the human community. For Niebuhr, this is an idolatrous view of man and nature, resulting in the glorification of an aspect of being at the expense of, with the tendency to devalue, another aspect of being. *For Niebuhr; the whole realm of being is the realm of grace*, or just as importantly, the realm infiltrated by grace. As being under the influence of grace, *all* being is valued, this is true because all being is God-created.

Grace is the activity of God which inheres in the total process of being, as Niebuhr expressed the notion in the following:

. . . God, I believe, is always in history; he is in the structure in things, the source of all meaning, the "I am that I am," that which is that it is.<sup>17</sup>

An important aspect of this gracious activity is that it is present even in the times and events which bring suffering and evil into our lives. Although this causes us the greatest difficulty in interpreting reality so as to see the good, the grace of the benevolent God, it is a fundamental reality and a primary concern of Niebuhr's theology. He writes:

That structure of the universe, that will of God does bring war and depression upon us when we bring it upon ourselves, for we live in a kind of world which visits our iniquities upon us and our children, no matter how much we pray and desire that it be otherwise.<sup>18</sup>

## **THE KINGDOM AS UNIVERSAL**

Two kinds of universalism commingle in Niebuhr's theological system. The first is that broad vision of universal being which enables Niebuhr to look at the forest and see more than trees. It is the comprehensive perspective which few theologians achieve that allows Niebuhr to consider all questions from the standpoint of all reality rather than assuming the idolatrous perspective of a particular part of reality. Of course, Niebuhr recognizes the relativity and incompleteness of this universal perspective at the same time that he goes beyond most thinkers in his rigor and consistency in the attempt to consider the meaning of the whole.

Another kind of universalism pertains to the question of whether or not all men are "saved." Niebuhr considers the question from two perspectives in *The Responsible Self*:

I believe that man exists and moves and has his being in God; that his fundamental relation is to God. That is the starting point, not the conclusion: hence the temptation to call this a theistic moral philosophy. But though God's relation to man is not qualified by man's acceptance or rejection of his presence, man's relation to God is evidently so qualified.<sup>19</sup>

Whatever man's standing is before God, it is not determined by man, but by God, who has taken the initiative in the divine-human relationship. The variable occurs at the point of human initiative.

The posture of God toward man is benevolence and acceptance into His Kingdom: "all - are citizens of the one *Civitas Dei*."<sup>20</sup> This acceptance is not limited to those who call themselves Christians, according to Niebuhr:

...we do not fail to note that among our companions who refuse to take the name of Christian, responses to action are made that seem to be informed by the trust, the love of all being, the hope in the open future, that have become possible to us only in our life with Jesus Christ and in the presence of the One whom he encountered in all his encounters and to whom he gave fitting answer in all his answers to his companions. We believe that the reinterpretation of existence has come into the world and that it is not confined to those who say, "Lord, Lord," nor even necessarily best represented by them.<sup>21</sup>

## **GRACE AS HOPE**

Niebuhr fills out his definition of grace as he introduces the important idea of hope as central to understanding the Christian message of salvation in *Christ and Culture*. He first finds the existentialism which describes Jesus "as radically obedient" and the orthodox Protestantism for which Jesus was the "exemplar" and the bestower of "the virtue of faith" to be "extreme." Then he turns to Albert Schweitzer who, according to Niebuhr, offers a better way.

Niebuhr says that Schweitzer described Jesus "as uniquely characterized by expectancy rather than love" or obedience or faith. "He hoped," Niebuhr continues, "for the great reversal in history through which evil would be finally overcome...."<sup>22</sup> It was the establishment of "God's reign" which was the ultimate concern of Jesus. This hope was heightened

by the conviction that in him the Messianic future had come very near. Hence the ethics of early Christianity is set forth as the ethics of the great hope.<sup>22</sup>

This hope is not a matter of determined consciousness but is the result of the free interpretation of the individual self which attempts to make sense out of its observation of what is going on in the world. This hope is rooted in an understanding and faith in God, rather than self-confidence or stubborn wishfulness.

The good result of such interpretations and the contribution that such "eschatologists" have made to modern theology, according to Niebuhr, is that the "overwhelming heroic greatness" of Jesus is presented with force. This extreme of hopefulness cuts across "average morality," according to Niebuhr, which "presupposes complacency tempered by a little cynicism, or resignation qualified by moderate expectations of good."<sup>24</sup> Niebuhr sums up Schweitzer's interpretation of Jesus' understanding of history: Jesus "is thought to have staked his hope upon what turned out to be an erroneous belief about the shortness of time . . ." and to have failed to change the unchangeable course of events to fit "his dogmatic pattern."<sup>25</sup> Niebuhr counters this interpretation with his own:

His eschatological view of history did not differ from the doctrine of progress only or primarily by regarding time as short.

He was not dealing with history at all in the first place, but with God, the Lord of time and space. He hoped in the living God, by whose finger demons were being cast out, whose forgiveness of sins was being made manifest. The times were in His hand, and therefore predictions about times and seasons were out of place. And was not the object of Jesus' intense expectancy God Himself, the manifestation of divine glory and the revelation of divine righteousness? The Kingdom of God for Jesus is less a happy state of affairs in the first place than God in his evident rulership. He rules now, but His rule is to become manifest to all.<sup>26</sup>

For the Biblically rooted interpreter of Jesus, this passage must become an exciting part of the theology of Niebuhr. Niebuhr seems to deny the essentially pessimistic views of Schweitzer, which leave the church with a Jesus who was deluded in his belief about the coming Kingdom, who naively held on to the hope that the Messianic Kingdom was coming on earth immediately. An essentially destructive position is countered and replaced with a basically positive understanding of the hopefulness of Jesus. Hopefulness is basic to the Church, which is the confessional community that trusts in Jesus Christ.

### **THE CHURCH: THE COMMUNITY OF HOPE**

Niebuhr's view of the church corresponds to his view of the Kingdom of God, yet draws a line between the two. The Church is *first*

a community of memory and hope, sharing in the common memory not only of Jesus Christ but also of the mighty deeds of God known by Israel, expecting the coming into full view of the kingdom on earth *and/or* (my italics) in heaven.

. . . and *secondly* "the community of worship, united by its direction toward one God and *thirdly* "as a community of thought in which debate and conflict can take place because there is a fundamental frame of agreement. .."<sup>27</sup> The expectation of the coming Kingdom is the hopeful confession of a community which shares a common faith in God. Niebuhr says that "negatively, the Church is not the rule or realm of God; positively, there is no apprehension of the kingdom except in the Church - . ." and, "the subject-counterpart of the kingdom is never an individual in isolation but one in community, that is, in the Church."<sup>28</sup> Hope is engendered within the community of hope.

Our reading of Niebuhr's theology of the Kingdom of God must go beyond description to evaluation to fulfill the function of translating his thought into our life story. The following observations seem helpful as a step toward fulfilling that task.

1. Wesleyans will certainly appreciate the understanding of God as *the powerful One* of the world. To accept a view of a powerless God would go against our historical emphasis upon the victory and empowerment, which is claimed through the cross of Jesus Christ. So, an important aspect of Niebuhr's Kingdom of power is seen in its willingness to endure the cross. "Death to self" is not an idea new to Wesleyan theology. On the social as well as the individual level, we must be willing to face the inevitable judg-

ment that our particular institutions or dreams of individual conquest may be radically transformed through crucifixion. Nations and warriors alike continually face their limitations and must surrender to God's will. There is power and humility in the way of the cross.

2. The Methodist heritage will also approve of the idea that the Kingdom of God is *creatively* powerful. Nothing lends any greater impetus to destruction than for the church to lack the courage to create new forms and accept changes in process and structure. The realm of God is open to new possibilities. (John Wesley's many new methods were a scandal to the church of his time.) We must be open to "reviving" institutions and individuals through the renewal, or alteration, or destruction of outmoded structures, whether they be personal, conceptual or social.

3. The universality of grace poses a possibility and a question. First, it is important for us to see with Niebuhr the extent of the influence of God's presence in *the whole world*. Particularisms of many kinds have crept into our movement with disastrous results. Niebuhr helps us see that God's gracious Kingdom extends its influence beyond the holiness movement to actively influence and involve other groups. (It would be well for us to consider new possibilities for Church union among our related holiness bodies. Niebuhr certainly would say so.)

A serious question arises when we confront Niebuhr's confident expectation that humanity is saved, even though sinful. This kind of universalism truncates the justice of God at the same time that it reduces the meaning of the cross of Christ. It is clear to this reader that outer darkness awaits those who are finally impenitent. The loss of this conviction led followers of Troeltsch and Niebuhr to abandon missions and evangelism. Wesleyans who deserve the name will not capitulate at that point.

4. Amidst a despairing world, we applaud Niebuhr's vision of *a hopeful Kingdom*. The individual and social despair generated by gloomy eschatologies work havoc among those who seek justice on earth. The Kingdom of God offers the potential for renewal in the face of opposition, discouragement and alienation. Wesley's driving ambition to save the whole world was motivated by that hope. And, with Niebuhr, Wesley believed that the Church is the confessional community which *alone* sees the Savior, Jesus Christ, as the symbol and reality of God's saving grace.

These points of comparison cannot exhaust the many possible comparisons, which need to be made. They merely illustrate the fruitfulness of attempting further dialogue among these traditions of faith.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>James W. Fowler, *To See the Kingdom, The Theological Vision of H. Richard Niebuhr* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1974), p. vii.

<sup>2</sup>H. Richard Niebuhr, "Illusions of Power," *Christian Century Pulpit*, 33 (April 1962): 100.

<sup>3</sup>H. Richard Niebuhr, "Science and Religion," *Yale Divinity News*, (Jan. 1960):21. Hereafter cited as "Science and Religion."

<sup>4</sup>H. Richard Niebuhr, *Faith on Earth* (unpublished book manuscript, Ch. 6: "The Reconstruction of Faith", p. 20, cited by James W. Fowler, *To See the Kingdom, The Theological Vision of H. Richard Niebuhr*, p. 232.

<sup>5</sup>H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Meaning Revelation* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1970), p.136.

<sup>6</sup>Niebuhr, *Meaning*, pp. 134-135.

<sup>7</sup>Niebuhr, *Meaning*, p.135.

<sup>8</sup>Niebuhr, *Meaning*, p. 135.

<sup>9</sup>Niebuhr, *Meaning*, p.136.

<sup>10</sup>Niebuhr, *Meaning*, p.136.

<sup>11</sup>It is interesting and significant that Niebuhr can draw upon the authority of these Old Testament materials in the case of God's creativity but omits similar basic data from his discussions on other subjects.

<sup>12</sup>H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Responsible Self* (New York: Harper Row, Publishers, 1963), p.135. Hereafter cited as *Responsible Self*.

<sup>13</sup>Bergson, *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Company, [French first ed. in 1932, first English trans., 1935, reprinted by Doubleday] n.d.), p.209. At occasional points in his work, Niebuhr acknowledges indebtedness to Bergson. This debt has not been fully calculated by the interpreters of Niebuhr and deserves the closest critical scrutiny.

<sup>14</sup>H. Richard Niebuhr, "An Aspect of the Idea of God in Recent Thought," *Magazin for Evangelische Theologie und Kirche* 48, (1920):42.

<sup>15</sup>The reference to II Isaiah refers to the view of God as acting in all events, with the understanding that that action is a function of the creative intention and activity of God. God is not, in Niebuhr's view of God, known primarily as the *initiator* of being, but as the principle of being by which every moment is and by which all being participates in the ongoing process of being.

<sup>16</sup>This is noted in his discussion of creativity in *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*.

<sup>17</sup>H. Richard Niebuhr, "A Communication: The Only Way into the Kingdom of God," *Christian Century*, 49 (1932):447.

<sup>18</sup>The statement runs counter to the view that "prayer changes things," or that one may expect a supernatural intervention in history which may alleviate or miraculously confute the forces of nature and reality which threaten us. Niebuhr's answer to the supernaturalist who believes in miracles, is to enjoin such an individual to accept that which is happening to him/her as part of the gracious activity of God. Even though the meaning of that activity is beyond the power of human comprehension, it is to be accepted as essentially gracious.

<sup>19</sup>Niebuhr, *Responsible Self*, p 44.

<sup>20</sup>H. Richard Niebuhr, "The Gift of Catholic Vision," *Theology Today*, 4(Jan. 1948):513.

<sup>21</sup>Niebuhr, *Responsible Self*, p.144.

<sup>22</sup>H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1951), pp. 19f.

<sup>23</sup>Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, p.20.

<sup>24</sup>Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, p.20.

<sup>25</sup>Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, p.21.

<sup>26</sup>Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, pp. 21f.

<sup>27</sup>H. Richard Niebuhr, *Purpose of the Church and Its Ministry* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1956), p.23. Hereafter cited as *Purpose*. <sup>28</sup>Niebuhr, *Purpose*, p.19.

# **THE HOLINESS WITNESS IN THE ECUMENICAL CHURCH**

by  
Donald W. Dayton

I have been asked to reflect today on “the holiness witness in the ecumenical church.” I hope that you will indulge me if I make this paper a little informal in character. Others of our society have attempted more systematic treatment of these issues. Timothy Smith has on various occasions attempted to reassert the ecumenical vision of the 19th century as a part of his effort to recover for us the significance of the antebellum era that was so formative for the emergence of our movement. John Smith of the Church of God (Anderson) cultivated the ecumenical dimensions of his movement for a generation and paid his own way for a quarter of a century to the Faith and Order discussions of the National Council of Churches. Our new president Howard Snyder wrote his B. D. thesis at Asbury Seminary on questions of unity in the Holiness Movement-in the midst of ill-fated merger talks between the Wesleyans and the Free Methodists. And a few years ago in his presidential address to us David Cubie argued by means of a motif analysis of Wesleyan and Methodist thought that the love motif so takes precedence over the purity motif that separation from other Christians should be a step of last resort.

Surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses I am ashamed to admit that I only recently came to this theme in my own thinking. I am at present not sure why this has been so. After my undergraduate years in a Wesleyan institution, education and employment have been gained primarily in “ecumenical” settings. But my movement back toward Christian faith has come, for the most part, through non-ecclesiastical questions that have allowed me to duck the question of the holiness witness in the ecumenical church for what seemed to be more important questions of social concern. I do remember intimations of this question after the 1973 “Chicago Declaration of Evangelical Social Concern” when I was one of the few signers of that document that welcomed the response of the Church and Society Unit of the National Council of Churches (others were concerned that any association with the NCCC would discredit their social reform agenda among “evangelicals”). My work

with such journals as *Sojourners* and *The Other Side* led to a meeting with leaders of the NCCC to discuss in private (even in secret) the ecumenical meaning of the recovery of "evangelical social concern" in the mid-1970s. I had something of the feeling at that time that the broader "evangelical" world was moving toward bridging the chasms bequeathed us by the fundamentalist/modernist controversy, but for some reason I assumed that my growing identification with our own movement precluded any formal involvement in the "ecumenical movement" as such.

This began to change about a decade ago with an invitation to participate in a variety of consultations under the sponsorship of the Institute for Ecumenical and Cultural Research in Collegeville, Minnesota, under the directorship of Robert Bilheimer, who had worked at the World Council in Geneva on most of the WCC assemblies since World War II and was now attempting to build up informal grass-roots networks in a form of "countercultural" ecumenism, something at odds with more formal ecumenism. There I was drawn into a larger picture especially by the influence of Thomas Stransky, one of the finest Christians I have known, who had worked in the Secretariat for Christian Unity during Vatican II and has recently accepted the directorship of the Tantur ecumenical center just outside Jerusalem. Some of you here have experienced also the impact of the Collegeville center and Tom Stransky on your own lives, especially when a couple of years ago two summer consultations were held in Collegeville on issues surrounding the role of the holiness, pentecostal, and evangelical traditions in the larger church world.

Contacts in Collegeville led to involvement in the formal ecumenical agencies of our time. I went to the Vancouver Assembly of the World Council of Churches on a press pass, and had my understanding of the Council transformed. I was stunned to sit through two profoundly theological addresses which bore exalted Christological visions only to discover that the media was interested almost exclusively in a side comment by Allan Boesak that violence might be justified in some forms of social oppression such as that existing in South Africa. In press reports the next day the theology of these addresses was ignored as alarmist headlines and articles reported a call for a "militarized clergy." It was this intimate experience of media distortion that more than anything else raised for me the question of whether I ought to rethink the nature of my rather cavalier lack of interest in such ecumenical questions. When I discovered that this experience had been shared by most of the other journalists from "evangelical" contexts, I worked with them in the drafting of an "Open Letter" testifying to what we were experiencing at Vancouver.

About the same time Brother Jeff Gros of the Faith and Order Commission of the National Council followed up on Collegeville Interaction and visited our Society when it met in Anderson, Indiana, a few years ago to invite us to participate in the theological discussions of the NCCC. David Cubie and I have served these last four years as your liaison representatives to the Faith and Order Commission, where we have had the privilege of participating in and influencing the direction of such discussions, along with representatives of various Pentecostal and evangelical groups that Jeff Gros has brought into this arena. I remember how nervous the WTS executive committee was about proposing this representation in response to the invi-

tation that we had-and the surprise at the lack of resistance when the proposal was brought to the floor. Rather, some of our members declared that such a step was long overdue. As I have reflected on the last four years of dialogue, I am convinced that this decision was one of the most visionary and important that we have ever undertaken as a society.

I have been overwhelmed in the last few years at the way in which an ecumenical world has opened up to me. I prevailed upon Collegeville contacts to intervene for an invitation to the plenary sessions of the WCC Faith and Order Commission a couple of summers ago in Norway. This led this last spring to a sabbatical term in Geneva, where in part out of the concern of Emilio Castro to open up the Council more to "evangelicals" and others outside the ecumenical movement, I was hosted by the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism as something of a "consultant" on relationships with non-member churches and movements. In that context I was able to meet with a variety of leaders of the WCC to advocate a "more inclusive ecumenism" and to invite them to take up the problem of reconceiving the ecumenical vision in a way that would find common ground with those groups now outside the formal ecumenical movement-and to carry the same message to the Secretariat offices in the Vatican. (My major paper written during this period as a way of introducing the holiness movement and related currents to the WCC will be published in the January issue of *The Ecumenical Review*). And when I was recently elected to the executive board of the North American Academy of Ecumenists, I had occasion to reflect on the famous line of the Pogo cartoon: "We have met the enemy and they is us!"

I have been reluctant to comment publicly on the meaning of these experiences until I had overcome my own disorientation and found my "ecumenical legs." I feel that the time has now come to talk more explicitly about these issues and experiences and invite the Wesleyan Theological Society also to reflect on these questions and perhaps to take them up with a certain intentionality. Again I have decided to leave the articulation of the Wesleyan ecumenical vision to such passionate advocates as Tim Smith and David Cubie. I will restrict my comments today to the exploration of some practical issues and the proposing of some concrete steps that might be taken up by the society.

On many occasions I have reflected on the ecumenical commonplace that such dialogue and engagement often drive one more deeply into one's own tradition in an effort to understand who one is and what one brings of value to wider ecumenical dialogue. Much of my struggle over the last few years has been to get some clarity on this question; thus I would invite you to think with me for a few minutes about the question of who we are as advocates of the holiness movement and as members of the Wesleyan Theological Society. What gifts do we bring to the wider Christian Church and what stance do we take with regard to it?

The most obvious answer and one that I have found regularly assumed in various contexts is that we are basically Wesleyan "evangelicals." This answer assumes that we share the general orientation of other "evangelicals" (including their suspicion of the ecumenical movement and its agencies) and that we would find our participation in a wider church world shaped by the same concerns. The more I have worked with this position, the more

problematic it has become. I have been forced to a different articulation for both substantive and practical reasons.

First the more substantive issue: In what sense are we to be considered "evangelicals"? Obviously the answer to this question depends upon the content carried by the word "evangelical." In one sense we are paradigmatic of what one might mean by "evangelical." Our movement took shape in the midst of the nineteenth century heyday of "evangelicalism," and we are carriers of that tradition. But the situation is complicated by the use of the label "evangelical" by a party of fundamentalists that emerged from that movement after World War II. The label used by this party carries a different meaning, one that I am increasingly convinced is at odds with our identity and one that would destroy the distinctive witness of our own movement if adopted or even acceded to. Let me illustrate.

The self-understanding of the neo-evangelicalism of the twentieth century is well expressed by Bernard Ramm in *The Evangelical Heritage*. In that book Ramm develops a sort of "historical geography" that he uses to define the "evangelical heritage." "Evangelicalism" in his sense belongs to the Christian west rather than the Christian east and to the world of the Reformation rather than to the Catholic tradition. From the Reformation Ramm traces his line through Protestant (and especially Reformed) orthodoxy which came under attack in the Enlightenment. For Ramm the "evangelical" is one who attempts to sustain the structures of Protestant Orthodox theology over against the Enlightenment and its offspring, "liberalism." As Ramm sees it, this was done most clearly in the 19th century by Old School Calvinism. Represented by the old Princeton Theology of Hodge and Warfield, it laid the foundations for modern fundamentalism and the neo-evangelical theological tradition that emerged from it. This analysis of the nature of "evangelicalism" focuses on the fundamental question of accommodation to enlightenment themes and turns "evangelicalism" into a position on a spectrum somewhere to the left of the supposed fundamentalist rejection of such issues and slightly to the right of conservative neo-orthodoxy (i.e. the position occupied by Karl Barth). The result is that "evangelical" in this vision is equated with "conservative" or "traditional" and is opposed most fundamentally to "liberal." Ramm is not as sophisticated about these matters as he might be, but I am convinced that something like this vision underlies nearly every articulation of the "neo-evangelical" vision.

How might we react to such an analysis? One might well argue that we in the Wesleyan tradition take a different turn at every key point in Ramm's flow chart. Though Augustinian and thus Western in some senses, Wesley thought Pelagius a much-maligned saint and derived many of his distinctive ideas from the Eastern tradition, especially the Cappadocian Fathers. One might well argue that much misunderstanding of Wesley's thought, especially of his concepts of "perfection," has been caused by the tendency to interpret what derives from the East in Western terms. Similarly, I am becoming increasingly convinced that Wesley is as much Catholic as he is Protestant in his fundamental thought forms, not only in the sense that he derives them from the *via media* of Anglicanism rather than the continental reformation but also in that his basic soteriological vision is more Catholic than Protestant in its orientation to the language of sanctification and the cultivation of Christian virtues. We celebrate the influence of Luther

on Wesley's Aldersgate experience, but we forget that when Wesley finally got around to reading Luther's commentary he was horrified and regretted that he had endorsed it. Wesley is only distantly related to Protestant Orthodoxy in the technical sense and was more a product of pietist revolt against Orthodoxy, which shared much of the Enlightenment critique of Orthodoxy. In the nineteenth century it would be "New School" Presbyterianism rather than "Old School" Presbyterianism with which we would find our affinities. Our distinctive theological emphases were bitterly opposed in the 19th century by the Old School Calvinists (cf. Warfield's two-volumes of attacks on varieties of "perfectionism."), and those emphases did not characteristically take the shape of "protestant orthodoxy." On the latter point one has only to read the polemics of Pope, Hills, and Wiley against the strict inerrantist doctrine of Scripture or to notice the Grotian and governmental sources of our doctrine of atonement over against the "penal sub-stitutionary" doctrine of the Orthodox tradition. Ramm's flow chart is developed to defend a theological position fundamentally at odds with our own-in spite of the fact that we have in many places been deeply assimilated into this "neo-evangelical" vision.

Much more is at stake in this discussion than getting the family tree right. Several points should be noted. In the first place we are more conjunctively related to the rest of the Christian tradition than Ramm's disjunctive analysis would allow. We cannot so easily and radically cut ourselves off from the rest of Christendom. We are vitally related to most other branches in the very center of our thought and theological understandings. We are, to follow the suggestion of Albert Outler, something of an ecumenical bridge tradition in that we reach instinctively in all these directions. Secondly, we are not oriented by the fundamental issue that defines Ramm's central problematic-the crisis of traditional belief precipitated by the Enlightenment. We have not noticed the extent to which Methodism is the first major religious movement after the Enlightenment and is to great extent contextualized to it-as evidenced for example by Wesley's more positive appropriation of "reason" over against, for example, Luther's tendency to call reason a "whore." Nor have we noticed that Wesley does not give "orthodoxy" the same technical status that fundamentalism and Protestant Orthodoxy give it. Wesley loved to note that the Devil himself is "orthodox" but far from the "true religion of the heart." This does not mean that Wesley had no concern for "orthodoxy" in the more general sense, but it does mean that he perceived the fundamental problem to be something other-a matter of the will. One might well argue that the Wesleyan analysis of the fundamental issue remains basically the same before and after the Enlightenment precisely because "orthodoxy" is not made the central question. This means that our tradition has found it easier to incorporate critical thought than the fundamentalist tradition has. It also means that the fundamental enemy in the Wesleyan vision is not "liberalism" as it is for the fundamentalist or the neo-evangelical but "nominal Christianity." The latter comes in many varieties, both conservative and liberal. The point is that the Wesleyan analysis of the human condition turns on a different axis and that we are often in danger of obscuring the distinctiveness of our own fitness by offering it as a version of "evangelicalism" in a world in which

Ramm's vision of what it means to be "evangelical" so dominates that it is difficult to hear any other voices.

But there are other dimensions of this problem that become apparent when one reflects on what might be our contribution to the wider church world. Our first answer to this is usually in terms of our vision of the spiritual life and the "perfect love" that defines the center of our theology and life. I would not negate this response, but I have come to realize new dimensions of this position. I had not realized how far off the map of many of the traditional churches such a position is, especially as it is distant from those who, as evidenced by the Lima document on "Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry," tend to pick up ecumenical questions in terms of church order and ministry issues. Our tendency to practice forms of open communion and to allow a variety of baptismal practices, subordinating questions along these lines to more central questions of the life of the Spirit, is rather unusual and an important witness to the rest of the world not only about basic priorities but also about practical solutions to issues that haunt the ecumenical movement.

And we have other unique gifts to bring to wider discussions that are very much alive today. We do not often stop to reflect on the fact that social issues have, historically at least, been given a high profile in our tradition. We sometimes so stress the centrality of Christian experience that we forget that the emphasis on sanctification is inherently a call to Christian integrity and the "Christianizing of Christianity." The Wesleyan tradition heightens the significance of the ethical response and has made such issues as defining of Christian integrity as important as "confession" and "doctrine" in other traditions-in a significant anticipation of such debates as for example, that over whether the opposition to apartheid should be lifted to the level of status confessionis in the Reformed tradition by officially declaring it "heresy." The holiness churches have, if anything, accentuated this tendency in the Wesleyan tradition. The Wesleyan and Free Methodists were founded explicitly in response to questions of Christian integrity with regard to slavery. We have in our midst the Salvation Army, one of the profoundest witnesses in the Christian tradition to the social concern and compassion that is central to Christian faith and probably the largest welfare organization in the world outside the federal government. But the Salvation Army is only the most obvious illustration of a theme that has been almost universally expressed throughout the history of the holiness movement-a "preferential option for the poor" that has its roots in Wesley himself but which came to the fore as a protest against the embourgeoisement of Methodism in the nineteenth century. Yet herein lies an irony in our generation: these issues have become widely debated outside our Wesleyan circles and the conclusion largely accepted that Christian faith includes this "preferential option for the poor," but such movement has largely not been in response to our witness, for we have largely withdrawn from such discussions.

A similar contribution of the holiness movement, beset by a similar irony, has to do with the ministry of women. A very strong case can be made that the holiness movement played a key role in the emergence of the nineteenth century women's movement and the ministry of women in the Christian church. We have over a century's experience with this issue and have

achieved percentages of women in the ministry as yet unthinkable in other churches. This history deserves to be shared with the rest of the church world, but we have not been sufficiently in contact with the rest of that world that they have any inkling that such a history and experience exists. And we have allowed ourselves to be so assimilated into the broader evangelical world and allowed other sociological forces to erode these distinctives so much that we have ourselves forgotten what might be our most distinctive contributions to the rest of the church world.

On these issues there is a very practical and concrete problem with entering the discussions as "evangelicals." Our distinctive contribution to the rest of the church world has largely to do with non-traditional and innovative themes that have been a part of our life and witness. The connotations of the word "evangelical" are so oriented to the defense of the "traditional" that if I enter the ecumenical arena as an "evangelical," it is assumed that I carry a set of concerns precisely the opposite of what is the case. This was a major problem in entering the Faith and Order Commission in the NCCC. Many of the women who have just recently begun to play a role in these discussions were very threatened when Jeff Gros began to invite various "evangelical" types in. They assumed that such participation would erode their own somewhat fragile position because they believed that it meant the expansion of participating by a dimension of the church world which they assumed to be opposed fundamentally to the ministry of women. In a similar way I discover that if I allow myself to be perceived as an "evangelical" in these discussions, I am assumed to be represented well by such institutions as Wheaton College and Fuller seminary. These institutions are such important political symbols of "evangelical power politics" that it becomes important in public meetings to feature these institutions and their representatives. My own distinctive witness is consistently marginalized. Such "evangelical" institutions are so dominant that I find my own witness constantly discredited. Thus in discussions with the study project on "evangelicalism" of the Lutheran World Federation center in Strasbourg I met the constant accusation that I was a marginal "left-wing evangelical" in my reservations about certain "evangelical" theological formulations and in my commitment to a form of Christian faith that gave such a prominent place to ethics in general and social ethics in particular. I tried to insist that I was more representative of my own tradition than they would allow-and that they were reading the whole "evangelical" experience through a sub-culture represented by the Evangelical Theological Society. The theological political situation is such that as long as I admit to being an "evangelical" I am read in terms of the wrong categories.

Thus recently I have come to the position that I refuse to appear in ecumenical contexts as an evangelical." I insist that I be called by my own name, that I belong to a "holiness" church that is as distinct from "evangelicalism" as, for example, Pentecostalism, and deserves to be treated as a distinct ecclesiastical tradition. This adoption of such an apparently "disreputable" label as "holiness" is sufficiently disorienting that I am able to fill the term with a more appropriate content and enter the discussion on my own terms. This strategy is very difficult to carry out consistently and it is so against the ingrained patterns of thought and the forces of ecclesiastical politics that I often experience it as a form of beating my head against

a brick wall. It was out of these high levels of frustration that I made my major discussion paper for a dialogue at the WCC a plea "for a moratorium on the use of the label 'evangelical' " on the grounds that it is "theologically incoherent, sociologically confusing, and ecumenically pernicious...."

Instead of the "evangelical" analysis represented by Ramm, I have offered in these ecumenical contexts an alternative analysis of what is at stake in these discussions—one that attempts to work with categories more appropriate to our own tradition and one that I think is a more accurate description of much of the broader "evangelical" world than is conveyed in the perspective of Ramm and other "neo-evangelicals." I have argued that if one looks at the National Association of Evangelicals, the World Evangelical Fellowship, the colleges of the Christian College Consortium, or other clusters of movements and institutions that constitute the "evangelical world" one actually finds a cluster of distinctively new movements and currents in the church that have arisen outside and in protest over against the style of the traditional churches of the ecclesiastical mainstream—a sort of "third force" in the church that finds expression in a variety of movements including adventism, pietist and revivalist movements, the holiness movement, pentecostalism, various forms of restorationism, the Southern Baptists as a distinct tradition, and so forth. This protest includes certain theological dimensions, but it must be understood on other levels as well, especially in terms of a form of class warfare based on new sect formation rooted in the nineteenth century. The conflicts that we are experiencing culturally today are in many ways not so much a resurgence of "evangelicalism" as the emergence into the broader culture and the middle classes of movements founded among the lower-classes in the nineteenth century but now claiming a place in the sun. Thus I present myself more as a representative of a church with a sectarian past now entering the larger church world with a distinctive witness.

This stance requires a profound reorientation at many points, but I am convinced that it is in many ways a more accurate reflection of the situation. I cannot here defend this vision fully (some more laboration will be in the January (1988) issue of *The Ecumenical Review* in my essay "Yet Another Layer of the Onion; or, Opening Up the Ecumenical Door to Let the Riffraff In" and I can make available my WCC paper calling for a "moratorium on the use of the label 'evangelical' "), but I would like to indicate some implications of this reorientation. In the first place, this perspective turns the "evangelical" position on its head. That position tends to see itself at the center as the preserver of "orthodoxy" and to see the rest of the church world as having left the center under the influence of liberalism. From this perspective the task of the "evangelical" is to call the rest of the church world "back" to the truth. My perspective grants to the ecumenical churches a more central role as the churches of the traditional mainstream, but argues that the newer movements of the nineteenth century are carriers of insights of importance for the whole life of the church and that ecumenical discussion is impoverished because it lacks these key voices. (For example, in Geneva I argued in the meetings of the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism that internal conflicts within the WCC were in part the product of the distance between CWME and Faith and Order in that the former was operating out of the missionary visions of the nineteenth century, while

the ecclesiology of the latter, as reflected in BEM, is truncated because the WCC includes very few of the voices of churches that made the missiological vision definitional of church existence-and I quoted B. T. Roberts to the effect that he did not know whether bishops were definitional of the church but he did know that a mission to the poor was.) Shifting the categories frees the "evangelical" world from the burden of claiming that all Christians must become "evangelicals" and allows them to adopt the more modest task of witnessing to a set of values and convictions that should permeate the whole. In this vision "evangelicalism" becomes one of several "parties" in the church world, playing a role not unlike the role of the "evangelical" party in the Church of England in the nineteenth century.

But this analysis has major implications for how we understand ourselves. Let me indicate two major issues. I have emphasized the extent to which the holiness movement must see itself in large part as founded in protest against the nineteenth century embourgeoisement of Methodism against the tendency to move toward patterns of traditional church life, toward forms of congregational life, theology and music that marginalized the poor; toward the growth of seminaries intimately tied up in this development; and so on. We are experiencing now, a century later, our own embourgeoisement and repeating many if not most of the patterns of the experience of Methodism in the nineteenth century. And to make it worse, we in the Wesleyan Theological Society, are the major carriers of this impulse toward embourgeoisement. It is crucial that we reflect together on the question of who we are and what we have to bring to wider church discussions. We are subject to many forces-denominationalization, "evangelicalization," the search for social and cultural respectability, etc.-that erode our distinctives and cause us in many cases to participate in the dissolution of our own tradition. I struggle with these questions very intensely-in part because the very questions with which I am dealing here could be seen as the epitome of the process of embourgeoisement and the search for respectability. I am inclined on certain levels to accept the validity of such a suggestion, but to argue that such forces are in part irreversible and that our task as Wesleyan intellectuals is to articulate the significance of our tradition in ways that preserve as much of the values of the past as possible in the new social and ecclesiastical reality in which we find ourselves.

But this analysis also leads to a very important argument for our own involvement in a larger church world. I have argued more fully in the January issue of *The Ecumenical Review* that I have come to understand the holiness movement and related currents as a profound "canonical corrective" to the life and theology of the Protestant mainstream. This began to dawn on me when I began to realize how many distinctive themes of the holiness movement are derived from the book of James: the search for purity of heart and the shunning of double mindedness; a certain down to earth vision of Christianity as a way of life in the "wisdom" tradition; the profound conviction that "faith without works is dead" and Wesley's comment that the devil is "orthodox" but fails to manifest true "heart religion"; the concern for the poor (it was James that was used to battle the nineteenth century pew rentals that holiness people found so prejudicial to the poor); and so forth. Those traditions of church life derived from the Reformation experience have often been explicit or implicit carriers of Luther's tendency to sup-

press this canonical witness. From this angle the emergence of the holiness movement (and of the larger Wesleyan tradition in general) is a sort of canonical corrective to magisterial Protestantism. Far from being a witness to the original vision of Protestantism now eroded by the acids of modernity, as the "evangelicals" would have us believe, we are a protest against the blind spots of this tradition in both its "liberal" and "conservative" expressions.

But as Kierkegaard often reflected, being a "corrective" is a tricky business. When separated from that which it is intended to correct, the corrective has a tendency to turn in on itself and to become demonic. Most of us have experienced this negative side of our movement (in its legalism, its cultural sterility, and other dynamics). This began to dawn on me two decades ago at Asbury Theological Seminary as I watched the liberating effect of Kenneth Kinghorn's course on Martin Luther on the students who took it. Such students, in reaction to their background, often went so far in the direction of Luther as to abandon the distinctive theological formulations of their own traditions. But there were some who managed to achieve a balance found in preserving a subtle dialectic of the "grace-full" themes of Luther and the "methodistic" disciplines of their own tradition without falling into either the ethical passivism sometimes associated with the former or the legalistic over-scrupulosity of the latter. It may well be that the health of our own tradition as well as its appropriate witness to the healing of others may well depend on a fuller and systematic intention to be in dialogue with and relationship to other expressions of the Christian tradition. In saying this, I do not think that I am saying anything basically new. Methodism has always struggled with the question of whether it is a movement for the renewal of the church and the reform of the nation or a new church brought forth in the providence of God with a distinctive vision of the shape of Christian faith and life. These questions ought to be more alive for us in the Wesleyan Theological Society, and we ought to be about the task of more intentionally bringing our concerns into dialogue with the rest of the church world.

This emerging way of articulating what I have come to believe is at stake as I have reflected on my ecumenical experience of the last decade leads me to believe that the Wesleyan Theological Society has a key role to play in the years that lie ahead. I am not sure who else among us has the vision and the tools to articulate a controlling vision that will shape our future and make it intentional rather than a product of the social forces of embourgeoisement and denominationalization. We need to think more profoundly about who we are in the larger context of the church and the distinctive character of our calling to be a force for renewal beyond the boundaries of our own marginalized subculture. For the last several months I have been haunted by a question pressed on me by a staff member of the Secretariat for Christian Unity in the Vatican. Noting our sectarian background and theological and cultural isolation, he asked me, "Do these people really want to be noticed and participate in a wider dialogue? Don't you think in many ways that they would rather be left alone?" Sometimes I think this comment is all too true and that we lack either the confidence or the faith to take up the difficult task of finding the appropriate "holiness witness in the ecumenical church." But on the other hand, I think that we have no choice and that we need to open ourselves up to this possibility and task. Thus I would invite you to join me in thinking more fully about these questions. And as a way of

stimulating discussion on these questions, I would make a series of concrete proposals and suggestions:

(1) I have heard recently intimations of the renewal of a vision that was much more alive in the 1960s when the CHA was reorganized in an attempt to provide a coordinating agency for the various denominations in the holiness movement and perhaps even midwife the emergence of a larger distinctly "holiness" denomination out of the various fragments of the holiness movement. We have forgotten the extent to which many of the present holiness bodies have been formed by a sort of agglutinative process that has drawn together various aspects of the movement scattered across the land at the turn of the century. For some reason this trajectory of further coalescing seems to have been broken since the failure of Wesleyan and ree Methodist merger talks after the Wesleyan Church was formed in 1968. I have wondered if these questions ought not to come up again and if we have not been derailed from this path by various issues that have not had more power than they deserve. No doubt there has been a certain amount of bureaucratic resistance based in vested interests and perhaps even a tempering of such enthusiasm by the anti-ecumenical rhetoric of the fundamentalists and the evangelicals. But it seems to be that we in the WTS could raise this question again and debate it intentionally in our midst and in the other locations in which we serve. I am not necessarily arguing that such a merger is inevitable or even finally desirable, but I think that we could well offer significant leadership in debating such issues. It is entirely possible that such a move would produce a creative ferment within our churches and give birth to a new church that could become more of a force for our own witness that the smaller and more marginalized churches cannot make. Let the debate begin!

(2) My experience in "ecumenical circles" has led me to the horrifying conclusion that as things are now, there is no chance that our witness can be heard because we are largely invisible in those contexts. We are so outside the discussions as to be totally unknown. This was brought home to me in Geneva as I became aware of the annual meeting of the executives of the "World Christian Communions" (Lutheran World Federation, World Alliance of Reformed Churches, World Methodist Council, The Seventh Day Adventists, The Salvation Army, etc.). I asked why the Christian Holiness Association is not represented in such meeting. I was told that the CHA apparently qualified but that no one had ever heard of it in Geneva. I approached a couple of members of the Board of Administration of the CHA asking why we are not represented and was told that no one had heard of the World Christian Communions. One member of the Board agreed that we should be represented, but that the issue would probably be the cost of attending such a meeting. I have wondered if there are not ways to raise this question in the CHA and encourage it to establish such a relationship one which is totally outside the formal structures of the ecumenical movement as such. Such a representation would have a great symbolic value and provide the platform from which other issues could be raised and by which we could be recognized as an ecclesiastical tradition along side of others.

(3) I have indicated above that I think that our decision a few years ago to send representatives to the Commission on Faith and Order in the NCCC was an unusually farsighted and bold step. Not only has this brought us into visibility in that context, but it has also profoundly shaped the character of those discussions. It has been exciting to see the "holiness" position on various issues be represented by papers alongside the view points of Catholics, Orthodox, and Magisterial Reformation views. I have chaired a section of the Apostolic Faith Study where we have tried to think through the distinctive features of the American context and the extent to which we carry a distinctive vision of what it might mean to confess the "apostolic faith." This has been largely an exercise in breaking open the theological categories of the mainstream churches to find categories for understanding and receiving the witness of those churches and movements largely outside the mainstream. Many in the Commission think this work the most important and creative of the last triennium, work that will be published and used to offer a "corrective" to the work of the Faith and Order Commission in the WCC. The interaction in the Commission has been invigorated by the bringing of new voices with new energies into what had become something of a lifeless discussion in pale imitation of the work in Geneva. I think that we need to continue this representation in the NCCC commission where there are other theological voices from non-member churches (Pentecostal, Evangelical, Catholic, etc.), but I have wondered if we ought not to discuss whether to pursue a possible liaison with the Faith and Order Commission of the WCC. I know from the reaction last Spring when I floated a more general proposal along these lines, that such a step would not necessarily be welcomed in the commission itself, but I do know that under Emilio Castro's administration there is a decided commitment to breaking open some of these discussions to wider representation. Other non-member traditions participate in Faith and Order discussions. The Catholics are represented by several positions in the commission, and the Adventists have been represented for some time. There would, of course, be some costs in working out such representation, but the full commission only meets three or four times in a decade and it might be possible to find other institutional sources to fund such representation. I am very concerned to see such arenas become more fully inclusive-and that there be a place somewhere that brings together the fragments of the church community in a way that does not yet take place.

(4) Over a decade ago now several of us here met a representative of the Vatican to the Society for Pentecostal Studies. He was fascinated to learn of the existence of the holiness movement and wondered at the time if the Vatican ought not to take up some form of formal dialogue with representatives of the holiness movement-parallel to those with a variety of traditions including Methodism and Pentecostalism. He seemed to feel that our tradition of spirituality has a special affinity with Catholic traditions of spirituality and might prove to be more interesting in many ways than the discussions with other forms of Protestantism. I experienced some sense of this same fascination this summer in Rome, and have wondered whether we ought not to pick up on such hints and pursue formally the possibility of such dialogue.

(5) The above suggestions have primarily to do with possible agenda within the larger church, but it also appears to me that we have other work that we could take up as well within the more narrow "evangelical" contexts. To some extent this work is being done by the new Asbury center for the study of the holiness movement. This project is structured to bring together representatives of the "ecumenical" church, prominent interpreters of "evangelicalism," Pentecostals, and others that have an interest in these questions. From one angle this project might be viewed as a "multilateral" ecumenical exercise while from another it might be viewed as a challenge to the reigning paradigms by which the "evangelical" tradition is interpreted. At any rate, I expect it to have a profound impact on the way in which our movement and witness is brought into dialogue with other parts of the Christian tradition. A few years ago Mel Robeck of Fuller Theological Seminary suggested in his presidential address before the Society for Pentecostal studies a joint meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, the Society for Pentecostal Studies, and the Wesleyan Theological Society to facilitate communication across the theological lines of the ecclesiastical traditions represented in the National Association of Evangelicals. I have often wondered if this should not be taken up with more intentionality.

(6) I have wondered on occasion what "ecumenical" responsibility we have to our "right" in terms of the Interdenominational Holiness Convention which gathers together those churches and currents that have largely repudiated the "mainstream" holiness movement of the CHA, arguing that we have become "liberal" and abandoned traditional "holiness standards." I personally have tried over the years to maintain some contact with persons in this movement and am convinced that on some points their critique of us is on target-especially as they have opposed our rush to respectability and our tendency to repeat the nineteenth century embourgeoisement of Methodism. On other points (their accusation of "liberalism" as we reassert our independence from "neo-evangelicalism") I think they miss the point. But we need to think more seriously about this opposition to the course that the "mainstream" holiness movement is taking.

(7) We also need to think about our relationship to "mainstream" Methodism. On the one hand our history lies in this stream, and there remains a great deal of overlap in many parts of the country in the camp meeting traditions and elsewhere. On the other hand we have experienced a great deal of tension and alienation in the various periods of separation and new sect formation-and as the "holiness movement" has taken on more denominational identity and reorganized the CHA into an interdenominational coordinating agency, we have grown apart and in many cases with-drawn from the life of Methodism. The problem has been especially accentuated as we have tried to understand our relationship as the Methodistic "holiness movement" to the "neo-evangelical" wing of Methodism that has come together as the "Good News Movement." These questions are complex and laden with emotion, but we may not have noticed many of the steps that we have taken over the last few years. For over a decade there has been a self-conscious effort to incorporate our life and witness into the "Oxford institute of Methodist Theological Studies" under the auspices of the World Methodist Council (precisely at the time that some of our denominations. Like the Free Methodists, have wavered in their commitment to this organi-

zation, and others, like the Nazarenes especially, have felt their "inter-denominational" character has made it inappropriate). Professor Theodore Runyon of Candler School of Theology, Emory University, has been a major force behind this and has attended our meetings on various occasions as a way of building bridges between our movements. It was at his invitation that we went to Emory to celebrate the Methodist bicentennial and our own twentieth anniversary. And in the last few years we have moved toward inviting "outside speakers" to our meetings, most of whom have been Methodists: Albert Outler, David Watson, and now Mortimer Arias. Perhaps we need to stop and reflect on these developments. Perhaps we should take up these issues more intentionally.

(8) With some hesitation I would like to point to a sub-category of the above discussion that may need special attention and discussion. We have been profoundly shaped in our history by the splits at the turn of the century that led to the emergence of the "holiness heresy" of Pentecostalism. We have subjected no other part of the Christian movement to the level of harsh attack that we have launched in this direction-and our strongest theological and ecclesiastical barriers have been erected against the possible intrusion of this theology and piety into our midst. I have often wondered if the greatest test of our openness might be to raise the question of our relationship to this tradition-to gently reassert our criticism of the movement while recognizing the validity of the paternity suit that is brought against us for the fathering of this movement. I have tried to do some of this in my recent ID published *Theological Roots of Pentecostalism*. Those that read that book carefully will see it as a defense of the theological categories of the Wesleyan tradition, but it takes that position in rather direct exploration of the historical and theological continuities between the two traditions. Similarly our new president Howard Snyder has argued in *The Divided Flame* that our anti-Pentecostal polemic has distorted our reading of Scripture and our ecclesiology. I have wondered if such issues ought not to be taken up more directly in a form of "bilateral theological dialogue" either between representatives of the SPS and the WTS or perhaps within the structures of Our annual meetings. Some of you may be surprised to discover how far such discussions have progressed already. I remember that only a few years ago Pentecostals were prohibited from attending Asbury Theological Seminary and I remember the controversy when H. Vinson Synan, historian of the Pentecostal Holiness Church spoke on the campus-and when the WTs discovered to its horror that Synan was a member of our society. Synan withdrew his membership out of sensitivity to our historical concerns even though it meant the endangering of his agenda to bring the holiness witness into a Pentecostalism increasingly inclined to suppress this aspect of its history. Some of you will know how far we have come in the last few years or, that next year we look forward to a meeting of the SPS on the Asbury Seminary campus by invitation of the Board. Fewer of you may realize that in rather direct response to this the SPS elected me second vice-president last year so that I would be responsible for the planning of the program at Asbury and would in the normal course of affairs move on to be-the first non Pentecostal/non-Charismatic to occupy that office. The Asbury project will hold one of its meetings in conjunction with the fall meeting, and I am hoping to program into the meeting some direct "bilateral

dialogue" between our two traditions. These are phenomenal "ecumenical" events, and I have wondered if we ought not to publicly debate and own these developments in a way that has not been possible up to now.

These suggestions are meant to be illustrative of what might be taken up by the society if it should become serious about its broader responsibility to support and articulate a "holiness witness in the ecumenical church." I commend such concerns and issues to your attention.

# **JOHN WESLEY'S CONCEPT OF THE MINISTERIAL OFFICE**

by  
Kenneth Collins

In a time when the basic role of ministers is being reconsidered within Methodism in light of the increasing demand for both private and public witness, for both personal spiritual integrity and political and social relevance, it is salutary to explore and to re-appropriate John Wesley's thinking in this important area. Although several significant and well-written articles have already appeared which range from Wesley's changing concept of ministry to his views on ordination,<sup>1</sup> no one work has taken as its chief point of departure Wesley's estimation of the ministerial office itself in terms of its requirements and tasks. Nor have previous works adequately considered the ecclesiastical environment of primitive Methodism as a possible source which shaped or at least informed Wesley's judgments in this area. This present work, therefore, will seek to address this deficiency, and will argue that Wesley's concept of the various offices of ministry must be seen not only in terms of his exegesis of Scripture-however important this may be-but also in terms of the larger context of British Methodism and its relation to the ever present Anglican mother church. indeed, expressive of this latter relationship is the fundamental structural distinction that Wesley drew between ordinary ministry on the one hand and extraordinary ministry on the other. This distinction is, therefore, a very suitable place to be in.

## **I. The Extraordinary Ministry**

At the first Methodist Conference, held in 1744, John Wesley and those assembled defined the Church of England as "the congregation of English believers, in which the pure word of God is preached, and the sacraments duly administered."<sup>2</sup> This understanding of the church and its ministry, which was based upon Article XIX of the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion of the Church of England, was maintained by Wesley throughout his lengthy career as an evangelist and reformer. In 1785, for example, after he had already produced the Deed of Declaration and had seen fit to ordain suitable

workers for ministry in America, Wesley reaffirmed this Anglican article in his sermon, "Of the Church."<sup>3</sup>

Now, embedded in the nineteenth article was a standard ecclesiology found in other religious traditions as well as Anglicanism,<sup>4</sup> and an understanding of the ministerial role which included the two major offices of prophet and priest. To be sure, Wesley's estimation of the major offices of ministry grew in part out of his consideration of the essential nature of the church. As prophets, earnest and sincere ministers were to proclaim the glad tidings of salvation, and as priests they were to administer the holy sacraments, which Wesley sometimes called "the sacred mysteries." What particularly disturbed him, however, was the perception that "modern laziness [had] jumbled together the two distinct offices of preaching and administering the sacraments,"<sup>5</sup> in such a way that both became the prerogatives of an ordained clergy. In opposition to such a view, Wesley denied that the connection between the ministry of the Word and the ministry of the Sacraments was indissoluble. Instead he declared, lay people could exercise a prophetic office in the church through preaching.

This increased role for lay people within the life of the church was, at first, resisted by Wesley himself. Early in the revival, Thomas Mayfield, a lay person, had taken it upon himself to preach to a congregation during Wesley's absence. Upon his return, Wesley chaffed, and complained to his mother about such boldness and irregularity. But Susanna, interestingly enough, replied: "take care what you do with respect to that young man, for he is surely called of God to preach, as you are. Examine what have been the fruits of his preaching: and hear him also yourself."<sup>6</sup> Wesley heeded his mother's advice, examined Mayfield's preaching and its fruits, and reached the same conclusion. At the conference held in 1744 at the Foundry, Wesley began to draw a distinction between the "extraordinary" and "ordinary" ministries. The former ministry embraced lay preaching while the latter referred to ordained clergy who exercised not only a preaching role but an exclusive sacerdotal role as well. Reflecting back upon this conference in 1789 in his sermon "Prophets and Priests" (The Ministerial Office), Wesley wrote:

In 1744, all the Methodist Preachers had their first Conference. But none of them dreamed, that the being called to preach gave them any right to administer sacraments. And when that question was proposed, "In what light are we to consider ourselves?" it was answered, "As extraordinary messengers, raised up to provoke the ordinary ones to jealousy."<sup>7</sup>

### **A. Assistants and Helpers**

Convinced that preacher-evangelist was a different order of ministry from pastor-priest, and that the former could be filled by competent lay people, Wesley began to employ "assistants" who were directly responsible to him. Basically, this order of ministry was comprised of those preachers who were appointed to administer the societies and to serve the other preachers within the circuits. Lay people could qualify for this largely administrative role by evidencing a close walk with God, by understanding and loving discipline, and "By loving the Church of England, and resolving not to separate from it."<sup>8</sup> In 1747, a differentiation was made between those assistants who traveled and those who served only in one place, and thus arose the distinction between traveling and local preachers which is a part of Methodism even today. Those preachers, on the other hand, who were under the care of an assistant in

the circuit were known initially as helpers. According to the conference minutes, it was their office to carry forward clearly stated tasks

In the absence of a Minister, to feed and guide the flock; in particular,

- (1.) To preach morning and evening.
- (2.) To meet the society and the Bands weekly.
- (3.) To meet the Leaders weekly.<sup>9</sup>

In order to foster the discipline necessary for ministry, Wesley gave the helpers a number of rules which covered such matters as punctuality, evil speaking, and personal comportment, especially in relation to women. And in Rule Eleven, Wesley, ever mindful of his evangelical commission, instructed his helpers concerning their principal task: "You have nothing to do but to save souls. Therefore spend and be spent in this work. And go always, not only to those that want you, but to those that want you most."<sup>10</sup> As such, these helpers were extraordinary messengers whose special assignment it was to goad the ordinary ministers into action. But if they were unsuccessful here, then their task was at least to supply the "lack of service toward those who [were] perishing for want of knowledge."<sup>11</sup> Eventually, the term "helper" was abandoned by the conference, and both the preacher within the circuit and the circuit's administrative head were referred to as assistants.

## **B. Opposition to Lay Ministry**

It was not long after Wesley began to employ his assistants that a hue and cry arose among the Anglican clergy concerning this irregular practice. Two chief objections emerged. The first concerned the unordained status of these ministers, and the second entailed their supposed ignorance. With respect to the former charge, Wesley thought that he had strong Scriptural support for the distinction between an extraordinary prophetic role which could be filled by lay people, and an ordinary priestly one which was reserved for the ordained. So he comments upon Ephesians 4:11, for example:

A prophet testifies of things to come: an evangelist of things past: and that chiefly by preaching the Gospel before or after any of the apostles. All these were extraordinary officers: the ordinary were, some pastors-watching over their several flocks and some teachers-whether of the same, or a lower order-to assist them as might require.<sup>12</sup>

Moreover, when John Toppin, the curate of Allendale in Northumberland, took umbrage concerning lay preaching and questioned in 1752 "whether any orthodox members of Christ's church ever took upon them the public office of preaching without episcopal ordination, and in what century,"<sup>13</sup> Wesley referred him to the Bible and replied: "Yes, very many, after the persecution of Stephen in the very first century, as you may read in the eighth chapter of the Acts."<sup>14</sup>

Beyond Scripture, Wesley appealed to the tradition of the Church of England to support his position: "Likewise in our own Church, persons may be authorized to preach, yea, may be Doctors of Divinity who are not ordained at all...."<sup>15</sup>

However, such practices had largely fallen into disuse in the Hanoverian Church. Indeed, those clerics who were eager to oppose Methodist lay preaching could just as easily as Wesley find support for their position in Anglican tradition. They cited Article XXIII of the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion:

It is not lawful for any man to take upon him the office of public preaching, or ministering the Sacraments in the Congregation, before he be lawfully called, and sent to execute the same. And those we ought to judge lawfully called and sent, which be chosen and called to this work by men who have public authority given unto them in the Congregation, to call and send Ministers into the Lord's vineyard.<sup>16</sup>

Wesley, was fully aware of the provisions and exclusions of this article of course, and revealed his judgment of it in a letter to James Clark in 1756: "I believe several who are not episcopally ordained are nevertheless called of God to preach the gospel. Yet I have no exception to the Twenty-third Article, though I judge there are exempt cases."<sup>17</sup>

The last ground on which Wesley supported the extraordinary ministry of lay preaching was that of experience. In a pungent letter to Nicholas Norton in 1756, the leader of the Methodist revival revealed that he tolerated lay preaching because of the "absolute necessity for it,"<sup>18</sup> and noted that were it not for this instrument of ministry, "thousands of souls would perish everlastingly."<sup>19</sup> In other words, Wesley, as an energetic evangelist, simply refused to stand by and watch the spiritual harvest of England rot on the ground for want of laborers. Taking the offensive, and in a pragmatic mood, he urged his detractors to consider the goal of ecclesiastical order at all. "Is it not to bring souls from the power of Satan to God?"<sup>20</sup> he queried. "Order then," he continued, "is so far valuable as it answers these ends; and if it answers them not, it is nothing worth."<sup>21</sup>

Now, in the Methodist revival, Wesley employed as his preachers people who previously had been stone masons, iron smiths, carpenters and the like. This, of course, opened him to the second charge of utilizing ignorant and unlettered preachers to accomplish a task more suited to the educated and genteel. Without deprecating the importance of sound learning, Wesley argued in his Farther Appeal that nowhere is it written in the Scriptures that God cannot or will not make use of people who lack great learning. Though without several of the natural gifts enjoyed by the ordained clergy, the Methodist preachers, Wesley maintained, were supplied by God with grace sufficient to the task to which they were called. "God gave wisdom from above to these unlearned and ignorant men,"<sup>22</sup> Wesley wrote, "so that the work of the Lord prospered in their hand, and sinners were daily converted to God."<sup>23</sup> And if there were still any doubts about the appropriateness of using such unlettered people for the tasks of ministry, Wesley urged the Anglican clergy to consider the fruit borne by his preachers: "Will you condemn such a Preacher because he has not learning, or has not had an University education? What then? He saves those sinners from their sins whom the man of learning and education cannot save."<sup>24</sup>

## II. The Ordinary Ministry

By employing lay ministers who were allowed to preach, but who were not permitted to administer the sacraments, John Wesley believed that he was keeping the Methodist movement well within the ecclesial rubrics of the Church of England. In his mind, at least, the reputation of lay administration of the sacraments was inextricably tied to Methodism's connection with the Anglican Church. John feared, as did his brother Charles, that if his preachers insisted on administering the sacraments without being ordained, then Methodism would soon emerge as an independent movement, incapable of reforming the larger Church. Anglican ordination, therefore, became the *sine qua non* in early Methodism for those who would administer. The unordained could not. In a certain sense, ordination was the fence or barrier wrapped around the ecclesiastical structure of primitive Methodism to keep it within the bounds of the Anglican church. But, as will become apparent shortly, it was ordination as an elder not ordination as deacon that was the real line of demarcation.

### A. Deacons

The Church of England recognized a threefold ministry of deacons, priests and bishops. Wesley chose to refer to the three as deacons, elders, and superintendents, reflecting his functional and Biblical orientation.<sup>25</sup> Concerning the initial stage of ordination, that of deacon, the Book of Common Prayer listed a number of responsibilities:

It appertaineth to the office of a Deacon, to assist the elder in Divine Service, and especially when he ministereth the holy Communion, to help him in the distribution thereof, and to read and expound the holy Scriptures; to instruct the youth, and in the absence of the elder to baptize. And furthermore, it is his office, to search for the sick, poor, and impotent, that they may be visited and relieved.<sup>26</sup>

From the passage just cited, it is obvious that deacons had a considerable role to play in the Anglican Church as they administered baptism, assisted the priest in the Lord's Supper, preached, taught, and undertook works of charity and mercy. It is interesting to note, however, that although Wesley included this selection in his Sunday Service, he was not in agreement with his Church concerning the number of duties which necessarily pertained to the office of deacons. With Wesley, the office was greatly circumscribed, and was essentially limited to service, works of charity, and the like-a view, no doubt, which was based upon the Biblical portrait of deacons. In a commentary on Acts 6:2 he stated his position:

In the first Church, the primary business of apostles, evangelists, and bishops, was to preach the word of God; the secondary, to take a kind of paternal care for the food, especially of the poor, the strangers, and the widows. Afterward, the deacons of both sexes were constituted for this latter business. And whatever time they had to spare from this, they employed in works of spiritual mercy. But their proper office was, to take care of the poor. And when some of them afterward preached the Gospel, they did this not by virtue of their deaconship, but of

another commission, that of evangelists, which they probably received, not before, but after they were appointed deacons.<sup>27</sup>

Once again, Wesley's reluctance to associate the task of preaching too strongly with the office of deacon is probably best understood in terms of his distinctions between prophets and priests, and between extraordinary and ordinary ministries. Wesley realized that the Book of Common Prayer's judgment concerning the office of deacon could readily be used to criticize his employment of lay preachers. On such a basis, it could be argued that preaching is an ordained ministry which pertains at the very least to deacons and of course to elders. Wesley, therefore, with some Scriptural support, chose to view the diaconal office largely, if not solely, in terms of service, disassociating from it the other responsibilities enumerated in the Anglican description. Now when this reduced role is effected in a context in which lay persons are already performing much of the diaconal service-in Methodism, as "stewards"-it becomes apparent that the particular office of ordained deacons, as distinguished from both lay people and elders, had for all practical purposes dropped out of early British Methodism. Such a conclusion is further substantiated by Wesley's tendency to ordain persons to eldership very shortly after their ordination to the diaconate, an activity which reveals "the little importance attached by [him] to the order of 'deacon' in the ordained ministry."<sup>28</sup>

## **B. Elders**

Wesley upheld the notion of an outward priesthood ordained by Christ, and understood this office largely in terms of an ambassadorial as opposed to a mediatorial role, and this explains, in part, his preference for the title of "elder" over "priest." In other words, although Wesley taught that priests are the chief stewards of the mysteries of God,<sup>29</sup> he did not believe that they are the mediators of the divine/human relationship, for all believers share a common priesthood in Jesus Christ who alone is the true mediator. Instead priests are to be considered as ambassadors, as representatives of God's righteous kingdom, which they announce through both preaching and sacrament. Ordination, therefore, is a divine institution, established by Christ, but it is neither a sacrament, as Rome had argued, nor does it convey any special grace.

In another sense, Wesley defined ordination to elder's orders, quite simply, as an outward and human call to serve the church through preaching and sacrament which in the best of circumstances is preceded by a divine inward call. But if either of the two calls was lacking, Wesley preferred that it be the outward, and not the inward call. Indeed, whenever the choice was between nature or grace, Wesley always chose the latter. He wrote: " I rejoice that I am called to preach the gospel both by God and man. Yet I acknowledge I had rather have the divine without the human than the human without the divine call."<sup>30</sup> And in 1755, in a letter to Samuel Walker, Wesley bemoaned the fact that many in the ministry of the Anglican Church had received a human call, but no divine call, for "God has not sent [them] to minister."<sup>31</sup>

### **1. Qualifications for Ministry**

Beyond a call to ministry, Wesley recommended a number of qualities for elders in order that they might be fully equipped for the tasks of their service. These qualities fell, basically, into three major groups: those of grace,

those of nature, and those acquired. But Wesley left little doubt as to which set of qualities he considered most important in profitable ministry, especially when he wrote to Samuel Furlly in 1756, "Grace and supernatural gifts are ninety-nine parts in a hundred. Acquired learning may then have its place."<sup>32</sup> Continuing in this line in his *Notes on I Corinthians 3:8* he remarked:

Ministers are still barely instruments in God's hand and depend as entirely as ever on his blessing, to give the increase to their labors. Without this they are nothing; with it, their part is so small, that they hardly deserve to be mentioned.<sup>33</sup>

Nevertheless, Wesley spent a good deal of ink on the natural and acquired endowments in his piece, "An Address to the Clergy." Concerning natural gifts, Wesley asserted that a minister should have a good understanding, sound judgment, a capacity for reasoning, liveliness and readiness of thought, and a good memory.<sup>34</sup> Acquired endowments, on the other hand, should include a knowledge of all of the following: the office itself, the Scriptures, Greek and Hebrew, profane history, the sciences, the Church Fathers, and the world. Moreover, this knowledge should be supplemented by prudence, common sense, and good breeding.<sup>35</sup>

No doubt, Wesley's "Address" was known outside Methodist circles, and several of his opponents soon claimed to discern a discrepancy between the lofty standards expressed in this work and the reality of a movement galvanized to a great degree by lay ministry. Wesley responded to this criticism by drawing a distinction between expediency and necessity in a letter to Robert Marsden dated 31 August 1756:

A careless reader of the Address may possibly think, I "make it necessary for a minister to have much learning," and thence imagine I act inconsistently, seeing many of our preachers have no learning at all. But the answer is easy. I do not make any learning necessary *even for a minister* but the knowledge of the Scriptures; although many branches of learning are highly expedient for him.<sup>36</sup>

This issue surfaced again as Wesley defended the Methodist ministerial order to Dr. Rutherford in 1768, and to Dr. Lowth in 1780. Wesley's correspondence to these two ministers is noteworthy for it reveals something of his teleological orientation to ministry in general—that he had at all times the ends or purposes of such ministry in view. To Dr. Lowth, for example, the Bishop of London who took great delight in being extremely demanding of ministerial candidates, Wesley maintained that he in no way despised learning, but asked "What is this, particularly in a Christian minister, compared to piety?"<sup>37</sup> And elsewhere Wesley wrote, "An ounce of love is worth a pound of knowledge."<sup>38</sup> Wesley's evangelical thrust is apparent in these replies for, according to him, a faith unfeigned, the love of God and neighbor, and a burning zeal<sup>39</sup> are those ingredients both necessary and sufficient for a fruitful ministry. On the other hand, knowledge of the ancient tongues or of the arts and sciences, while expedient, is neither necessary nor sufficient for the promotion of God's Kingdom. This last point is borne out in Wesley's rather caustic remark to Dr. Lowth that although the bishop had sent ministers to America who knew something of Greek and Latin, they knew "no more of saving souls than of catching whales."<sup>40</sup>

Throughout his lengthy career Wesley had seen an ordained, educated clergy operating under the auspices of the Church of England, some of whom were spiritually dead, while still others were outright wicked.<sup>41</sup> They neither preached the doctrines contained in the Anglican Articles, nor did they practice holiness, and yet they had all the formal trappings of ministry.

To make certain that this kind of minister did not emerge within the Methodist movement Wesley exercised discipline. In a "Letter to the Evangelical Clergy" in 1764, he specified a number of essential doctrines such as original sin, justification by faith, and holiness of heart and life to which all clergy who were associated with him should assent. Clearly, this was not an attempt on the part of Wesley to stifle theological discussion or to suppress various opinions and interpretations, for the same irenic spirit that characterized his sermon "The Catholic Spirit" was present in this letter as well. But, on the other hand, Wesley simply did not wish to see the Methodist movement fall into a latitudinarianism that would dilute the heart of the gospel and with it Methodism's very reason for being: that is, "To preach Scriptural Holiness across the land." And upon reflecting upon the identity of the Gospel Minister Wesley wrote:

Who then is such? Who is a Gospel Minister, in the full, scriptural sense of the word? He, and he alone, of whatever denomination, that does declare the whole counsel of God; that does preach the whole gospel, even justification and sanctification, preparatory to glory. . . those only are, in the full sense, Gospel Ministers who proclaim the "great salvation"; that is, salvation from all (both inward and outward) sin, into "all the mind that was in Christ Jesus; . . ." <sup>42</sup>

## **2. The Ministerial Task**

At the first Methodist conference, Wesley declared that the major purpose for convening was "To consider how we should proceed to save our own souls and those that heard us."<sup>43</sup> And in the deliberations of this same conference it was asked, "What is the office of a Christian Minister?" To which it was replied, "[It is] to watch over souls, as he that must give an account."<sup>44</sup> Without doubt, Wesley never departed from this evangelical conception of the ministerial task, nor was he embarrassed by the language of "saving souls." In fact, such language can be found in almost any period of his ministry. In a letter to his brother, Charles, in 1772, for example, John reflected back upon the time when they both had taken priest's orders and noted that their principal task of ministry, then as now, was "to save souls."<sup>45</sup>

But just what did it mean to save souls, according to Wesley? It was not a work of the by and by, concerned only with the afterlife, nor was it an impractical affair. Instead, it was the arduous and present work of rescuing people from the death of sin, and reclaiming them for life with God. Moreover, Wesley expressed this most important task both positively and negatively. Positively, to save a soul was to lead it to the gospel through which the love of God and neighbor could be reestablished in the heart through faith. Negatively, it entailed the breaking of the yoke of sin, freedom from its power and its guilt, and from all that stifled the ability to love.<sup>46</sup> Indeed, Wesley knew full well both that the greatest of all bondages was

bondage to sin and that the greatest of all liberties was the freedom to walk in the love of God blameless. To this task, and to this task preeminently, he committed his ministers as evidenced in his *Farther Appeal*:

To "seek and save that which is lost;" to bring souls from Satan to God; to instruct the ignorant; to reclaim the wicked; to convince the gainsayer; to direct their feet in the way of peace, and then keep them therein; to follow them step by step, lest they turn out of the way, and advise them in their doubts and temptations; to lift up them that fall; to refresh them that are faint; and to comfort the weak-hearted; to administer various helps, as the variety of occasions require, according to their several necessities: These are parts of our office. . . .<sup>47</sup>

So emphatic was Wesley on this score that he boldly asserted elsewhere that true evangelical ministers were those who saved souls from death,<sup>48</sup> and that if they failed to do so, then, whatever else they might be, they were no ministers of Christ.<sup>49</sup> In light of this, it comes as no surprise to learn that Wesley did not look favorably upon the practice of preaching politics from the pulpit, unless of course it entailed a refutation of those ministers who had spoken evil of the King.<sup>50</sup> The main and constant duty of a Christian minister, once again, was not to engage in political discussions which breed various parties all of whom claim to be in the right, but to "preach Jesus Christ, and him crucified."<sup>51</sup>

Interestingly enough, Wesley's ministerial style and the value he placed upon the several tasks of ministry is perhaps best depicted in his sermon, "On Visiting the Sick." As to the general method of treating the ill, Wesley advised that one should begin with their outward condition and determine whether they have the necessities of life, such as sufficient food, raiment, and fuel, and after this, to inquire whether they have ample nursing care and sound medical advice. Once inquiries have been made concerning their bodies, then, Wesley wrote, "You may inquire concerning their souls."<sup>52</sup> The little labors of love shown to the body, Wesley argued, have paved the way "for things of greater importance"<sup>53</sup>-in other words, for an examination of spiritual matters. Attending to the physical and temporal needs of the ill or the poor, therefore, has chronological priority over spiritual concerns, but not valuational priority. A mistake often made in ministry which Wesley clearly avoided is to conclude that ministry which is first in time by necessity is also first in rank.

### **3. Two Books That Made a Difference**

It should be apparent by now that Wesley's concept of the role of elders was broad and extensive, especially when compared to that of deacons. Elders not only could preach, teach, and counsel, but they could also administer the sacraments. But the office of elder grew even larger, at least in the mind of Wesley, after he had read two significant books on church polity. The first book, written by Lord Peter King, had the rather lengthy title, *An Enquiry into the Constitution, Discipline, Unity, and Worship of the Primitive Church*, and was produced in 1691. In this work, which Wesley read in 1746, King championed the idea that in the early church the office of elders and bishops was of the same order, though different in degree. This meant, of course, that elders had the same right to ordain as bishops did, an observation that

did not elude Wesley. Thus he wrote his letter to "Our Brethren in America" in 1784: "Lord King's *Account of the Primitive Church* convinced me many years ago that bishops and presbyters are the same order, and consequently have the same right to ordain."<sup>54</sup>

The second book that altered a few of Wesley's ideas concerning ministerial order and polity was the *Irenicon*, written in 1659 by Edward Stillingfleet, the Bishop of Worcester. Having in mind a reconciliation of the Episcopalians and Presbyterians of his day, Stillingfleet touched upon some of the very same themes as King, most notably the notion that in the early church bishops and presbyters were essentially the same. But he then went on to deny that Christ had prescribed and sanctioned any particular form of church polity, and Stillingfleet thereby repudiated the notion that the episcopal form of church government had been divinely sanctioned. Wesley read the work in 1755, and not long thereafter he wrote to James Clark the following:

As to my own judgment, I still believe "the Episcopal form of Church government to be both scriptural and apostolic": I mean, well agreeing with the practice and writings of the Apostles. But that it is prescribed in Scripture I do not believe. This opinion (which I once heartily espoused) I have been heartily ashamed of ever since I read Dr. Stillingfleet's *Irenicon*. I think he has unanswerably proved that neither Christ or His Apostles prescribed any particular form of Church government, and that the plea for the divine right of Episcopacy was never heard of in the primitive Church.<sup>55</sup>

Both King's and Stillingfleet's works are especially relevant because they display the general direction John Wesley was moving in considering what precisely were the prerogatives of an ordained elder. By 1755, Wesley had come to realize that there is practically no ministry in the church that can be denied an elder on Biblical grounds. Yet Wesley was reluctant to act upon his new understanding because he knew that such views were not widely accepted in the Anglican Church.

### **C. Bishops: Wesley as Scriptural *Episcopos***

In time, though, Wesley had little choice but to act. In 1780, he had entreated Dr. Lowth, the Bishop of London, to ordain suitable people for ministry in America, but the bishop refused. Wesley then proceeded cautiously, ever mindful of what would cause an irreparable breach with the Church,<sup>56</sup> but at this point his scruples were at an end. He conceived himself at full liberty to appoint and send laborers into the harvest.<sup>57</sup> Mr. Whatcoat and Mr. Vasey were thus ordained<sup>58</sup> for ministry in America on September 1, 1784, and of this event Wesley wrote:

Judging this to be a case of real necessity, I took a step which, for peace and quietness, I had refrained from taking for many years; I exercised that power which I am fully persuaded the great Shepherd and Bishop of the church has given me.<sup>59</sup>

But the ordinations did not stop there. The flood gate was broken and the tide was about to rush in. The very next year, in 1785, Wesley saw fit to ordain John Pawson, Thomas Hanby, and Joseph Taylor for ministry in

Scotland.<sup>60</sup> And in 1786, he ordained Wiffiam Warrener for Antiqua and William Hanimet for Newfoundland.<sup>61</sup> Wesley justified these further ordinations in the following words:

Whatever is done, either in America or Scotland, is no separation from the Church of England. I have no thought of this: I have many objections against it. It is a totally different case.<sup>62</sup>

Finally in 1788, after the death of his brother Charles, John crossed the Rubicon and ordained Alexander Mather for ministry in England itself.<sup>63</sup> But even here Wesley refused to consider this action a violation of the ecclesiastical norms of the Church of England, for about a year after this event, in December, 1789, he asserted:

I never had any design of separating from the Church: I have no such design now. I do not believe the Methodists in general design it, when I am no more seen. I do, and will do, all that is in my power to prevent such an event. . . . I declare once more, that I live and die a member of the Church of England; and that none who regard my judgment or advice will ever separate from it.<sup>64</sup>

Not surprisingly, after these ordinations, several of Wesley's opponents claimed that he was being grossly inconsistent, for, on the one hand, he proclaimed faithfulness to the Anglican Church, but, on the other hand, he felt at liberty to violate her sense of ecclesiastical order whenever it suited his purposes. Clearly, neither the *Articles of Religion* nor the *Book of Common Prayer* could be used to support or legitimize the ordination of Mather. However, Wesley's response to such charges revealed the three major principles which informed his ecclesiastical procedures for over fifty years. First of all, and most importantly, he would do nothing without scriptural warrant. Second, he refused to separate from the Church of England, despite encouragement from various sectors to do so. And third, he felt at great liberty to utilize what some deemed "unorthodox" methods in ministry whenever necessity required.<sup>65</sup> Wesley might have been unconventional, but he was certainly not inconsistent.

Moreover, in a letter to his brother Charles in 1785, after the American ordinations had taken place, John Wesley argued forcefully that he was a "scriptural *episcopos*," as much as any person in England or in Europe.<sup>66</sup> In other words, Wesley believed that as an elder in the Church of England faced with the needs of a thriving ministry, he had an obligation—indeed a right—to appoint workers for the harvest. This right, in Wesley's eyes, arose not only out of a consideration of the New Testament's view of the prerogatives of an elder, which King and Stillingfleet had helped him to see more clearly, but also out of his strong sense of duty to further the kingdom of God. Notice once again that it is the normative guidance of Scripture plus the requirements of ministry which give the office its particular contour. As noted earlier, this combination of Scripture and experience led to a reduced role for deacons, but here in this present context it results in an increased role for elders. The difference is important.

If the Anglican church would neither recognize this bishop in their midst, nor his lay ministers, time and circumstance did. To a certain extent, the

revival itself dictated the role that Wesley and his preachers had to play. Without doubt, he functioned as a bishop, and exercised many of the roles that bishops play, but received little credit or support from his Church. His authority, therefore, was achieved, not ascribed; earned, though not conferred.

### **III. Conclusion**

In light of the preceding, it is evident that there are two competing conceptions of ministry and the ministerial office here. One is Biblical, functional and attentive to fruit, while the other is authoritarian, traditional and attentive to credentials. In the former, the mission itself defines the office to a certain degree, but in the latter, tradition and the hierarchy determine and legitimize the office. Wesley's administrative and ministerial genius, therefore, lies in the fact that he held both models in tension, that of a traditional conception as espoused by the Church of England, and that of a functional, Biblically based, and teleologically oriented, conception as utilized by the Methodists.

When Wesley realized that he had failed to arouse sufficient support within his own Church, he undertook the task of developing a ministerial infrastructure that could sustain the awakening that was sweeping across the British Isles. His conception of the ministerial office, therefore, was very much task-oriented, and, some might even argue, pragmatic. And it was precisely this "newfangled structure" with its lay preaching, diminished role for ordained deacons, vastly increased role for elders, and scriptural bishops that caused much of the opposition to Methodism.

Nevertheless, this is not to suggest that Wesley was a ministerial utilitarian, indifferent to various means in his concern over the ends or goals of ministry. To argue so is to distort his basic theological posture. Whether Wesley considered the role of lay assistants, deacons or elders, he always took great care to determine, first of all, how the Bible considered these offices, and then-and only then-did he feel at liberty to transgress church tradition, if necessary. In the Wesleyan quadrilateral, as Alan Coppedge has so aptly noted,<sup>67</sup> the components of Scripture, reason, tradition and experience are not equally weighted; the first takes precedence. It is, therefore, not a matter of ministerial expediency at all, although it might initially appear so. In fact, Wesley's polity seemed to be so new precisely because it was so old, reflective of primitive Christianity. Methodism was not the real innovator here, but rather the Church of England.

Caught in the middle between ecclesiastical etiquette and the burden to preach the gospel as widely as possible, Wesley performed a balancing act for many years. But when finally forced to decide-and Wesley was after all very reluctant to do this-he preferred to save souls, even by what seemed to others to be very unorthodox means, over obedience to what he had come to believe was an all too human ecclesiastical order. "Give me one hundred preachers who fear nothing but sin and desire nothing but God,"<sup>68</sup> he thundered in his later years, "and I care not a straw whether they be clergymen or laymen, such alone will shake the gates of hell and set up the kingdom of heaven on earth."<sup>69</sup>

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Cf. William R. Cannon, "The Meaning of Ministry in Methodism," *Methodist History* Vol. VIII No. 1. (October 1969): 3-19; E. Herbert Nygren, "John Wesley's Changing Concept of the Ministry," *Religion in Life* Vol. XXXI No. 2 (Spring 1962): 264-74; and Linda M. Durbin, "The Nature of Ordination in Wesley's View of the Ministry," *Methodist History* Vol. IX No. 3 (April 1971): 3-21.

<sup>2</sup>Thomas Jackson, ed., *The Works of John Wesley*, 14 vols. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1978), 8:280. Hereinafter, Jackson, *Works*, 8:280 etc.

<sup>3</sup>Frank Baker, editor in chief, *The Works of John Wesley*, 39 vols. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984), 1:51. Hereinafter, Baker, *Works*, 1:51 etc.

<sup>4</sup>John T. McNeill, ed., *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press), 2:1023.

<sup>5</sup>John Telford, ed., *The Letters of John Wesley*, A.M. 8 vols. (London: The Epworth Press, 1931), 7:372. Hereinafter, Telford, *Letters*, 7:372 etc.

<sup>6</sup>Thomas Coke and Henry Moore, *The Life of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M* (London: G. Paramore, 1792), p. 220.

<sup>7</sup>Jackson, *Works*, 7:277.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, 8: 319.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 309.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 310.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 309.

<sup>12</sup>John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament* (Salem, Ohio: Schmul Publishers), p. 496. Hereinafter, Wesley, *Notes*, p. 496 etc.

<sup>13</sup>Baker, *Works*, 26:495.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup>Jackson, *Works*, 7:276.

<sup>16</sup>Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1983), 3:501.

<sup>17</sup>Telford, *Letters*, 3:200.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, 3:186

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup>Baker, *Works*, 26:206.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup>Jackson, *Works*, 8:220.

- <sup>23</sup>*Ibid*
- <sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 498.
- <sup>25</sup>John Wesley, ed., *John Wesley's Sunday Service for the Methodists in North America* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1984), p. 5
- <sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 282-83.
- <sup>27</sup>Wesley, *Notes*, p. 290.
- <sup>28</sup>A. B. Lawson, *John Wesley and the Christian Ministry* (London: SPCK, 1963), p. 98.
- <sup>29</sup>Telford, *Letters*, 2:55.
- <sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, 3:195.
- <sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, 3:145
- <sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 175.
- <sup>33</sup>Wesley, *Notes*, p. 413.
- <sup>34</sup>Jackson, *Works*, 10:482.
- <sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 482-85.
- <sup>36</sup>Telford, *Letters*, 3:184. (emphasis mine)
- <sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*, 7:31.
- <sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*, 5:110.
- <sup>39</sup>*Ibid.*, 5:363.
- <sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*, 7:31.
- <sup>41</sup>*Ibid.*, 4:303.
- <sup>42</sup>Jackson, *Works*, 10:456.
- <sup>43</sup>Jackson, *Works*, 13:248.
- <sup>44</sup>*Ibid.*, 8:309.
- <sup>45</sup>Telford, *Letters*, 5:316.
- <sup>46</sup>See "The Great Privilege of those that are Born of God" in Baker, *Works*, 1:431ff.
- <sup>47</sup>Jackson, *Works*, 8:177-78.
- <sup>48</sup>Telford, *Letters*, 2:149.
- <sup>49</sup>*Ibid.*
- <sup>50</sup>Jackson, *Works*, 11:155.
- <sup>51</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup>Baker, *Works*, 3:391.

<sup>53</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup>Telford, *Letters*, 7:238.

<sup>55</sup>*Ibid.*, 3:182.

<sup>56</sup>*Ibid.*, 7:238.

<sup>57</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup>Nehemiah Curnock, *The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M, 8 vols.* (London: The Epworth Press, 1938), 7:15. Note that the *Journal* uses the word "appointed," but the *Diary* uses ordained."

<sup>59</sup>Jackson, *Works*, 13:256.

<sup>60</sup>Curnock, *Journal*, p. 101.

<sup>61</sup>Lawson, *Ministry*, p. 158.

<sup>62</sup>Jackson, *Works*, 13:257.

<sup>63</sup>Curnock, *Journal*, 7:423.

<sup>64</sup>Jackson, *Works*, 13:273-74.

<sup>65</sup>*Ibid.*, 7:279.

<sup>66</sup>Telford, *Letters*, 7:284.

<sup>67</sup>Alan Coppedge, "John Wesley and the Issue of Authority in Theological Pluralism," *The Wesleyan Theological Journal* Vol.19, Num. 2 (Fall 1984) pp. 62.76.

<sup>68</sup>Telford, *Letters*, 6:272.

<sup>69</sup>*Ibid.*

# **JOHN WESLEY: PRACTICAL THEOLOGIAN?**

by

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FOR: Dr. J. Kenneth Grider<sup>1</sup>

When one reads secondary treatments of Wesley one repeatedly comes across disclaimers of his being a "systematic" theologian. If an alternative characterization is listed, among the more common is "practical" theologian. One of our goals in this paper is to demonstrate the warrant for such a construal of Wesley as a practical theologian.

A more important goal is to overcome prevalent caricatures of what this entails. For example, it often appears that classification of Wesley as a practical theologian is intended to imply that he "dabbles" in theology when it fits his pastoral or evangelistic purposes but does not take doctrinal reflection seriously. We hope to demonstrate that this and related implications are distortions of Wesley's practical theology.

To make this case we must place Wesley's practical theology in its historical context. Until recently, such a contextual consideration has not only been lacking but almost impossible. Given the dominance, in the modern era, of the Western university model of Systematic Theology-with its accompanying application-discipline of Practical Theology, earlier understandings of "practical theology" were largely forgotten or distorted. However, this reigning model of Practical Theology is being called into question in recent discussions of theological methodology. These discussions have spurred historical investigation into earlier understandings of "practical theology." They have also spawned calls for reformulating Practical Theology and, perhaps, returning to a model of theology per se as a practical endeavor.

Accordingly, we will begin with a summary of the emerging history of "practical theology." Next, we will note some of the themes expressed in recent calls for recovering a model of theology as practical. Against this background, we can then more accurately assess Wesley's model of a practical theology. We will conclude with some implications that his example suggests for any contemporary retrieval of a practical theology.

## I. HISTORICAL UNDERSTANDINGS OF PRACTICAL THEOLOGY<sup>2</sup>

1. *Theology per se as Practical.* Early Christian practice suggests a twofold understanding of "theology"-i.e. knowledge of God. At the most basic level it was understood as a *habitus* or implicit worldview that guides the temperament and practice of believers' lives. This *habitus* was not assumed to be divinely implanted at conversion. It must be developed. Thus, the need for theology in its second major sense-the discipline of study, instruction

The focus of theology/discipline was on understanding and communicating the nature of the interaction between God and humanity. That is, it integrated reflection on anthropology and soteriology with that on the nature of God. Indeed, it sought always to base even the most metaphysical reflections about God on the life of faith and to draw from these reflections pastoral and soteriological implications.<sup>3</sup>

As this description of theology/discipline suggests, it was carried out primarily in a pastoral setting by those concerned to shepherd Christian communities. As such, its concern was essentially practical; i.e. oriented to understanding and norming Christian life in the world. This practical nature was also evident in the primary forms of such theology/discipline: e.g., the production of catechisms, liturgies, commentaries, and spiritual discipline manuals. Properly pursued, such theological activities demand rigorous theological reflection. At the same time, they develop in response to, and seek to address, the needs and questions of typical Christian life-such as, "How should we pray?," "What does this verse mean?," "Should we call Jesus "God'?", and "How should we train new Christians?"~

In early medieval western Christianity the social location of theology began to switch to the newly emerging universities. As these universities became detached from their founding monasteries or cathedrals, they adopted an Aristotelian model of theology as a theoretical science concerned with the rational pursuit of knowledge for its own sake (theology/science). It was this shift that provoked the first debate, in the thirteenth century, over whether theology is really a practical science (i.e., dealing with humans and the things humans do-in light of God) or, rather, a primarily speculative science (i.e., concerned with understanding God per se). Thus ended the general agreement that theology as a whole was practical.

2. *Practical Theology as Spiritual-Devotional Theology.* The model of theology/science eventually came to dominate the universities. Likewise, they soon came to dominate theological debate and pastoral preparation. Thereby, theology/science became the standard model of serious theological activity. Among the consequences of this shift in genre were the following: 1) the primary form of theological activity became the preparation of comprehensive textbooks (*summae*) for university education, 2) anthropological issues and implications were largely confined to a single section of these textbooks, 3) the method of deciding theological issues increasingly became exclusively logical, 4) there often developed a useless subtlety of argument, 5) there was a prevalent danger that theological reflection would crystallize into petrified systems, and 6) doctrinal clarifications that were achieved had little influence on liturgy, etc. Overall, the relation of such theology to human life became problematic.

A closely related development was that "practical theology" was marginalized into a separate genre alongside theology/science. While the latter supposedly pursued a rigorous dispassionate analysis of truth as a whole practical theology (increasingly under such names as mystical or spiritual theology focused on understanding and inculcating Christian spirituality. Two things about this move are important- First, such practical theology was usually pursued by monastics.<sup>4</sup> so its relevance for the lives of non monastics was limited. Second, implicit in the very distinction between the two genres is the troubling fact that doctrinal analysis and reflection on Christian life were drifting apart.

The Reformers reacted against this split between practical and doctrinal (academic) theology. They called for a return to pursuing theology per se as a practical science. However, their achievement was short-lived. Protestant Orthodoxy soon reappropriated the model and the problems of a theoretical theology/science. In reaction Pietism increasingly rejected the relevance of such theology and developed an alternative practical theology oriented to (non-monastic) Christian spirituality. Overall, Protestant Orthodoxy construed Christian faith more as a set of intellectual affirmations than as a habitus that orient Christian life in the world, while Pietism lacked a clear affirmation that such a habitus was formed and normed by the careful doctrinal reflection of theology/discipline. Thus, the separation of doctrinal reflection and concern for Christian life continued to grow.

*3. Practical Theology as Non-Technical Theology.* While the marginalization of practical theology into spiritual theology was the dominant response to the ascendancy of the university model of theology/science, another understanding of "practical theology" was possible. It could be construed as a simplified version of academic theology prepared for the non-professional. Thus, we occasionally find "practical theology" used in the late sixteenth century for simplified surveys of Scholastic theology-giving the major conclusions without the argumentation.~ These surveys were intended for students entering ministry rather than academic vocation. That is, "practical theology" became that taught "mere" pastors, while true theology was reserved for professional theologians! Imagine where this leaves the laity!

*4. Practical Theology as Moral Theology.* By the eighteenth century we find another use of "practical theology within the university. While uncomfortable with considering devotional life an academic matter, they had developed a focused concern for Christian actions-in particular, moral actions. Apparently drawing on Aristotle's distinction between *theoria* and *praxis*, they designated the study of Christian actions "Practical Theology" and the study of Christian beliefs "Theoretical Theology."<sup>7</sup>

Two things must be noted about this development. First, "practical theology" had moved from being the genre of all theology, through being a genre of theology outside the university, to being now one university discipline alongside others! Second, this discipline of Practical Theology was structurally separate from primary doctrinal reflection.<sup>8</sup> Given its current identification with moral theology, this raised even more intensely the basic problem we have already noted- "what is the relationship between what we believe and what we do?"

*5. Practical Theology as Popular Theology.* During the last third of the eighteenth century another important use of "practical theology" developed

in Germany.<sup>9</sup> This time the development was alongside the university among the newly emerging educated middle-class. They constituted a lay audience interested in the major conclusions of recent theological reflection, though having neither the background nor the desire to consider all the details. Of particular interest to them were those aspects of theology that most immediately impacted the moral decisions of life. Accordingly, the genre of popular theology (frequently called "practical theology") emerged-aimed at distilling such information and presenting it in terms understandable to this audience.

The concerns addressed by this genre of practical theology are admirable. Ironically, however, it appears to have accelerated the growing split between academic theology and lived piety-in two ways: 1) it moved the concern for relevance outside the purview of Theoretical Theology per se and 2) it formalized the assumption that non-professionals play no constructive role in theological reflection, but are merely an audience for its conclusions.<sup>10</sup> As a result, this genre faded away-as fewer were able to stand in the gap between professional theology and popular audiences, and fewer still on either side assumed the other had anything of relevance to share.

6. Practical Theology as Pastoral Theology. In the nineteenth century Kant's use of practical reason to establish the theoretical foundation of moral action undermined the reigning university distinction between Theoretical and Practical Theology. One result of this was to emphasize further the notion that Practical Theology was concerned merely to apply theories that Systematic Theology developed. A second result was to question whether general human life should still be considered its field of application. Particularly after Schleiermacher's influential theological encyclopedia, this field was increasingly narrowed: first to ecclesial practice; and then, to the practice of clergy. That is, Practical Theology became a discipline for preparing ministers to handle technical aspects of their profession.<sup>11</sup>

7. Practical Theology as Glaubenslehre. The model of Pastoral Theology came to dominate both Protestant and Catholic seminaries by the latter half of the nineteenth century. There was, however, an important alternative understanding of Practical Theology in Protestant circles during this time.

The Enlightenment had emphasized a distinction between theology (as rational ideas) and religion (as historical reality). This reinforced the suggestion of some Pietists that a truly practical theology would be one derived from consideration of the practice of piety. These influences lie behind Schleiermacher's replacement of dogmatics with his Glaubenslehre-an articulation of the doctrine currently expressed in the life of the Church. Schleiermacher himself placed this task within the area of Historical Theology. However, the increasing influence of Hegel's notion of "praxis" as the unfolding of the Idea implicit in history led many to call such a study of the historical embodiment/expression of beliefs "Practical Theology"-as contrasted with Systematic Theology's abstract treatment of concepts.

Thus emerged the use of the term "practical theology" to designate an empirical investigation and articulation of the implicit convictions of contemporary Christian life. Such a Practical Theology was proposed as a direct alternative to the perceived traditional practice of imposing dogmatic definitions of faith upon the present church.<sup>12</sup> This use of "practical theology"

was short-lived in Protestant circles. The Neo-Orthodox turn in the twentieth century decisively rejected its assumption of the primacy of current church praxis over traditional teachings and belief. They believed the current church was verging on apostasy and called it back to the Word! In the process, they effectively reduced Protestant Practical Theology again to Pastoral Theology-and almost to homiletics alone!

## **II. CONTEMPORARY CALLS FOR RECOVERING THEOLOGY AS PRACTICAL**

*1. Overcoming Practical Theology as Pastoral Theology.* One intense area of current debates about theological method has focused on the nature and goal of the specialty-discipline Practical Theology. The major concerns of this debate have been to overcome the effects of equating Practical Theology with Pastoral theology, namely, 1) the narrowing of its subject field to clerical practice, and 2) its construal as a mere "application" discipline. The reconceived Practical Theology that is advocated either becomes again essentially Moral Theology, or it is assigned the task of reflecting on current Christian praxis, <sup>13</sup> with the goal of critically transforming it into more authentic forms. Obviously, this latter task entails mediating between current praxis and the normative convictions of Christian faith.

*2. Calls for Recovering Theology as Practical.* Once the specialty discipline of Practical Theology is defined this broadly, however, one wonders what remains for Systematic Theology. Thus, many of those calling for a transformed Practical Theology have realized that they are really calling for the recovery of a model of theology per se as a practical endeavor-like that preceding the dominance of university theology.<sup>14</sup> Their voices have joined many others stimulated by a variety of concerns in the theological arena.

For example, within the arena of ethics, attempts to overcome the separation between doctrinal theology and ethics-whose origin we noted-have supported this call. Even stronger support has come from the recent focus of political and liberation theologies on the interrelationship of religious belief and the socio-political realities of life. Perhaps the strongest support has come from the proponents of focusing the discipline of ethics more on understanding and cultivating the abiding virtues (character) which guide life than on determining abstract principles of ethical judgment. This emphasis on the need to form the cogrutive and affectional character from which "proper" life flows carries clear parallels to the early Christian understanding of the relationship of theology/habitus and theology/discipline.

This parallel lends support to the growing contemporary argument that it is (praxis-related) activities like creating liturgies, composing hymns, and shepherding discipleship which are the primary forms of theology. This emphasis is not a rejection of rigorous, even complex, doctrinal reflection. Indeed, the concern for legitimate formation (or reformation] of character, requires doctrinal critique and norming of liturgies, etc. Such doctrinal reflection is secondary, however, in the sense that it is a step further removed from Christian praxis than the other activities.

Another contemporary theological movement that has lent support to the agenda of reconceiving theology as practical is the call to "deprofessionalize" theology, allowing the "people" (*laos*) to participate and making the needs of the people a primary concern. This call differs from the "Popular

Theology” noted above because it demands more than a translation of academic theology for the laity. It calls for the practice of theology to be reformed so that it will involve the entire community more.

A final contributing force to the growing call for a practical theology is the rejection of foundational or primarily metaphysical approaches to theology, arguing that the primary function of doctrinal reflection is the norming of Christian discourse and life. A similar point is being made (without the critique of foundationalism) in recent descriptions of the basic Christian convictions and tempers as an interpretive worldview that guides Christian life.

*3. Characteristics of the Theology Desired.* Such are some of the forces that have coalesced to champion the cause of reconceiving theology as practical. What are the major characteristics considered essential to such a practical theology?

First, it would be inherently transformative. That is, it would seek not only to understand but also to correct Christian life.

Second, it would be holistic. It would consider and seek to norm not only the mind, but also the will and the affections. In other words, it would be concerned not only with orthodoxy but also with orthopraxis and orthopathy.

Third, it would clearly recognize the primacy of praxis in theological method. Existing praxis (Christian and general) would be both the starting point and final goal of theological activity. To say that theology starts with praxis is not to say that it derives its norms from praxis. Rather, it is to claim that the needs and challenges arising from Christian praxis in the world are what spark authentic theological activity.<sup>15</sup> To say that theological reflection is always directed back to praxis is not to dispense with careful doctrinal reflection. Rather, it is to affirm the need for pursuing doctrinal reflection to the point of discovering the anthropological and soteriological implications of all doctrines. It is also to make the indispensable effort of relating that second-level doctrinal reflection to the primary theological activities that address directly the concerns arising from Christian praxis in the world.

Fourth, because of its connection to praxis, a truly practical theology would necessarily be contextual. It would not focus on the search for universal unchanging expressions of Christian faith. Rather it would undertake the demanding work of wrestling with both the Christian revelation and the individual socio-historical situation until it determined particular authentic embodiments of Christian faith. In the process it would protect against both irrelevance and relativism.

Finally, this theological activity would be inherently occasional, concerned more to address pressing issues as they arose than to formulate programmatically an abstract theological System.

### **III. PRELIMINARY DEFINITION OF WESLEY’S “PRACTICAL THEOLOGY”**

With the historical analysis of the variety of meanings of “practical theology” in mind, we turn now to the question of whether, and in what sense, Wesley was a practical theologian.

Eighteenth century English authors typically divided religious literature into three main types: 1) doctrinal or speculative writings (concerned with articulating and defending specific doctrines and evidences, natural and

revealed, for Christianity), 2) controversial materials (concerned with demolishing on rational, historical or scriptural grounds, the beliefs and practices of rival groups), and 3) practical literature (concerned with helping the individual practice the Christian life).<sup>16</sup>

In general, Wesley used the same designations and corresponding definitions in describing his and others' theology (Divinity).<sup>17</sup> For example, he frequently refers to "speculative divinity." On rare occasions this is used derogatorily to refer to a theology that merely speculates about issues especially those not revealed in Scripture-without applying them to Christian life.<sup>18</sup> More typically it is seen as a necessary partner to practical theology-the one dealing more with matters of Christian intellectual belief and the other with matters of Christian practice.<sup>19</sup>

As this suggests, Wesley's typical use of "practical divinity" is to designate literature which focused on nurturing Christian life.<sup>20</sup> His clearest examples of this type of material are A Christian Library<sup>21</sup> and the 1780 Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People Called Methodists.<sup>22</sup>

Likewise, Wesley clearly assumed that the role of "controversial divinity" was to attack perceived errors and, thereby, defend one's understanding of the Christian truth.<sup>23</sup> While he professed not to enjoy such theological activity, he participated in it.<sup>24</sup> In particular, one would have to place here most of his open letters and appeals, the treatise on Original Sin, and much of the content of early volumes of the Arminian Magazine.<sup>25</sup>

Besides these major categories, Wesley occasionally mentioned "mystical divinity"-which he castigated as seeking hidden meanings in everything<sup>26</sup>-and "natural divinity"-which was concerned to demonstrate the nature and attributes of God from the creation.<sup>27</sup>

In light of these usages, it is clear that Wesley considered at least part of his theological activity to be practical theology. Most of his interpreters make a stronger claim than this. They consider practical theology to be the defining type of his theological activity.<sup>28</sup> The question this raises, of course, is what they mean by practical theology-as ascribed to Wesley. A comparison of their apparent understandings with the history of "practical theology"-in reverse direction-might be illuminating.

1. Glaubenslehre? Since the model of a Glaubenslehre clearly postdates Wesley, one would not expect construals of his practical theology in this direction. However, there is an emphasis among some interpreters that comes close. They argue that Wesley avoided a dogmatic approach to theology, opting instead for an empirical, inductive, or experimental theology.<sup>29</sup> Such an argument could suggest that Wesley developed his theology from empirical analysis of contemporary Christian piety and life-like Troeltsch. Wesley would surely have rejected such a suggestion.<sup>30</sup>

To be sure, Wesley allowed experience to play an important role in his theological method. Indeed, it can be argued that he assigned more of a role to experience than was common in the Anglicanism of his day.<sup>31</sup> However, his appeal to experience was always subordinate to the role of Scripture.<sup>32</sup> The role of experience was to confirm interpretations of Scripture and to help decide issues not clearly revealed in Scripture.<sup>33</sup> Thus, when Wesley refers to his experimental divinity, he is affirming that his interpretations of doctrines have been confirmed and enlarged by consideration of Christian experience, not that they are derived from that experience alone. More-

over, Wesley does not identify this role of experience as the defining aspect of his practical theology.<sup>34</sup>

2. Pastoral Theology? The narrowed definition of Practical Theology as Pastoral Theology also postdates Wesley, and clearly has very limited value in characterizing his approach.<sup>35</sup> He was concerned to train his lay preachers for their task. However, the training he provided was hardly limited to technical questions about pastoral duties.<sup>36</sup> He was more concerned with providing them with the basic knowledge they needed of Anglican and Methodist doctrine-through the homilies, sermons, Christian Library, etc. Moreover, he was just as concerned with the theological education of his lay members as that of his preachers.<sup>37</sup>

3. Popular Theology? The model of Practical Theology as translating academic theology for laity was nearly contemporaneous with Wesley and is a more likely candidate for comparison. Albert Outler's now-famous designation of Wesley as a "folk theologian" makes roughly such an identification. Outler emphasizes in his definition the folk theologian's abilities to simplify, synthesize and communicate the essential teachings of the Christian gospel to laity-i.e., to teach in "plain words for plain people."<sup>38</sup>

It is clear that this concern for communication was important to Wesley.<sup>39</sup> However, there are two aspects of the model of Popular Theology expressed in Germany that do not appear to fit Wesley. First, Wesley's audience was not primarily the educated upper middle-class, but the lower classes.<sup>40</sup> As such, he was not as concerned to expose his people to "interesting" developments in recent academic theology as to ground them in the basic teachings of the Christian faith. Second, the model of Popular Theology suggests that it merely translates conclusions reached by others, rather than engaging in doctrinal formulation and correction itself. Such an implication was evident in Outler's early use of "folk theology" as well, but he has increasingly realized that this is inadequate for Wesley-who not only translates, but debates, clarifies and reformulates doctrinal claims.<sup>41</sup>

4. Moral Theology? Wesley had a clear concern for moral issues in his society and the lives of his people. This concern has led some to consider his theology preeminently a Moral Theology.<sup>42</sup> Again, while understandable, this characterization could be misleading. We noted that the model of Moral Theology has typically assumed a division between its task and that of doctrinal reflection. No such separation is evident in Wesley. Rather, he exemplifies a more integrated investigation of doctrinal convictions and ethical concerns.<sup>43</sup>

5. Non-Technical Theology? The model of Practical Theology as a nontechnical version of academic theology for those entering ministry has not been correlated with the theology of Wesley by his interpreters. After all, he did not remain in the academy training ministers. At most, some tangential comparisons could be made between this model and Wesley's procedure of "digesting" theological works for his preachers and people.

6. Spiritual Theology? When it is remembered that Wesley is typically identified as a Pietist,<sup>44</sup> it is not surprising that the model of Spiritual Theology is often seen as definitive of Wesley's practical theology.<sup>45</sup> This is clearly in keeping with Wesley's own use of "practical divinity." However, it would not seem to do justice to the breadth of his theological activity. While Wesley clearly had a deep concern for nurturing Christian piety, it was not to

the exclusion of, or merely an application of doctrinal reflection-as increasingly characterized the development of the independent genre of Spiritual Theology.

7. Theology as Practical. Having suggested the inadequacy of the other identifications of practical theology as characterizations of Wesley's overall theology, we come to our main thesis: When his work is considered as a whole, Wesley's theological activity is analogous to the early Christian approach to theology per se as a practical endeavour.<sup>46</sup>

### **III. THE ANGLICAN SETTING OF WESLEY'S THEOLOGICAL ACTIVITY**

To understand Wesley's inclination toward the early Christian model of theology as practical, we need to note some differences between the Anglican tradition within which he was trained and the Continental theological setting of the changing definitions of "practical theology" noted above.

Anglicanism self-consciously sought to be a "middle way" between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism. In particular, it believed that a return to the beliefs and practice of the early church would recover an authentic Christianity uncontaminated by the later disputes and splits. Therefore, Anglican theologians immersed themselves in the study of the first four centuries of Christian theology and life.

Among the elements of the early church which influenced Anglicanism was the model of theology per se as practical. The best evidence of this is the eventual forms of official Anglican doctrine. They were not *summae*, *encyclopaediae*, or even *Institutes*. Rather, like the practical theology of the early church, they were creeds or confessions (The Thirty-Nine Articles), Liturgies (The Book of Common Prayer), catechetical sermons (The Homilies), and commentaries on Biblical passages.<sup>47</sup> We will detail below how Wesley utilized these same forms for his theology.

The early church influence may also account for the fact that Anglican theologians of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries focused more on clarifying issues of theological method than on constructing "systems" of theology (the contemporaneous preoccupation of Continental theology). Indeed, they actively distrusted systems.<sup>48</sup> As such, the fact that Wesley never constructed a "system" would not have implied to them that he was not a serious theologian. By their standards, a serious theologian would strive to clarify the sources of theology and the methods for utilizing and weighting these sources. Judged accordingly, Wesley was not only conversant with the issues involved, he made an important contribution concerning the role of experience in formulating and testing theological assertions.<sup>49</sup>

One result of the characteristics of Anglican theology was that the Orthodoxy/Pietism split had neither the same nature nor the prominence in seventeenth and eighteenth century England that it had on the Continent.<sup>50</sup> Anglican schools were not dominated by a scholastic method of theology.<sup>51</sup> Correspondingly, English Pietists did not focus on the general nature of academic theology in their critique of the moral and spiritual laxity of the Church. They laid the blame more on liturgical practices, ecclesiastical arrangements, or the rationalist temper of Deism. Thus, Pietists actually held positions of respect within the university.<sup>52</sup> As a result, Wesley was trained in a setting that typically held consideration of the practice of Chris-

tian life and doctrinal reflection together.<sup>53</sup> It is not surprising that he should do the same.

#### **IV. THE FORMS OF WESLEY'S THEOLOGICAL ACTIVITY**

Our basic thesis is that Wesley was a serious theologian proceeding in terms of the early Christian model of theology as a practical endeavor. We have shown how his Anglican setting conveyed such an approach to him. A survey of the forms of his theological activity should demonstrate his actual embodiment of such praxis-related theology.<sup>54</sup>

**1. Creeds.** First, it is clear that Wesley placed high value on the Articles of Religion, both as an authentic expression of traditional Christian faith and as a catechetical aid. Indeed, he often recommended Bishop John Pearson's Exposition of the Creed as the best available source for studying Christian divinity.<sup>55</sup> Thus, when the American Methodists separated from the Anglican Church, it was entirely in character for him to undertake the theological task of editing the Articles,<sup>56</sup> and to urge strongly their adoption by the fledgling church, even though they already had his Sermons and Notes.

**2. Liturgy and Prayers.** Likewise, Wesley placed a high value on the liturgy of the Book of Common Prayer for both his personal spiritual development and that of his people.<sup>57</sup> Thus, he was equally concerned to provide the American church with a theologically purified (and, as typical, abridged) version of this vital resource of theological formation.<sup>58</sup>

Related to Wesley's appreciation of the formal liturgy was that of devotional prayer. His first publication was actually a collection of such prayers. He published two other collections of prayers and a set of devotions for the days of the week and the Great Festivals.<sup>59</sup> While most of these materials were apparently extracted from others, they reveal Wesley's theological concern in their selection and editing, their organization, and their explicit doctrinal content.<sup>60</sup>

**3. Sermons.** The third major form of Wesley's theological activity was the publication of sermons—parallel to the Book of Homilies and early Christian catechetical sermons. It is important to notice a key difference between Wesley's oral preaching and his published sermons. The former were primarily awakening messages aimed at the general public. The latter were chiefly concerned with the nurture and theological education of those within the Methodist societies.<sup>61</sup> Thus, Wesley was concerned that his collected sermons deal with "all those doctrines which I embrace and teach as the essentials of true religion."<sup>62</sup> He was also concerned to relate even the most speculative doctrines to the practice of human life.<sup>63</sup>

**4. Bible Study Aids.** Another important form of Wesley's practical theological activity was the publication of Biblical study aids, especially the Explanatory Notes on the New Testament. As John Lawson has noted, the essential purpose of this work was not simply to provide devotional reading, but to overturn the exegesis of customary Calvinist and Antinomian "prooftext"<sup>64</sup> Wesley was convinced that his opponents' exegesis undercut Christian discipleship. Thus, the Notes were ultimately meant to provide the exegetical basis for the theological/spiritual nurture of his people.

**5. Hymns.** Surely, any consideration of the forms of Wesley's theology must include the various hymnbooks.<sup>65</sup> While Charles was the author of most of the hymns, John exercised strong editorial control over the joint hymnbooks. That they can, therefore, be considered authentic expressions of his theology needs no more proof than his own frequent reference to them in his doctrinal pieces.<sup>66</sup>

It is clear that John and Charles were concerned that their hymns be not only artistically acceptable but also theologically appropriate.<sup>67</sup> After all, it is quite likely that the faith sung had more formative power on the Methodist people than any other expression.<sup>68</sup>

**6. Conferences.** A sixth form of Wesley's practical theological activity was the holding of periodic conferences with his preachers. A perusal of the Minutes of these meetings shows that they were not the primarily administrative and motivational meetings typical today. Rather, they addressed the theological struggles within the revival, often resulting in clarification of distinctive Wesleyan emphases—hence the authority of their Minutes.<sup>69</sup> This is not to suggest that these Conferences paralleled early Christian Councils.<sup>70</sup> A better analogy would be early catechetical schools, for Wesley clearly served more as a teacher than as the moderator of a corporate quest for truth.<sup>71</sup>

**7. Occasional Essays.** Perhaps Wesley's most serious theological work appears in the open letters, appeals, and other essays meant to explain and defend his theological positions. For example, he considered his "Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion" the best presentation of his position.<sup>72</sup> His longest original work was a reply to a treatise that denied the doctrine of original sin.<sup>73</sup> Also included here would be the *Arminian Magazine* with its series of doctrinal sermons and other writings. Together, these various letters and essays provide a good introduction to Wesley's theology.<sup>74</sup> More importantly, they are ideal examples of occasional theological reflection spawned by the controversies and needs of the Methodist movement.

**8. Catechetical Materials.** Wesley's sermons and the hymns could be considered catechetical in nature.<sup>75</sup> Beyond these general works, he edited and translated a French catechism for use in his schools. This catechism included both a summary of doctrine and a guide to Christian piety.<sup>76</sup>

**9. Other Educational and Devotional Materials.** Beside the materials mentioned above, Wesley provided other devotional and educational resources for his people. Foremost was the Christian Library where he extracted or abridged selected pieces of "practical divinity," editing them with a discerning theological eye so that they would not mislead and, misform) his people. <sup>77</sup> Also included here would be his edited histories of Christianity and of England, and the survey of the newly emerging natural sciences. Such works were meant not only to communicate information but also to inspire Christian devotion and to inculcate a capacity for theological judgment.<sup>78</sup>

**10. Journal.** Wesley's publication of his *Journal* also deserves some consideration in discussion of his theological activity. The importance of this act is not simply that it stands in a tradition of such classic examples as Augustine's *Confessions*. It is the fact that the journal—no doubt first published primarily to defend his revival in the public arena—became yet another

avenue by which Wesley fashioned and strengthened the faith of his followers 79 Unfortunately, the genre tended to invite misrepresentation by its one-sided account of his theology.<sup>80</sup>

**11. Letters.** The last major form of Wesley's theological activity was his numerous private letters. Since most of these were written in response to letters asking his counsel or advice, they provide important insights into his pastoral concern and practice. They also provide numerous examples of it.<sup>81</sup>

## **V. THE NATURE OF WESLEY'S PRACTICAL THEOLOGY**

The preceding section should have made it clear that Wesley pursued serious theological activity in the forms common to his Anglican setting and appropriate to the early Christian model of practical theology. To clarify further the nature of his practical theology, we will now explore parallels between it and the model being proposed in the recent discussions of theological method.

1. Concerns of Wesley's Practical Theology. To begin with, Wesley shared many of the concerns of the movements that have joined forces in calling for a more practical theology. For example, he also refused to separate ethical convictions from doctrinal considerations. He disdained merely philosophical approaches to ethics, grounding his own ethical reflection solidly in his theology of grace.<sup>82</sup> On the other side, he had little patience for a theology that neglected or undercut the dimension of responsible Christian living.<sup>83</sup>

While his social analysis shared his age's blindness to structural causes, Wesley's advocacy of the cause of the poor, his confidence in the transforming power of God, and his emphasis on orthopraxis have suggested parallels with contemporary liberation theologies.<sup>84</sup> Likewise, his understanding of Christian holiness as involving holy tempers, not simply correct actions, has resonated with those articulating a "character ethics."<sup>85</sup>

The preceding survey of Wesley's various theological activities should make clear his shared conviction with those who consider such undertakings as constructing liturgies to be serious-indeed, primary-forms of theology. Likewise, our comparison of Wesley's thought to Popular Theology noted his concern that theology be done for the good of (and in terms understandable, by laypersons, rather than primarily for the academy. In this regard, there is a similarity between Wesley and the recent calls for a "people's theology." However, Wesley did not particularly share the current concern to give the "people" a voice in theological decisions. His agenda was meant to provide them with an appropriate theological formation.<sup>86</sup>

There are also strong affinities between Wesley's thought and the contemporary emphasis on the role of theological doctrines as the "rules" or "grammar" of Christian confession and life.<sup>87</sup> For example, in his note on I Cor. 14:6, he defines the purpose of doctrine: "to regulate your tempers and life " However, words of caution are again in order. First, some advocates of the regulatory view of doctrine construe it simply in terms of norming Christian language. By contrast, Christian tempers and actions are clearly Wesley's concern. Secondly, their strong anti-foundationalist mood inclines many advocating of this view toward denying that doctrines make any claims about "how things are," while still affirming their norming implications for Christian life. Wesley would not have understood (nor agreed with!) this contrast For him, it was because God is Creator that we owe our love to God;

and because Christ is not only Priest but Prophet that Christians must uphold the law.<sup>88</sup>

Finally, Wesley would have been quite sympathetic with the description of the basic Christian convictions as a patterned worldview through which we interpret the world and by which we are moved to Christian praxis. He was convinced that true religion begins in the true knowledge of God.<sup>89</sup> Thus, he could argue that the chief cause of the inefficacy of Christianity in England was that the people did not know the “first principles” of Christianity; i.e., the nature and moral attributes of God, God’s providence, the offices of Christ, etc.<sup>90</sup> Likewise, his proposed cure for the natural atheism with which children are born was to educate them in the basic Christian worldview.<sup>91</sup> While Wesley did not believe that assent to the Christian worldview was the sufficient cause of Christian discipleship—for one must practice what one believes<sup>92</sup>—he clearly held that a conviction<sup>93</sup> of the truth of this basic worldview was a *sine qua non* of such discipleship, because this worldview grounded and structured Christian life.<sup>94</sup>

2. Characteristics of Wesley’s Practical Theology. In light of the concerns that Wesley shared with contemporary movements that have fostered the call for recovering a practical theology, one would also expect some similarity with the characteristics of the model they propose.

The first characteristic of the proposed model is that it should be inherently transformative. Obviously, this assumes that humans are not right, and that theology’s goal is not to make them comfortable with their faults but to reform them. This same conviction is apparent in Wesley’s claim that while Calvinists merely aim to make Calvinists, he is trying to make Christians!<sup>95</sup> Given this assumption, one important criterion for assessing any doctrine would be consideration of its positive or negative results on Christian life in the world. This criterion played a dominant role in Wesley’s doctrinal assessment.<sup>96</sup>

The second characteristic of the desired practical theology is that it should be holistic. It should consider and seek to norm not only the mind, but also the will and the affections. Underlying this characteristic is the growing conviction that what ultimately unites orthodoxy and orthopraxis are right affections (*orthopathos*). Thus, a truly practical theology must be concerned to understand and form (reform) human affections. Wesley’s deep sensitivity to this concern is easy to demonstrate. Indeed he has been used as a model by recent proponents of this general theme.<sup>97</sup>

The third major characteristic of the proposed model is that a truly practical theology should recognize the primacy of praxis. Such primacy argues that it is existing praxis that presents the legitimate challenges that spark theological activity. Even a cursory examination makes it clear that the stimulus of most of Wesley’s theological insights and endeavors was the struggle to meet the needs of and address the controversies within his fledgling revival movement.

The affirmation of the primacy of praxis also assumes that theological reflection must always be related back to praxis through such primary theological activities as constructing liturgies, shepherding congregations, etc. Our review of the various forms of Wesley’s theological activity shows clearly that he engaged in such *primary* theology.

What the primacy of praxis does not imply is a reduction of theological decisions to the criterion of "whatever will work." It does not reject careful doctrinal reflection. Rather, it requires that such doctrinal reflection be pursued to the point of determining the anthropological and soteriological dimensions of all Christian doctrines. Our major claim in this paper is that such serious doctrinal reflection, responding to the stimulus of praxis and in service to the effort<sup>9</sup> of primary theological activities-is precisely what we find in Wesley.<sup>98</sup>

Wesley clearly did not avoid doctrinal reflection. Indeed, at one time or another, he touched on every major area of doctrinal reflection.<sup>99</sup> Moreover, he did not limit himself to those doctrines whose implications for Christian life were immediately evident. He found it necessary to take up some quite technical debates-such as the question of whether Christ's death was the formal or meritorious cause of justifying faith. <sup>100</sup> He also dealt with such speculative issues as the nature of animals in Heaven,<sup>101</sup> the nature of the torments in Hell,<sup>102</sup> and how God will deal with those who have never heard of Christ.<sup>103</sup> But, what most characterized Wesley's doctrinal reflection was that it always drew the anthropological and soteriological implications of the doctrine under consideration-however, technical or speculative it might be.<sup>104</sup>

The fourth major characteristic of the desired practical theology is that it should be contextual. It is not concerned to formulate timeless definitions of truth but to determine context-sensitive embodiments of the Christian gospel. Now, Wesley was no more sensitive to his bias toward his general Anglo-Saxon Christian context than others of his age were to their respective biases.<sup>105</sup> However, consideration of the variations in his doctrinal reflection does demonstrate a sensitivity to the changing contexts of the struggles in his movement.<sup>106</sup>

The final characteristic desired in a contemporary practical theology is that it be occasional. Our analysis of the forms of Wesley's theological activity-especially the occasional essays-clearly demonstrates that this was characteristic of his general approach.

## **VI. WESLEY'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE MODEL OF "THEOLOGY AS PRACTICAL"**

We have argued that Wesley's practice modeled a style of theological activity very similar to that being proposed in the call for a recovery of practical theology. As such, Wesley should be of interest, as an exemplar, to those involved in this discussion.

We believe that there is another-less obvious, but equally important contribution that Wesley can make to the present discussion. Perhaps the greatest concern expressed about the proposed model of praxis-related theology relates to its occasional and situational nature.<sup>107</sup> It is sparked by issues in particular situations and tends to adopt unique emphases or strategies appropriate to each situation. This suggests two potential problems. First, such an occasional approach to theology would not be conducive to comprehensive theological awareness. Second, it is possible that the demands of the situation would so dominate theological judgments that there would be no consistency between the various situation-related theological reflections.

Clearly the second of these potential problems is the most troubling. A fragmentary theological understanding could still be authentic in the issues it treats. Likewise, while comprehensiveness is laudable, it does not appear to be essential to human praxis. By contrast, a lack of reasonable consistency in theological reflections would surely weaken confidence in any claim to truth. Thereby, it would also limit the effectiveness of that reflection in norming praxis. This explains why a concern for consistency in its major doctrines is characteristic of all religions.<sup>108</sup>

In the modern Western model of Systematic Theology this concern for consistency came to be construed—under the influence of the Hegelian Encyclopedia— as the need for all theological claims to be derived from or subsumed under a single idea.<sup>109</sup> Such a tight system was often attained only at the expense of exegetical and praxis-related considerations. Obviously, such an approach is not going to be attractive to a proponent of praxis-related theological reflection. Thus, it is ironic that so many Wesley interpreters continue to apologize for the fact he was not a “systematic” theologian in this Hegelian sense.<sup>110</sup> Wesley’s model now appears to be more viable than that over against which they critique him!

But, if consistency should not to be imposed by the Hegelian Idea, what other options are there? Two major suggestions have been made. The softest claim is that it is the intrinsic consistency of the basic Christian mythos that grants consistency to situation-related reflection.<sup>111</sup> While helpful, this suggestion fails to explain how there can be—as there surely are— alternative consistent readings of this one mythos.

In answer to this question, some have argued that what gives consistency (*if* there is any) to particular theological traditions is not unchanging doctrinal summaries, nor a theoretical idea from which all truth is deduced nor given order in a “system.” Rather, it is a basic orienting perspective or concern that guides their various theological activities.<sup>112</sup> Particular responses could vary as appropriate to their situation and yet retain a consistency because each situation is addressed from the standpoint of the same orienting perspective. Moreover, one need not have a comprehensive summary of the claims consistent with such a perspective prior to engaging in theological reflection. In fact, it is precisely the search for consistent expressions in relation to new issues that enlivens a theological tradition.

As we have argued elsewhere, we believe this understanding of an orienting perspective is quite helpful for explaining the consistency that so many interpreters find in Wesley’s various situation-related theological reflections.<sup>113</sup> As Albert Outler notes, this consistency is not one of literal identity in every formulation but of a constancy of intention and perspective in various circumstances.<sup>114</sup> This is exactly what we would expect to find in a praxis-related theological reflection.

If, indeed, Wesley maintained a reasonable consistency among his various situation-related theological activities by addressing each of these situations under the guidance of an (admittedly implicit) orienting perspective then his example strengthens the case of those arguing that this is how consistency should be insured. More importantly, it helps remove the most serious objection to the contemporary calls for theological reflection to reestablish its connection to Christian life and praxis.

## NOTES

### ABBREVIATIONS

- BE        *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley*. Editor in Chief, Frank Baker. Nashville: Abingdon, 1984ff (Volumes 7, 11, 25 and 26 originally appeared as the Oxford Edition of The Works of John Wesley, 1975-85).
- Jackson    *The Works of John Wesley*. 14 vols. 3rd. ed. Ed. Thomas Jackson. London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, 1872; reprint ed., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979.
- Journal    *The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.* 8 vols. Ed. Nehemiah Curnock. London: Epworth, 1909-16.
- JW        John Wesley. Ed. Albert C. Outler. A Library of Protestant Thought Series. New York: Oxford University Press, 1964.
- Letters    The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M. 8 vols. Ed. John Telford. London: Epworth, 1931.
- NT Notes    Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament. 2 vols. London: Bowyer, 1755; reprint ed. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1986.

<sup>1</sup>This paper is dedicated to Dr. J Kenneth Grider in honor of completing 37 years of teaching theology at Nazarene Theological Seminary. Both his life and teaching have modeled a Wesleyan practical theology.

<sup>2</sup>For a more detailed and documented study of the history of practical theology and the current debates about recovering an understanding of theology as a practical (sections I & II of this paper) see Randy L. Madox "Practical Theology and Theology as Practical: Interrelated Current Debates." forthcoming.

<sup>3</sup>Note Augustine's conviction about theology: "The only merit of this science is that from it a saving faith is born, nourished defended and strengthened." (*De Trinitate*, BK. 14, Chap 1.).

<sup>4</sup>A good example is St. Basil's *On the Holy Spirit*. This complex and influential analysis of the interrelations of the Godhead was occasioned by the issue of whether Christians should pray to the Holy Spirit.

<sup>5</sup>An example would be Thomas à Kempis' *The Imitation of Christ*.

<sup>6</sup>Cf. Johann Theiner, *Die Entwicklung der Moraltheologie zur Eigenständigen Disziplin* (Regensburg: Verlag Friedrich Pustet, 1970), pp. 57-97.

<sup>7</sup>The developments are chronicled in Theiner, *Moraltheologie*.

<sup>8</sup>For analysis of the problems involved in this bifurcation of the theological sciences, see Edwards Farley, *Theologia: The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983).

<sup>9</sup>Cf. Volker Drehsen, "Theologia Popularis: Noizen zur Geschichte und Bedeutung einer praktisch-theologischen Gattung," *Pastoraltheologie* 77 (1988) 2-20.

10Cf. Drehsen. "Theologia Popularis," pp. 16ff.

11For an analysis of this development see Edward Farley, "Theology and Practice Outside the Clerical Paradigm," in *Practical Theology: The Emerging Field in Theology, Church and World*, pp. 21-41, edited by Don Browning (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1983).

12While there were earlier approximations to such a position, the clearest example is Ernst Troeltsch.

13We have purposefully avoided this term until now. The term "praxis" has been reappropriated in recent philosophical and theological discussions to emphasize the inescapable dialectical relationship between theory and practice. As such, one cannot simply derive practice from theory nor derive theory from practice. Rather, truth emerges in creative action, inspired by critical reflection, that gives rise to both change and insight. In this light, Christian praxis can once more become a stimulus and ode of theological reflection, and not just the goal. For an analysis of the current theological discussion of praxis see: Matthew Lamb, *Solidarity with Victims: Toward a Theology of Social Transformation* (New York: Crossroad, 1982).

14A good example is Thomas Ogletree, "Dimensions of Practical Theology: Meaning, Action, Self," in *Practical Theology*, pp. 83-101.

15On this crucial point see Clodovis Boff, *Theology and Praxis: Epistemological Foundations* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1987), esp. pp. 190, 200.

16Cf. Isabel Rivers, "Dissenting and Methodist Books of Practical Divinity," in *Books and their Readers in Eighteenth Century England*, edited by I. Rivers (New York: St. Martins, 1982), pp. 127-64, see p. 127.

17In the eighteenth-century "divinity" was the common English term for teaching about God, and one who teaches (either as theologian or pastor) was a "divine." Cf. "An Address to the Clergy" §I.2 (Jackson X:482).

18Cf. Letter to Mary Bishop, 411711776 (Letters VI:213).

19Note the conjunction of speculative and practical in: Sermon 122: "Causes of the Inefficacy of Christianity" §6 (BE IV:89); Preface to the 1780 Hymnbook §4 (BE VII:73-4); Preface to the Pocket Hymn Book §7 (Jackson XIV:345); and Letter to John Hosmer, 61711761 (Letters IV: 155).

20Note how he uses the term to refer to devotional works like Kempis and Law, but not Pearson's *On the Creed* in the Conference Minutes for Wednesday, 511411746, Quest. 15 (JW:162).

21Subtitled: "Consisting of Extracts from, and Abridgements of, the choicest pieces of Practical Divinity which have been published in the English Tongue." The Preface is reprinted in Jackson XIV:220-22.

22Note the Preface §4 designates the work a "little body of experimental and practical divinity" (BE VII: 74).

23Cf. NT Notes, Romans 14:19; and the Preface to *A Christian Library*. §5 (Jackson XIV:221).

24Note his reference to an early Christian aphorism: "God has made practical divinity necessary, and the devil controversial," to which he adds that sometimes we must write and preach controversially, but the less the better, in Letter to Joseph Benson, 713111773 (Letters VI:35). Cf. Letter to "John Smith," 12/30/1745 (BE XXVI:176), and Journal IV:4 (11/19/1751). Note also Gerald Cragg's judgment that, compared to the typical models of controversial writing in his day, Wesley was quite reasonable and self-possessed (BE XI: 160-2).

25Some of the letters and the Appeals to Men of Reason are collected in BE XI. Note Wesley's defense of the controversial materials in the Arminian Magazine in the Preface to the Second Volume, ~9 (Jackson XIV:283).

26Preface to A Christian Library, §7 (Jackson XIV:221-21. Cf. the Letter to Dorothy Furley, 611811757 (Letters III:218).

27See NT Notes, Acts 17:22. Cf. reference to Natural Philosophy in "An Address to the Clergy" §II.1 (Jackson X:492). He also makes one reference to a distinction between "positive divinity" and "comparative divinity" (apparently his closest genre to "systematic" theology) in Sermon 92: On Zeal §II.5 (BE III:313).

28Cf. Frank Baker, "John Wesley and Practical Divinity," Wesleyan Theological Journal 22.1 (1987) 7-1.~

29Cf. Robert Cushman, Faith Seeing Understanding (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1981), p. 65; Erich von Eichen, Rechtfertigung und Heiligung bei Wesley dargestellt unter Vergleichung mit den Anschauungen Luthers und des Luthertums (Heidelberg: Eichen, 1934), p. 68; Luke Keefer "John Wesley and English Arminianism," Evangelical Journal 4 (1986):15-28; Martin Schmidt, John Wesley: A Theological Biography, II.1 (New York: Abingdon, 1972), p. 59; and Roy Sturm, Sociological Reflections on John Wesley and Methodism (Indianapolis: Central Publishing, 1982), P 99.

30Actually, this may not be obvious in reading Wesley's few explicit descriptions of his use of experience. He tends to describe it with the typical naive inductivism of his day. In practice, however, his appeals to experience were not to develop doctrine inductively, but to test proposed understandings of doctrine-as modern hermeneutic awareness would suggest is always the case. For a good summary of Wesley's understood inductive methodology see Donald Thorsen, "Theological Method in John Wesley" (Drew University Ph.D. thesis, 1988), pp. 158ff.

31Cf. Thorsen, "Theological Method," esp. pp. 343, 157, 200.

32Cf. Thorsen, "Theological Method," pp. 70, 304.

33On the role of experience in confirming or denying proposed doctrines ~ee: Sermon 11: "The Witness of the Spirit II" §III.6 (BE 1:290) & §V.2 (BE I:297); Sermon 13: "On Sin in Believers" §III.7 (BE 1:323); and Sermon 44: "Original Sin" §II.2 (BE II:176). On its role in deciding matters not defined in Scripture, see Sermon 83: "On Patience" §§11-12 (BE III:177-8).

34We noted Wesley's conjunction of "experimental" and "practical" divinity, referring to the 1780 Hymnbook (BE VII:74). Some take this to be an identification of the two. We would suggest that they correlate but are not identical. "Experimental divinity" appears to be used at times Wesley is talking about how he confirms, or develops his theological affirmations, while "practical divinity" is used to emphasize their effects on life.

35Some have described Wesley's theology as a "pastoral" theology. By this, however, they are not referring to the technical discipline of training pastors. Rather, they are suggesting that Wesley's theological concern was not primarily academic; it was to meet the pastoral needs of his people. Cf. Fadiy Lovsky, *Wesley: Apostre des Foules. Pasteur des Pauures* (Lausanne: Foi et Victoire, 1977), p. 147; John M. Turner, *Conflict and Reconciliation: Studies in Methodism and Ecumenism in England. 1740-1982* (London: Epworth,1985), p.44; and Philippo Verhalen, *The Proclamation of the Word in the Writings of John Wesley* (Rome: Pontificia Universitas Gregoriana, 1969), pp. 9, 56.

36Cf. in this regard Frederic Greeves, *Theology and the Cure of Souls: An Introduction to Pastoral Theology* (Manhasset, NY: Channel Press,1962). He is a Methodist struggling to overcome the limitations of Pastoral Theology to mainly technical application-through appeal to Wesley ~pp. 70-83~.

37Note that he recommends the same course of study to lay women as to his preachers! Cf. Letter to Margaret Lewen, 6/1764 (Letters IV:247-9); and Letter to Sarah Wesley, 9/18/1781 ~Letters VII:81-3~.

38Cf. Albert Outler, *John Wesley* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. vii, Idem, "John Wesley as Theologian-Then and Now," *Methodist History* 12.4 (1974):65; Idem, "John Wesley: Folk Theologian," *Theology Today* 34 ~1977~: 150-60; Idem, "John Wesley's Interests in the Early Fathers of the Church," *Bulletin of the United Church of Canada Committee on Archiues and History* 29 (1980-2):6-7; and BE I:67.

39Cf. Preface to NT Notes §3 (Jackson XIV:235); and Preface to Volume 1 of his Sermons §3 (BE 1:104).

40Note the comment of Wilson and Harper that Wesley's decision to be a folk theologian was influenced by the emerging gap between upper and lower classes in the eighteenth century. Robert Wilson and Steve Harper, *Faith and Form: A Unity of Theology and Polity in the United Methodist Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), p. 19. Cf. Thomas W. Herbert's comment about Wesley's need to pierce the wall between literary culture and his unlearned flock: *John Wesley as Editor and Author* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1940) p. v.

41In 1964 Outler assumed that folk theologians did not belong in the front rank with speculative theologians who (alone?) effected changes in Christian doctrine ~John Wesley, p. 119~. More recently he has suggested that Wesley's theological model is an authentic and creative form in its own right. Cf. "A New Future for 'Wesley Studies': An Agenda for 'Phase III.'" *In The Future of the Methodist Theological Traditions*, edited by M. Douglas Meeks (Nashville: Abingdon, 1985) p. 48.

42 See especially Leon Hynson, "Wesley: Theology of the Moral Life," *Asbury Seminarian* 38.5 (1983):18-19.

43Cf. Outler's comment in BE II:236.

44For a striking example, note: *Das Zeitalter des Pietismus*, edited by Martin Schmidt & Wilhelm Jannasch (Bremen: Carl Schunemann Verlag, 1965). The only non-German example of Pietism they mention is John Wesley (247ffl).

45The strongest such claim is Lionel Greve, "Freedom and Discipline in the Theology of John Calvin, William Perkins and John Wesley: An Examination of the Origin and Nature of Pietism" (Hartford Seminary Ph.D. thesis, 1976~, see p.218. Cf. Richard Heitzenrater, *The Elusive Mr. Wesley*, Vol. 1 (Nashville: Abingdon, 1984), p. 145; Jean Orcibal, "Les spirituels fran~ais et espagnols chez John Wesley et ses contemporains." *Revue de L'Histoire des Religions* 139 (1951):55,76 ~he translates "practical divinity" as "spirituality"); and Martin Schmidt, *John Wesley*, II.2 ~New York: Abingdon, 1973), p. 189.

46Cf. Albert Outler's judgment that few have surpassed Wesley's grasp of theology as a practical science: "The Place of Wesley in the Christian Tradition," in *The Place of Wesley in the Christian Tradition*, edited by K. A. Rowe (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1976), p. 29.

47Note the somewhat similar comparison in Thomas Oden, *Doctrinal Standards in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), pp. 22-4. He omits the liturgy, which was a basic form of theological expression, particularly in the Greek Church.

48See Thorsen's helpful discussion of this point (drawing on Henry McAdoo) in Thorsen, "Theological Method," pp. 31, 35-8. Cf. Outler in BE 1:99.

49This is the thesis of Thorsen, "Theological Method."

50Most studies of Pietism deal only with Continental examples. If England is mentioned, it is with reference to Puritanism. However, only a portion of Puritans would really qualify for such a designation-many others were more likely Scholastics! On the issue of English Pietism see F. Ernest StoeMer, *The Rise of Evangelical Pietism* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1965), esp. pp. 27-9.

51We are not claiming there were no such approaches present in English schools. During the early shifting affiliations of the Church of England there were frequent importations of Continental theologies and theologians. This influence remained scattered through the schools. However, it did not define the model of university theology. On the more pastoral nature of such Anglican Divines as Richard Hooker and Jeremy Taylor, see Christopher F. Allison, *The Rise of Moralism* (London: SPCK, 1966), pp. 5, 63-4

52Note, for example, the reputation of William Perkins—a prominent English pietist—at Cambridge. Cf. Stoeffler, *Evangelical Pietism*, p. 51. In Germany Pietists typically developed their own schools, such as Hälle.

53There were minority voices such as John Downname who argued that the most profitable part of theology is “that which consisteth more in experience and practice, than in theory and speculation; and more principally tendeth to the sanctification of the heart, than the informing of the judgment and the increasing of knowledge.” Quoted in Stoeffler, *Evangelical Pietism*, p. 70.

54Parallels between Wesley’s forms of theological expression and those of Anglicanism have been noted in Oden, *Doctrinal Standards*, p. 35. If anything, Wesley idealized Early Church practice and theology even more than was typical in Anglicanism. Thus, we will stress Early Church parallels.

55E.g., Letter to Cradock Glascott, 511311764 ~Letters IV:243); and Letter to Alexander Knox, 61511778 ~Letters III:314).

56For a helpful comparison of the Thirty-nine Articles and Wesley’s edited version, highlighting the theological considerations involved in Wesley’s editing, see Oden, *Doctrinal Standards*, pp. 99-126.

57Cf. Sermon 121: “Prophets and Priests” §15 (BE IV:80)—“I hold all the doctrines of the Church of England. I love her Liturgy. I approve her plan of discipline.” For Wesley’s appreciation of the value of liturgical worship for his followers, see: “Reasons Against a Separation from the Church of England” §3.3 (Jackson XIII:230); and “Large Minutes,” Q. 45 (Jackson VIII:321-2). Cf. the discussion in Henry Knight “The Presence of Christ in the Christian Life: A Contemporary Understanding of Wesley’s Means of Grace” ~Emory University Ph.D. thesis, 1987), pp. 133-9; and Jerald Brian Selleck, “The Book of Common Prayer in the Theology of John Wesley” ~Drew University Ph.D. thesis, 1983).

58Cf. John Wesley’s *Sunday Service of the Methodists in North America* (Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House & United Methodist Board of Higher Education and Ministry, 1984; reprint of 1784 edition). In the introduction to this edition James White argues that the distinctive elements of Wesley’s theology can all be found in the way he edited and ordered this service (p. 16). Wesley had been thinking about most of the issues involved in his revision for some time. Cf. “Ought We to Separate From the Church of England” (1755) full version given in Frank Baker, *John Wesley and the Church of England* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1970), pp. 326-40, note p. 331. Baker gives a good summary of the revisions on pp. 234ff.

59The three collections of prayers are reprinted in Jackson XI:203-72. The Devotions can be found in *John Wesley’s Prayers*, pp. 71-100, edited by Frederick C. Gill (London: Epworth, 1951).

60On the theological nature of the prayers, see Selleck, “Book of Common Prayer,” pp. 179ff.

61Cf. Albert Outler, *Evangelism in the Wesleyan Spirit* ~Nashville: Tidings, 1971), pp. 21-2; Outler’s discussion in BE I:14; and Outler’s note in

BE IV: 422 that Wesley did publish some awakening sermons for the general public but did not include them in the collections of Sermons on Several Occasions which were meant to provide for the theological sustenance and growth of his lay preachers and members, as well as to define and defend his doctrinal tenets for skeptical scholars.

62“Preface,” Sermons on Several Occasions, Vol. I (BE I:103).

63Note Sermon 87: “The Danger of Riches” §II.I (BE III:236): “I am now] to apply what has been said. And this is the principal point. For what avails the clearest knowledge, even of the most excellent things, even of the things of God, if it go no farther than speculation, if it be not reduced to practice?”

64John Lawson, Selections from John Wesley’s Notes on the New Testament: Systematically Arranged with Explanatory Comments (London: Epworth, 1955), p. 10. There was a lesser-known parallel Expository Notes on the Old Testament. While it has very little original Wesley material in it, his theological concerns are clearly evident in his process of editing and his few additions. Cf. Robert M. Casto, “Exegetical Method in John Wesley’s Explanatory Notes upon the Old Testament: A Description of His Approach, Uses of Sources, and Practice” (Duke University Ph.D. thesis, 1977).

65Cf. Rattenbury’s claim that the hymnbooks were the most comprehensive of all the statements of Methodist doctrine, J. Ernest Rattenbury, The Evangelical Doctrines of Charles Wesley’s Hymns ~London: Epworth, 1941), p. 61.

66See especially the references in the “Plain Account of Christian Perfection” §§9ff (Jackson XI:370ff). Cf. Oliver Beckerlegge’s discussion in BE VII:55-6.

67Cf. the conclusions about Charles’ hymns in James Dale, “The Theological and Literary Qualities of the Poetry of Charles Wesley in Relation to the Standards of His Age” ~Cambridge University Ph.D. thesis, 1960), esp. pp. 132-4, 180; and Erik Routley, The Musical Wesleys ~New York: Oxford University Press, 1968) p. 30.

68Cf. Robert Cushman, “Orthodoxy and Wesley’s Experimental Divinity.” Quarterly Review 8.2 ( 1988):74; and Franz Hildebrandt’s comment ~BE VII:1) that the hymns belong with the Sermons and Notes as the three standard books of Wesleyan doctrine. The Wesleys had ancient precedent for this form of theological activity as well. While congregational hymns per se were not present in the early church, much of the liturgy was chanted and it appears that these repetitive chants were also as influential on the laity as the expressly didactic elements.

69Until the drawing up of the “Model Deed” which established the Sermons and the NTNNotes as the standards of Methodist doctrine, Wesley considered the Minutes of his conferences as such a standard. Cf. the Letter to the Traveling Preachers, 81411769 ~Letters V:145).

70In the first place, they were not gatherings of the whole Christian community. Secondly, they dealt mainly with Methodist distinctives, not the

central doctrines authoritatively defined by the early Church Councils. Cf. William Doughty, *John Wesley: His Conferences and His Preachers* ~London: Epworth, 1944), p. 32.

71On Wesley's "control" of the Conferences, see his Letter to Thomas Taylor (?), 1/18/1780 (Letters VI:376). Cf. Doughty, *Conferences*, pp. 17-18.

72Note Cragg's discussion in BE XI:38ff.

73"The Doctrine of Original Sin" (Jackson IX: 191-464).

74Cf. Casto, "Exegetical Method," p. 2.

75See the discussion in Frederick R. Edgar, "A Study of John Wesley from the Point of View of the Educational Methodology Used by Him in Fostering the Wesleyan Revival in England" (Columbia University Ph.D. thesis, 1952), pp. 64, 80ff.

76Instructions for Children(8th edition; Bristol: William Pine, 1767). The work is summarized and discussed in John W. Prince, *Wesley on Religious Education* (New York: Methodist Book Concern, 1926), p. 127.

77Cf. Rogal's observation that Wesley never lost sight of the need to educate and mold his readers into "thinking" Christians, and his concern that Wesley at times tried to be the guardian of his followers' intellects, filtering out all opposing views (Samuel Rogal, *John and Charles Wesley* [Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1983], pp. 96-7).

78Note the conclusion to John Wesley, *A Survey of the Wisdom of God in Creation* (London: J. Paramore, 1784 [4th ed.]) Vol. IV, pp. 332-3: "I have presented my readers with a variety of facts of an interesting nature . . . but this contemplation would prove fruitless, did it not lead us to aspire incessantly after this adorable Being, by endeavoring to acquire a knowledge of [God], from that immense chain of various productions wherein [God's] power and wisdom are displayed." See also comments on his history of England in Rogal, *John and Charles Wesley*, p. 131.

79Cf W. R. Ward's comments in BE XVIII:37-8; and Samuel Rogal, "John Wesley's Journal: Prescriptions for the Social, Spiritual, and Intellectual Ills of Britain's Middle Class," *Andreus University Seminary Studies* 26 (1988) 33-42. See also River's claim that the Journal may be the most important work of practical divinity of the century ("Practical Divinity," p. 152).

80Cf. Cragg's comment in BE XI:7.

81Cf. Frank Baker's comments in BE XXV:97ff.

82Cf. Robert Rakestraw, "The Concept of Grace in the Ethics of John Wesley" (Drew University Ph.D. thesis, 1985), pp. 4, 162, 143ff.

83Witness his rejection of the Moravians because their quietism allowed "inward religion to swallow up outward" (Letter to Charles Wesley, 4/21/1741 BE XXVI:56]).

84Cf. the various articles in Theodore Runyon, ed. *Sanctification and Liberation: Liberation Theologies in the Light of the Wesleyan Tradition* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1981).

85Note especially, Stanley Hauerwas, *Character and the Christian Life. A Study in Theological Ethics* (San Antonio, TX: Trinity University Press, 1975), chapter 5.

86Cf. Robert Cushman, "Church Doctrinal Standards Today." *Religion in Life* 44 (1975):403, 410fn6

87Note the positive discussion in Mark Horst, "Christian Understanding and the Life of Faith in John Wesley's Thought" (Yale University Ph.D. thesis, 1985), esp. pp. 92, 131.

88Cf. Sermon 128: "The Deceitfulness of the Human Heart" §I.2 (BE IV:153); and Sermon 36: "The Law Established by Faith II" §I.6 (BE II:37-8).

89"An Ernest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion" §28 (BE XI:55).

90Sermon 122: "Causes of the Inefficacy of Christianity" §6 (BE IV:89).

91Sermon 95: "On the Education of Children" §14 (BE III:353). The passage should be read in full to capture Wesley's graphic description of the basic Christian view of God and God's relation to humanity.

92On this point one must read carefully Wesley's programmatic remark that "orthodoxy, or right opinions, is, at best, but a very slender part of religion, if it can be allowed to be any part of it at all" ("Plain Account of the People Called Methodists" §I.2 [Jackson VIII:249]). It was often misunderstood as implying one could be religious without being orthodox. His point was that one could be orthodox without being religious! Cf. Letter to James Clark, 911811756. §7 (Letters III:203).

93On the choice of "conviction" over "assent," see Rex Matthews, " 'With the Eyes of Faith': Spiritual Experience and the Knowledge of God in the Theology of John Wesley," in *Wesleyan Theology Today*, edited by Theodore Runyon (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1985), pp. 406-15.

94Cf. his description of Christianity as "that system of doctrine which describes the character [of one who is a Christian indeed], which promises that it shall be mine . . . and which tells me how I may attain it" ("A Plain Account of Genuine Christianity" §II.1 [JW:188]). To be sure, Wesley assumed one could embrace and be shaped by this basic Christian worldview without needing to (or being able to) express it in clear theological terms (Cf. Sermon 130: "On Living Without God" §15 [BE IV:175]). Yet, he does assume a conviction of the truth that God is Benevolent Creator, etc.

95Letter to Mrs. Woodhouse, 7/30/1773 (Letters VI: 34).

96Note his citing of the negative consequences of the doctrine of Predestination (along with the lack of Scriptural support, etc.) as reason for rejecting it: "Predestination Calmly Considered" §86 (Jackson X:256). For another example, see Sermon 110: "Free Grace" (BE III:544-59).

97See: Gregory Clapper, *John Wesley on Religious Affections: His Views on Experience and Emotion and Their Role in the Christian Life and Theology* (Metuchen, NJ: Sarecrow Press, 1989) note p. 154; Knight, "The Presence of Christ," esp. pp. 281ff; and Horst, "Christian Understanding," esp. p. 131.

98Thus, we strongly deny that Wesley's was a "theology of pragmatism," as has been argued by: Johannes Schempp, *Seelsorge und Seelenfuhrung bei John Wesley* (Stuttgart: Christliches Verlagshaus, 1949), esp. pp. 132f, 164; William Sweetland, "A Critical Study of John Wesley as Practical Thinker and Reformer" (Michigan State University Ph.D. thesis, 1955); and John Vincent, *OK Let's Be Methodists* (London: Epworth, 1984), pp. 9, 65ff.

99While it is somewhat of an overstatement to say that his sermons, taken together, add up to a *Summa Theologiae* (Outler, *Evangelism*, p. 41), it is also a mistake to assume Wesley treated only the *ordo salutis*.

100See the summary of the issues involved in Outler, "Place of Wesley," p. 25.

101Sermon 60: "The General Deliverance" §III.3-4 (BE II:446-7).

102Sermon 73: "Of Hell" (BE III:31-44).

103Sermon 91: "On Charity" §11.3 (BE III:295-6); Sermon 106: "On Faith" §1.4 (BE III:494); Sermon 130: "On Living Without God" §14 (BE IV: 174); and his note on Romans 1:19 in NT Notes.

104Note the consistent style in his "doctrinal" sermons of first defining and (if necessary) defending the doctrine, and then drawing the implications of the doctrine for Christian praxis. Cf. Sermon 67: "On Divine Providence" §27 (BE II:548)- Sermon 72: "On Evil Angels" §III (BE III:27); and the whole of Sermon 120 "The Unity of the Divine Being" (BE IV:61ff) where his description of God's attributes leads to a description of true religion as "gratitude and benevolence" (§16 [p. 66]).

105Cf. his derogatory description of contemporary Eastern Orthodoxy in Sermon 63: "The General Spread of the Gospel" §§5-6 (BE II:487).

106Cf. Knight, "Presence of Christ" pp. 8-9; and David L. Watson, "Christ Our Righteousness: The Center of Wesley's Evangelistic Messages" *Perkins Journal* 37 (1984) 38-9. For a good analysis of the contextuality of Wesley's responses to the particular issue of the Calvinistic Methodists and their affirmation of predestination, see: Alan Coppedge, *John Wesley in Theological Debate* (Wilmore, KY: Wesley Heritage Press, 1987).

107Note, in particular the worries expressed by Edward Farley—one of the advocates of recovering theology/discipline: Farley, "Systematische Theologie in einer systemfeindlichen Zeit," in *Entwurfe der Theologie*, edited by J. B. Bauer (Graz: Styria, 1985), pp. 95-125, esp. p. 103.

108William Christian, *Doctrines of Religious Communities* (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 1987), pp. 43-4.

109Cf. Charles Wood, *Vision and Discernment* (Atlanta, GA: Scholar's Press, 1985), p. 16fn23.

110For particularly sharp examples, see: Robert Burtner and Robert Chiles, *John Wesley's Theology: A Collection from His Works* (Nashville: Abingdon~ 1954), p. 7; and Paul Sanders, "John Wesley and Baptismal Regeneration- Religion in Life 23 (1954):591.

111This is Farley's solution ("Systematische Theologie," pp. 103-4).

112Gerhard Sauter has described this orienting perspective as a "orienting concept" (*Wissenschaftstheoretische Kritik der Theologie* [Munich: Christian Kaiser, 1973], p. 281) or a "concept with an orienting function" (*Arbeitsweisen Systematischer Theologie: Eine Anleitung*, [Munich: Christian Kaiser, 1976], p. 156). David Kelsey describes a similar phenomenon by distinguishing between a "discrimen" and norms or criteria (*The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975], p. 160). He makes the crucial point that such a discrimen is not a norm or criterion arbitrarily imposed upon the Christian tradition, but the attempt of a theologian (or theological tradition) to grasp imaginatively what distinguishes and unites the Christian worldview.

113Randy L. Maddox, "Responsible Grace: The Systematic Perspective of Wesleyan Theology." *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 19.2 (1984):7-22. Note also Mitsuru Fujimoto, "John Wesley's Doctrine of Good Works" (Drew University Ph.D. thesis, 1986), p. 1-where he argues that, while Wesley's theology betrays any signs of systematization, it gives unequivocal proof of a "guiding principle." For affirmations of consistency in Wesley's theology see Heitzenreiter, *Elusive Mr. Wesley*, Vol. I, p. 28; Outler, *John Wesley*, p. 27; and Robert Tuttle, *John Wesley: His Life and Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), p. 10.

114BE I:62.

# **JOHN WESLEY, SPIRITUAL DIRECTOR: SPIRITUAL GUIDANCE IN WESLEY'S LETTERS**

**by  
Wesley D. Tracy**

Spiritual direction, or more accurately, spiritual guidance was an essential element in the success of the eighteenth century Methodist revolution. Much of the spiritual guidance occurred in the arenas of the classes and bands. Mutuality was its keynote. It was not as hierarchical as the classical director-directee relationship typical in Roman Catholic tradition and practice. Yet beyond the mutuality of the classes, bands and select societies John Wesley and his Methodists practiced a one-on-one spiritual guidance that usually gets lost in the wings as the class meeting hogs the center stage spotlight of the Wesley scholar's work. In this essay, however, the emphasis will be placed upon the spiritual direction of Wesley, particularly as it appears in his letters, and even more particularly as it appears in his letters to Ann Bolton.

We discover in his personal correspondence John Wesley, the spiritual guide. We might even use the term spiritual director, for Wesley appears to fulfill the requirements set forth in the literature of spiritual direction.

A spiritual director, according to Alan Jones, is "God's usher."<sup>1</sup> This usher practices the "art of arts," spiritual guidance. God's usher needs to be both "loving and learned." He or she should be characterized by love, tender respect, holiness, detachment, and theological competence. He or she should possess the gift of discernment, much patience, practice utter frankness and honesty and be available to God the Holy Spirit.<sup>2</sup>

Kenneth Leech describes the spiritual guide as a- "soul friend." This is derived from the language and lore of the ancient Celtic saints who taught that "anyone without a soul-friend is a body without a head."<sup>3</sup> Leech summarizes the qualities of the good spiritual director in six statements.

- "1. A person possessed by the Spirit.
- "2. A person characterized by holiness of life and closeness to God.
- "3. A person of experience-in prayer and life.

"4. A person of learning-particularly in the scriptures and the patristic writings.

"5. A person of discernment who can read the signs of the times and the writing on the wall of the soul.

"6. A person who gives way to the Holy Spirit."4

These roles and qualities, along with those cited by Gilbert Shaw, Henri Nouwen, Augustine Baker, and Gregory Carlson, rather accurately describe John Wesley's spiritual direction in the Letters.

In early Methodist practice we see spiritual counsel thriving in two forms: director-directee and mutual guidance. Sometimes a "babe" in Christ would be assigned to a "father." In other cases "twin souls" as Wesley called them would be joined to serve as "companions on the way to the New Jerusalem." Wesley was convinced that spiritual guidance was essential for all. He repeatedly warned his people, both fledglings and veterans, that they could not keep warm alone. "I believe there is no saint on earth whom God does not teach by man,"5 he told the much married but much reformed Sarah Ryan. To Mary Bosanquet he wrote, "You have need of a steady guide, and one that knows you well."6 His letter to Ann Bolton, July 8, 1785, shows Wesley's idea of both the necessity of a spiritual guide, and the qualities he expected in a good spiritual guide:

My Dear Nancy,-It is undoubtedly expedient for you to have a friend in whom you can fully confide that may be always near you or at a small distance, and ready to be consulted on all occasions. The time was when you took me to be your friend; and (to speak freely) I have loved you with no common affection. I "have loved you"-nay, I do still; my heart warms to you while I am writing. But I am generally at too great a distance, so that you cannot converse with me when you would. I am glad, therefore, that a good Providence has given you one whom you can more easily see and correspond with. You may certainly trust her in every instance; and she has both understanding, piety and experience. She may therefore perform those offices of friendship which I should rejoice to perform were I near you. But wherever you can, give me the pleasure of seeing you.7

The utter urgency of having spiritual guides, or companions on the way as Wesley called them, is seen in a letter to Frances Godfrey. He addresses her as "my dear Fanny" and says, "It is a blessed thing to have fellow travellers to the New Jerusalem. If you cannot find any you must make them; for none can travel that road alone."8 Even wealthy bankers like Ebenezer Blackwell needed a spiritual guide. "I am fully persuaded," Wesley wrote, "if you had always one or two faithful friends near you who would speak the very truth from their heart and watch over you in love, you would swiftly advance...."9 Hundreds of such examples are to be found in Wesley's correspondence.

Early in the Methodist revival Wesley found the role of spiritual guide forced upon him. "In every place people flock to me for direction in secular as well as spiritual affairs," Wesley wrote to a friend, "and I dare not throw ... this burden off my shoulders...."10 It was a role that Wesley came to value, a role he willingly, even eagerly claimed. "I am . . . desirous to help

you forward who are in the morning of life,"<sup>11</sup> he wrote to the young Ann Bolton. After urging Elizabeth Morgan to seek to "recover the whole image of God" Wesley added, "If I can in any degree assist you in this, it will be an unspeakable pleasure. . . ." <sup>12</sup> To Peggy Dale he said, "I do not see how you could possibly avoid . . . loss without a free intercourse with me both in writing and speaking."<sup>13</sup>

Most of the persons whom Wesley served as spiritual director by mail were devout women, frequently new converts. The direction carried on over the years by correspondence could hardly have been conducted in person. Wesley traveled almost constantly and was simply not available. Further, the intimate and personal relationship carried on by letter could hardly have been conducted in long individual sessions without being criticized as violations of Christian propriety.

## **Characteristics of John Wesley's Spiritual Guidance as Found in the Letters**

### **Affection**

The first quality one notices in Wesley's letters is his unabashed love and affection for his correspondents. His language sounds a lot like Paul's words to the Thessalonians: "With such yearning love we chose to impart to you not only the gospel of God but our very selves, so dear had you become to us" (I Thess. 2:8 NEB). To Peggy Dale Wesley says, "I thought it was hardly possible for me to love you better than I did.... But your artless, simple, undisguised affection exceedingly increased mine."<sup>14</sup> To Mrs. Bennis he writes, "I think of you every day; indeed, I do not know that I ever loved you so well as since I was at Limerick last."<sup>15</sup> To Ann Bolton: "I cannot tell you how much I love you; you are exceeding near and dear to me." <sup>16</sup> Of Elizabeth Baker he asks: "What is that sympathy that often unites our hearts to each other?"<sup>17</sup> Miss Clarkson is told: "I love you because I believe you are upright of heart and because you are a child of affliction."<sup>18</sup> To Ann Loxdale, with whom Wesley had corresponded but never met, he writes: "Your heart seems to be just as my heart. I cannot tell that I ever before felt so close an attachment to a person I had never seen. Surely it is the will of our gracious Lord that there should be a closer union between you and yours in tender affection, John Wesley."<sup>19</sup> "I have always loved you since I knew you," Wesley tells to Mrs. Knapp, "but lately more than ever, because I believe you are more devoted to God and more athirst for his whole image."<sup>20</sup> William Holland is told, "Our Lord . . . has given us to each other, that we may strengthen each other's hands in Him."<sup>21</sup> "Excuse me if I write just as I feel," Wesley said to Mary (Bosanquet) Fletcher. "I have not for a long season felt so tender an affection for you as I have done in reading your last [letter]. I love you much for the care you have taken of my dear Miss Ritchie. " <sup>22</sup>

Hundreds of such expressions of uncommon affection punctuate Wesley's letters of spiritual guidance. One must believe that no model of spiritual guidance which does not emphasize love could be accurately called Wesleyan.

### **Reciprocal Openness**

Repeatedly Wesley told his correspondents that persons who love each other should speak without reserve. To his friend, critic, and banker Ebenezer

Blackwell Wesley wrote, "You have never spoken to me with more freedom than was agreeable to me. Your freedom is the best proof of our friendship."<sup>23</sup> Mrs. Bennis was advised, "When we love one another, there is no need of either disguise or reserve."<sup>24</sup> "At any time you should speak to me without reserve just what arises in your heart," Wesley told Mrs. Woodhouse.<sup>25</sup> Kitty Warren was informed, "I do not desire there to be any ceremony between us; but as much love as you please." To John Downes Wesley said, "Your letter is a picture of your heart. It is honest and upright."<sup>26</sup> "I love you for your freedom and openness," Wesley wrote to Elizabeth Ritchie, "at all times it is of use to have a friend to whom you can pour out your heart without any disguise or reserve."<sup>27</sup>

Wesley's openness could take the form of confrontation or rebuke when the occasion demanded it. To a correspondent identified only as an Irish Lady Wesley gives the following food for thought, "Should you not earnestly strive and pray against thinking highly of your own understanding or attainments in religion?"<sup>28</sup> His friend, convert, and counselee Sarah Ryan he confronts charging,

You seem to think too highly of yourself, and (comparatively) to despise others . . . you appear to be above instruction . . . you appear to think . . . that none understands the doctrine of Sanctification like you . . . you appear to undervalue the experience of almost every one in comparison of your own.<sup>29</sup>

There was, however, a reciprocity of openness in Wesley. He allowed his people to be open in their confrontation of him. He gave guidance, but also received and sought it at the hands of his directees. When Wesley's harsh words about certain mystical writers offended Henry Brooke the latter confronted Wesley with his "excess." Wesley responded to Brooke in these words.

Dear Harry,

Your letter gave me pleasure and pain too. It gave me pleasure because it was written in a mild and loving spirit; and it gave me pain because I found it had pained you, whom I so tenderly love and esteem. But I shall do it no more: I sincerely thank you for your kind reproof; it is a precious balm-and will, I trust, in the hands of the Great Physician, be a means of healing my sickness. I am so sensible of your real friendship herein that I cannot write without tears. The words you mention were too strong and they will no more fall from my mouth.

My dear Harry, cease not to pray for your obliged and affectionate brother. John Wesley.<sup>30</sup>

To Emma Moon he confessed, "I often feel a feebleness of soul, a languor of spirit, so that I cannot as I would press forward toward the mark. . . help me forward, my friend, by your prayers."<sup>31</sup> In responding to his banker friend Ebenezer Blackwell, Wesley said

. . . you do well to warn me against "popularity, a thirst of power and applause, . . . against an affected humility, against sparing from myself to give to others from no other motive than ostentation." I am not conscious to myself that this is my case. How-

ever, the warning is always friendly . . . always seasonable, considering how deceitful my heart is and how many the enemies that surround me.<sup>32</sup>

Repeatedly, Wesley models the proper way to receive spiritual direction. The unlearned Sarah Ryan gave guidance to him. Wesley said to her, "I cannot think of you without thinking of God . . . you bring me straight into His presence."<sup>33</sup> Jane Bisson, Elizabeth Ritchie, Joseph Benson and Mrs. Crosby were also among those who served Wesley as spiritual guide. Reciprocal openness throughout the ranks was one of the secrets of the success of early Methodist spirituality.

### **Encouragement**

Wesley was quick to encourage his correspondents with exhortations that a God was ready to help them. When Peggy Dale thought she was on her death-bed Wesley wrote to her about his prayers that she would have "many years to glorify Him in the body before He removes you to the world of Spirits. The comfort is, that life or death, all is yours, seeing you are Christ's."<sup>34</sup> Miss March was urged, "Dare to believe! Look up and see thy Savior near."<sup>35</sup> Jenny Lee who wrote to Wesley about perfection was cheered on, "You have faith: hold it fast. You have love: let it not go. Above all you have Christ! Christ is yours! He is your Lord, your love, your all."<sup>36</sup> To Jane Hilton, a new Christian in great temptation, Wesley wrote, "Christ is yours; and He is wiser and stronger than all the powers of hell. Hang upon Him . . . lean on Him with the whole weight of your soul."<sup>37</sup>

### **Accountability**

Wesley strongly believed that it was the duty of Christians to hold each other spiritually accountable. One reason he broke away from the Moravians was that he met in their societies himself "full of sin" and was not once reprove. The mutual accountability that occurred in the classes and bands was a powerful factor in the success of Methodism. But we see Wesley calling his correspondents to accountability as well. We see the accountability factor at work repeatedly in Wesley's twenty-nine year correspondence with Ann Bolton. On March 30, 1771 Wesley told Damaris Perronet that he had examined Ann Bolton carefully and found in all her actions "sanctity and love." He added, "I marked her every word and almost every meaning; but could find nothing to reprove."<sup>38</sup> However, on September 16 of the same year Wesley is alarmed that Ann has not returned his letters. "Nancy, Nancy! Why do you forget your friends? Why do you tempt me to be angry? . . . Do not delay to write."<sup>39</sup> On November 7, 1771 he writes "I want a particular account of your inward and outward health."<sup>40</sup> By January 29, 1772, Wesley is writing urgently:

Nancy, Nancy! What is the matter? Not a line yet! Are you trying whether I can be angry at you? Or are you fallen into your old temptation, and so care not whether I am pleased or displeased? You give me concern. I have many fears concerning you. Tell me without delay how your soul prospers.<sup>41</sup>

On July 6, 1772 things are much better. Wesley writes, "I do not observe anything to reprove in the account you now give me."<sup>42</sup> By December 5, 1772 Wesley tells his directee, "Perhaps I shall find faults in you that others do

not; for I survey you on every side. I mark your every motion and temper, because I long for you to be without spot or blemish.”<sup>43</sup> By February 18, 1773 Wesley was able to say to Ann, “I do not find any fault in you at present; only I am afraid you are not careful enough of your health.”<sup>44</sup> On December 12, 1773 he writes saying to Ann, “I want to find you exactly right in all things. I wish you to be wise and good as an angel!”<sup>45</sup> Perhaps Wesley’s hopes were too high for Ann Bolton-or anyone else. But the principle of spiritual accountability to a soul friend is strikingly demonstrated in this case and in several others in the Letters.

Other characteristics of Wesley’s spiritual guidance could be cited, but we turn instead to a case study which demonstrates rather than describes Wesley as spiritual guide.

### **The Bolton Correspondence**

Wesley’s 93 extant letters to Ann Bolton allow us to examine his spiritual guidance more closely. Doubtless Wesley was aware of the long tradition of spiritual guidance by letter. This 29-year correspondence is typical of Wesley’s spiritual guidance by post.

Ann Bolton (whom Wesley called, “Nancy”) lived her whole life in Witney, Oxfordshire. She was converted at age 18 or 19. In her early 20’s she was on the verge of marrying a man Wesley regarded as a “non-believer.” Wesley intervened in her life and persuaded her not to become “unequally yoked.” Feeling then a sense of responsibility he took a personal interest in her life. Over a period of 29 years he wrote her some 130 letters of spiritual guidance. He taught her many things-we shall focus on what he taught her of sanctification, suffering, and service.

### **SANCTIFICATION**

Entire sanctification, or Christian perfection, was the central theme in Wesley’s preaching and teaching. We are, therefore, not surprised that his letters of spiritual guidance are also saturated with this theme. His correspondence with his young friend Ann Bolton reveals his purpose of leading her into sanctifying grace and then growth in holiness.

In his very first letter to Ann he says, “The best and most desirable thing of all is that you should live and die wholly devoted to God . . . studying one thing-to be holy both in body and spirit, an whole burnt offering of love.” (Feb. 13, 1768).<sup>46</sup> Two months later he gently tells her, “He has already given you the faith of a servant. You want only the faith of a child.” He urges her to reach up by faith to receive sanctifying grace. “Look up, my sister, my friend! Jesus is there! Doubt not His love! Forget yourself. . . . But look unto Jesus! See the Friend of Sinners! Your Friend; your ready and strong Savior.”<sup>47</sup>

But Ann wrote back saying she feared she was far away from holiness. Her soul friend replied, “How far are you from holiness? Nay, rather think how near you are to it! You are no farther from it than you are from faith, than you are from Christ. And how far is He from you? Is He not nigh? Is He not just now knocking at the door of your heart? Hark! The Master calleth you!” (May 9, 1768).

Two years later, however, we find Wesley writing, “To see even the superscription of a letter from you always gives me pleasure. I am glad you are

still waiting for the kingdom of God: although as yet you are rather in the state of a servant than of a child (Emphasis added). But it is a blessed thing to be even a servant of God!<sup>48</sup> A month later Wesley tells her not to think "too little" of the almighty works of grace in her life.<sup>49</sup> Two weeks later he writes and asks her to read *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*.<sup>50</sup> She is to be "nursed as a child," but is seriously to seek to be perfected in love.

But in the following Spring Ann is still doubtful. She wrote in her own journal on May 9, 1771:

I went to meet the Rev. Mr. Wesley at Broad Marston, this visit was made a blessing to my soul. I saw clearer into the nature of sanctification and saw it more to be my privilege. But altho the Lord had given me many promises and did so encourage my soul to go on yet I often doubted and was fearful to call myself a child of God, which kept me back from pressing earnestly after full salvation.<sup>51</sup>

Two June letters in 1771 tell her that her current afflictions are part of the gradual aspect of sanctification, that God is purging away "dross." In August, 1771 Wesley writes telling Ann: "O how I long . . . that you may be perfect in Him...."<sup>52</sup> The following November 7 Wesley writes again about perfect love.<sup>53</sup>

By February 1772 Ann Bolton had come into an experience of sanctifying grace. She writes to Wesley reporting that seven persons have "received a clear witness that the blood of Jesus hath cleansed them from all sin." Apparently Ann was among the seven for in Wesley's reply he says, "I rejoice over others, but over you above all."<sup>54</sup>

On March 13, 1772 Wesley warns Ann about going too far in self-denial. Self-surrender must not be made into "self-emptiness" or "self-annihilation" for this is "self-contradiction."<sup>55</sup>

Over the next several months Wesley writes to Ann about several aspects of the sanctified life. He warns Ann about going too far in self-denial. He refers her to two published sermons: "Sin in Believers" and "The Repentance of Believers." In October he counsels her about perfect love as seen in the Sermon on the Mount and in I Corinthians 13. In November he writes more about love. On December 5, 1772, Wesley writes that he submits her to unusual examination because he longs for her to be "without spot or blemish."<sup>56</sup> No spot or blemish is named but Wesley prays that God will pour more love into her heart than He has ever done before.

On February 18, 1773, Wesley writes that he finds no fault in her. <sup>57</sup> On August 8, 1773, he encourages her to exhort others to go on to "salvation into the whole image of God" and not to decline in her own zeal for it.<sup>58</sup> Wesley writes on the same theme on February 8, 1775.<sup>59</sup>

Showing that he truly believed that there is no perfection that does not "admit of continual increase" Wesley urges Ann onward in perfect love. On August 15, 1775, he writes, "I want you to [be] all a flame of holy love! I want you now to do His will as angels do in heaven! To be all life, all fire all light in the Lord!"<sup>60</sup> On April 24, 1777, Wesley's letter includes a poem about "the stamp of perfect love."<sup>61</sup> On September 27 of that year, he celebrates her "ten thousand blessings," the greatest of which is "Christ in a pure and spotless heart! Beware of ever admitting any doubt or [evil]"

reasoning concerning this! Whereunto you have attained hold fast! And use all the grace you have received . . . exhort everyone especially those who groan after full salvation.”<sup>62</sup> A June 22, 1780, letter celebrates Ann’s further progress. “Your letters are always welcome to me. But none more welcome than your last. It gives me very much pleasure to hear . . . that God . . . has established your soul in pure love and given you the abiding witness of it.” In the same letter he refers Ann to two other women (Hannah Bell and Patty Chapman), who “have the same deep experience.” Ann was to converse with them that “each might be profited by the other.”<sup>63</sup>

In the years that follow, Ann Bolton’s chronic ill health becomes worse. Wesley had always told her that these afflictions were “God’s school,” God’s refining furnace, and God’s will for her. Ann, logically, as the afflictions continue, wonders if these sufferings indicate that she is not yet sanctified. In several letters Wesley says that they do not indicate sin on her part but that they will add greatly to her reward in heaven.

In 1785 Ann rededicated herself to the holy life. She wrote in her journal

Wednesday 2 . . . Mr. Wesley preached from “Let us go on to perfection” a most blessed lively discourse attended with power to many hearts. He afterwards administered the sacrament. . . . I was enabled to renew the offering I had made of myself, all the powers of body and soul unto God. I think more consciously and unreservedly than ever before.<sup>64</sup>

In the case of Ann Bolton we see again Wesley’s practice of spiritual guidance succeeding. He took a small town girl who was on the verge of becoming “unequally yoked” and led her from the state of a “babe in Christ” to “Christian perfection.”

## **SUFFERING**

Does one ever need a spiritual companion, a soul friend, any more than during times of suffering? Ann Bolton suffered severely from several ailments during the time of her correspondence with John Wesley. Most persistent was sinus or migraine headaches. She also suffered through her brother’s near bankruptcy. He was a devout Christian, but a terrible farmer. She also suffered grief-she outlived her parents, her sister and her three brothers-as one by one she buried each of her loved ones.

John Wesley, perhaps the busiest man in England, did not fail Ann during these times of trouble, grief, and sickness. He was God’s usher escorting her into His presence during these trying times. Ann’s soul friend taught her several things about suffering.

1. John Wesley taught Ann that God frequently calls His own to follow in the steps of Jesus, His Son, who walked the path of suffering before us. To Ann he wrote, “It has seemed good to our Lord . . . to lead you in a rough and thorny way.<sup>65</sup> “It is given to you . . . to suffer with Him, to drink a little of the cup which He drank of.”<sup>66</sup> Regarding Ann’s “afflictive circumstances.” which had hounded her since childhood, Wesley wrote, “He that made the Captain of your salvation perfect through sufferings has called you to walk in the same path....”<sup>67</sup> “You are not called,” Wesley wrote her, “to desire suffering. Innocent nature is averse to pain; only as soon as His will appears yours is to sink down before it.”<sup>68</sup>

Such submission is sometimes difficult and several times Wesley reminded his friend that, "Happy are they that do His will, and happier still they that suffer it."<sup>69</sup> Our call, Wesley taught Ann Bolton, is both to do and to suffer God's will.

2. Ann also learned from her spiritual guide that God's call to suffer did not mean that God was against her. God is good and "good is the will of the Lord," he told her on Sept. 9, 1781.<sup>70</sup> "And, whatever clouds may interpose between, His banner over you is love."<sup>71</sup> Though "it seems good to our Lord to try you as by fires . . . Look up to Him that loves you. Tell Him as a little child all your wants. Look up . . . He hears the cry of your heart."<sup>72</sup> "What if . . . Wesley asks, "Satan should sift you as wheat? Still you have a Friend before the throne above...."<sup>73</sup> During one of Ann's illnesses Wesley prescribed chewing bark, eating all the red currants she could and remembering the love of God. "That is your point. Jesus loves you! He is yours. Be not so unkind as to distrust Him! Cast your soul at His Feet."<sup>74</sup>

Ann's spiritual guide himself seemed drawn closer to her because of her afflictions: "One effect of your trials is to unite me more closely to you as 'pity melts the mind to love.'"<sup>75</sup> Again he told her "I feel much sympathy with you in your troubles which endear you to me exceedingly."<sup>76</sup> When Wesley was 85 years old he wrote to Ann: "I love you the more because you are a daughter of affliction. I suppose you are still in God's school. But you still remember He loveth whom He chasteneth."<sup>77</sup>

3. Wesley also taught Ann the art of always looking for the redemptive aspect in every painful event, every tragedy, every trial. There was danger, Wesley advised, in failing "to see the hand of God" (March 28, 1785) in such events.<sup>78</sup> God has a way, Wesley coached, of "extracting good out of the infirmities, follies, [even] ... sins of men...." The "wise end" is that through such sufferings we "may be the more largely partakers of His holiness."<sup>79</sup>

God's redemptive work in our suffering will eventually come to light, Wesley counseled. "O how you will praise Him by-and-by for His wise and gracious visitation." Wesley told Ann during that difficult summer of 1771, "He is purging away all your dross, that you may be a vessel meet for the Master's use."<sup>80</sup> Wesley frequently used this metaphor with his suffering friend: "He has proved you in the furnace of affliction; and when you have been tried you shall come forth as gold."<sup>81</sup> "You shall lose nothing but your dross."<sup>82</sup> "You shall be purified, not consumed."<sup>83</sup> "God is on your side . . . you are still kept above the billows.... But you are in God's school and He will teach you one lesson after another till you have learned all His holy and acceptable will."<sup>84</sup> Therefore, "sufferings are the gift of God to you." <sup>85</sup>

Ann learned well for she wrote to Wesley about experiencing the peace of God even during great grief. Wesley wrote back, "That you speak of feeling the peace of God in the midst of the most exquisite sufferings does not surprise me at all"<sup>86</sup> (Jan. 14, 1780). About a year and a half before Wesley died he wrote to Ann who had just buried her only sister. "It hath pleased God to lead you in the way of suffering from your youth up until now. For the present this is not joyous, but grievous; nevertheless it has yielded peaceable fruit. Your soul is still as a watered garden, as a field which the Lord hath blessed."<sup>87</sup>

Ann Bolton also learned from her spiritual guide that suffering does not last forever. A few weeks before he died Wesley wrote to her: "Many of your

sufferings, perhaps the greatest part, are now past. But your joy is to come! Look up my dear friend, look up! and see your crown before you! . . . adieu.”<sup>88</sup>

How was Ann to know when a short time later she attended the funeral of John Wesley that the happiest years of her life were yet to come?

## **SERVICE**

John Wesley led Ann Bolton, as we have seen, step by step into sanctifying grace and through the hazards of sorrow and suffering. He led her also into outstanding Christian service.

Ann loved the quiet countryside around Witney where she spent most of her life. She was reticent, self-conscious and slow to speak. But Wesley recognized a nascent leadership ability. He urged her to be zealous and active in classes, bands, and prayer meetings. “Use your every grace, stir up the gift of God that is in you.... Speak for God wherever you are.”<sup>89</sup>

Ann became, as Wesley called her, the “nursing mother” of all the bands, classes, and prayer meetings in her region. Though she would have preferred to simply serve in her village of Witney, Wesley had other ideas. “I am not content that you should be pinned down to any one place. That is not your calling. Methinks I want you to be (like me) here and there and everywhere. Oh what a deal of work has our Lord to do on the earth! And we may be workers together with Him!”<sup>90</sup>

Thus as a sort of special assistant Ann went to work. Wesley kept her challenged by such exhortations as this:

You give me a pleasing account of the work of God which seems to be dawning about Tavistock. It is probable you was (sic) sent thither for this. Redeem the time; buy up every opportunity; and never be discouraged, although many fair blossoms shall fall off and never ripen into fruit.<sup>91</sup>

But Ann saw many flowers ripen to full fruitfulness. For example she wrote to Mrs. Trembry Feb. 10, 1772, about “my select band,” “my dear companions and fellow travellers to Sion.” She wrote:

We are now 11, about a month ago we were 5.... Glory be to God we have had such a blessed opportunity I believe I may say as we never before experienced instead of 11 [tonight] we had 15. Four who had not a full assurance of God’s sanctifying power on their hearts, but one of these cried out “praise God on my behalf Brs. (brothers) and sisters he has filled my heart with his love.” My dear-who was another of the four held the blessing with a trembling hand, the other two Br. T and sister T. went home panting and thirsting for compleat (sic) salvation. <sup>92</sup>

Besides shepherding classes and bands, Ann was sent by her spiritual guide to counsel particular persons. When Philothea Briggs lost her testimony to sanctifying grace, which she had struggled so hard to find, it was Ann Bolton who was sent to restore her.<sup>93</sup> When lady evangelist Sarah Mallet was in need of both “comfort and quickening,” Wesley sent Ann Bolton. When Ally Eden’s life with a wicked husband became bitter and miserable, Wesley sent Ann Bolton to help. Ally Eden had gone against the advice of all her Christian friends in marrying an unbeliever. When her life fell apart,

Wesley wrote to Ann Bolton, "Do not forget poor Ally Eden. She has need of comfort; so we will not reprove her."<sup>94</sup>

Ann served so well that Wesley called her "a mother in Israel," a "repairer of waste places," "a guide to the blind," "a healer of the sick," "a lifter up of the hands which hang down."<sup>94</sup>

It is no wonder that Wesley wrote to Ann's pastor, Francis Wolfe:

She has all Hannah [Ball's] grace with more sense. See that she is fully employed. You have not such another flower in all your gardens. Even Patty Chapman does not equal her.<sup>95</sup>

Nor is it any wonder that Wesley declared that when he contemplated Ann's sanctified example, patient suffering and energetic service he was "often ready to cry out, 'Thou perfect pattern of true womanhood.'"<sup>96</sup>

Less than three weeks before he died, on March 2, 1791, Wesley wrote his final letter to Ann Bolton, who was then 47. He told her, "I feel no pain, but only weakness, which . . . must increase till the pins of this tabernacle are unloosed, and the dust returns to dust." He went on to tell her that he was glad to hear that her own health was improving. He encouraged her not to think of herself, "but merely on the mercies of God." Curiously enough he added a postscript: "P.S. Give up your Friends to God, and He will given (sic) them you again."<sup>97</sup>

When Ann learned that her friend had died, she journeyed to London immediately. She wrote in a letter to her friend an account of that sad journey. She wrote, in part,

Tuesday night 10 o'clock Miss Ritchie and myself spent about 1/2 an hour with the dear remains in the room by ourselves and with my whole heart, I blessed my God for the many gracious helps I had enjoyed thro him (kneeling down by his coffin) and offered up our petitions for future mercies. It was a season not to be forgotten, and so affects my heart and eyes I can hardly see my paper now (March 12, 1791)<sup>98</sup>

In her journal Ann wrote an account of Wesley's funeral. In part she wrote:

My soul was sweetly solemnized and very tenderly affected with my loss. The signs of mourning, the pulpit, galleries and stairs hung with black and such a vast concourse of people all cloathed (sic) in appendages of mourning and woe had a peculiar effect on my heart and I mourned. I mourned my own loss among the thousands of Israel.<sup>99</sup>

Who would not so mourn the loss of such a "soul friend," such a companion on the way to Jerusalem?

Ann Bolton lived on to serve until June of 1822. She was buried a few days before what would have been her 79th birthday. Wesley had been dead for some 31 years. The Arminian Magazine carried a notice under the heading RECENT DEATHS:

Lately, at Witney, at a very advanced age, Mrs. Conybeare (formerly Miss Bolton) an old friend and correspondent of the Rev. John Wesley.<sup>100</sup>

Surely Ann would have been happy to be so remembered, but if she could have written the notice herself she might have added something of the “many gracious helps” she received through John Wesley, spiritual guide.

## NOTES

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11Letters, 6:9, Jan. 15, 1773.

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- 30Letters, 7:174, Apr. 21, 1783.
- 31Letters, 4:195, Nov. 5, 1762.
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- 42Ibid., p. 325.
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- 44Letters, 6:18.
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- 57Letters, 6:17-18.
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- 60Ibid., p. 174.
- 61Ibid., pp. 261-2
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- 63Letters, 7:24-25.
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- 65Letters, 8:117-118, Feb. 20, 1789.
- 66Letters, 5:256, June 8, 1771.
- 67Letters, 7:45-46, Jan. 2, 1781.
- 68Letters, 5:240, May 2, 1771.
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1789.
- 70Letters, 7:83.
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- 72Letters, 5:258, June 15, 1771.
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- 75Letters, 7:142, Sept. 15, 1782.
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- 77Letters, 8:84, Aug. 15, 1788.
- 78Letters, 7:263. March 28, 1788.
- 79Letters, 6:345, May 18,1779 (See also letters of Dec. 20, 1189 and May 2,  
1773).
- 80Letters, 5:258, June 15, 1771.
- 81Letters, 7:142, Sept. 15, 1782.
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- 83Letters, 5:256, June 8, 1771.
- 84Letters, 7:215, April 1, 1784.
- 85Letters, 6:382, Feb. 26, 1780.

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- 87Letters, 8:157-158, Aug. 1, 1789.
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- 89Letters, 5:286-7, Nov. 7, 1771. (See also letter of April 15, 1771).
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- 91Ibid.
- 92Banks, p. 24
- 93Letters, 7:17-18, May 8, 1780.
- 94Letters, 8:246, Nov. 4, 1790.
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- 96Letters, 6:144, March 15, 1775.
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# **ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES AND REAL RELIGION: THEOLOGICAL METHOD IN WESLEY'S SERMONS ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS**

by  
John R. Tyson

## **I. Wesley's Sermons as Theological Resources**

The fact that the heirs of John Wesley find themselves doing theology from his sermons (and to a lesser degree his Notes) is indicative of the nature of Wesleyan theology. John Wesley described himself as a practitioner of "practical divinity" and most of his sermons were designed for a popular audience.(1) It is on this basis that Outler has continued to describe Wesley as a "folk-theologian" (or "people's theologian"), who was "technically competent as a theologian, with a remarkable power of creative sophistication, a revivalist who took special pains to conceal his erudition in the interest of the edification of his particular audiences" (Sermons, I, 67).(2)

Wesley's published sermons show an increasing awareness of the changing status of his audience as they move from the First (Nos. 1-53) into the Second Series (Nos. 54-108). Sermons in the second collection are less likely to be written drafts of earlier evangelism. They have become theological treatises complete with all the accoutrements of published compositions. More importantly, the later sermons were written with a theological task in mind. They were designed to round out the so-called "standard" contents of the earlier collection. Wesley's "Preface" to Sermons on Several Occasions (hereinafter SOSO), Second Series, makes it clear that he had a conscious ordering principle in mind, not when he wrote, but when he compiled these sermons(3) This "Preface" (printed in 1788) has several striking parallels to that more famous one supplied for the 1780, A Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People Called Methodists. In both cases the arrangement of books possesses theological significance, and the pattern as well as the contents of both books seeks to unify "important Christian doctrines" and "Christian Practice."

The First and Second Series of Wesley's sermons are structured around a soteriological center which establishes the foundation for Wesleyan theol-

ogy, and then sermons on the interior life, ethics, and specific doctrines are tied into that primary axis. The First Series, for example, establishes the soteriological focus of the revival through sermons such as "Salvation by Faith" (No.1), "Awake, Thou that Sleepest" (No.3), "Scriptural Christianity" (No. 4), and "Justification by Faith" (No. 5). In each case salvation is described in its broadest context. It is a renovation by the Holy Spirit which enables the Christian "to crucify the flesh with its affections . . . that inward change to fulfill all outward righteousness, ('to walk as Christ walked, in the work of faith, the patience of hope, and the labor of love')" (Sermons, 1, 161). On the basis of this foundation Wesley examined the connection between conversion, Christian dispositions ("religious affections"), and ethics in sermons such as "The Righteousness of Faith" (No. 6), and a series of six sermons (Nos. 8-13) which describes the "Witness of the Spirit" and Christian assurance. Representative of the sermons of this second phase was "The Circumcision of the Heart" (No.7), which characterized "the distinguishing mark of a true follower of Christ" as ". . . right state of soul-a mind and spirit renewed after the Image of Him that created it...." (Ibid., 400). Wesley's concept of sanctification or Christian Perfection (presented specifically in Nos. 14, 18, 19 and 40) is the lock stitch of the second phase of development, joining conversion to Christian dispositions and Christian life. Wesley's thirteen sermons "Upon Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount" (Nos.21-33) are prime examples of the soteriological bridge between inner dispositions and outward life; similar development is found in three sermons on the Law and Christian living (Nos. 34-36). After this foray into "practical divinity" Wesley returns to the soteriological axis in sermons such as "The Scripture way of Salvation" (No. 43), "Original Sin" (No. 44), and "The New Birth" (No.45), only to address the practical dimension again through "The Wilderness State" (No. 46), "The Cure of Evil Speaking" (No. 49), and "The Use of Money" (No. 50).

The Second Series of SOSO presupposes the soteriological foundation laid in the earlier material and turns to treat a series of specific doctrines which, though introduced in the First Series, need further elucidation. Thus sermons such as "On Eternity" (No. 54), "On the Trinity" (No. 55), "On the Fall of Man" (No.57) and "On Predestination" (No.58) expound basic Wesleyan theology with the same attention to inner and outer life registered in the earlier material. An intervening series of sermons (Nos. 59-64) offers a more sweeping vision, it marks out Wesley's panoramic view of God's encompassing love as it recreates a fallen world. Here the reader meets a theology of history that is reminiscent of the recapitulating of the ancient eastern Fathers (e.g. Irenaeus). Wesley then returns to an analysis of individual doctrines, in sermons such as "Good" and "Evil Angels" (Nos.71,72), "On Hell" (73), "On the Church" (No. 74), and "On Schism" (75). His Second Series closes with a collection of sermons on practical topics such as "The Danger of Riches" (No.87), "On Charity" (No. 91), "On Zeal" (No. 92), "On Redeeming the Time" (No. 93), "Family Religion" (No. 94), "On the Education of Children" (No. 95), "The Duty of Constant Communion" (No. 101), and "On Attending the Church Service" (No. 104). Thus, the order Wesley used in compiling his two collections of SOSO exemplifies the same interest in uniting inner and out religion that one meets in his separate sermons. The shape of the SOSO communicates "practical divinity" by demonstrating the inter-

connection between full salvation, Christian dispositions, and Christian living.

While many things should be said about the theological context of these sermons, as we begin to look at them as resources for examining the shape of his thought, John Wesley's self-confessed traditionalism must be kept in the forefront. Not only did he persistently align himself with classical Protestant doctrines, as these are expressed in the Anglican Articles, but for all his pragmatism and ecclesiastical innovations Wesley could not conceive of himself as an innovator. When dealing with those he termed "rank antinomians," Wesley argued with characteristic fervor: ". . . whatever doctrine is new must be wrong; for the old religion is the only true one; and no doctrine can be right unless it is the very same 'which was from the beginning' " (Sermons, I, 324). Thus he defended himself, with equal force, against charges that he was a "setter forth of new doctrines." Wesley believed he merely proclaimed the "essential duties of Christianity" (Ibid. I, 401). This mood is reflected in Wesley's repeated and rather self-congratulatory presentation of the Methodists as a sort of reincarnation of "Primitive Christianity." (4)

His sermon "On Laying the Foundation of the New Chapel," continues to protest against charges of innovation: "But you will ask, What is Methodism . . . Is it not a new Religion? . . . But nothing can be more remote from the truth... Methodism, so called, is the old religion of the Bible, the religion of the primitive church, the religion of the Church of England." (Sermons, III, 585). The same sermon also lists a host of Church Fathers who, in Wesley's mind, represented the primitive Church; that hall of fame makes it clear that his concept of "primitive Christianity" extended beyond the popular use of the term, which looked to the NT alone. (5)

While primitive Christianity and Anglican orthodoxy set the outer parameters of Wesley's thought, the theology he constructed within those boundaries wove doctrinal clarity and vital piety into a single fabric. Wesley's penchant for "practical divinity" committed him as assuredly to orthopraxis as to orthodoxy. It is evidenced in his efforts at infusing Anglican theology with Puritan piety through his Christian Library. His SOSO also evidences his dependence upon the Puritans-especially with regard to practical matters. (6) William Law and other "mystical divines," including Roman Catholics and continental Pietists, are also mentioned, though less frequently than Puritans. (7)

Finally, Wesley's SOSO was shaped by the context and resources of the Enlightenment to a greater degree than is typically thought. (8) These sermons are seasoned with references to eighteenth century philosophy (especially regarding the question of human moral agency), as well as world history and science-such as they were known at the time. The task of these sermons, as Thomas Langford has noted, includes "a combination of confessional and apologetic theology." (9) While certain elements in them, such as Wesley's fatherly advice on personal piety, seem to be most directly addressed to Methodists, the apologetic and confessional dimension are inextricably wound together.

## **II. The Catholic Spirit**

Wesley's doctrinal conservatism was mediated through an amiable theological mood, which he termed "the Catholic Spirit." It found its classical

expression in his sermon bearing that phrase as its title (SOSO No. 39). Following "A Caution Against Bigotry," (No. 38), which seems to be a practical treatise on how Methodists should conduct themselves in the face of mounting hostility, "The Catholic Spirit" fixes upon the issue of theological diversity, a theme which had already been introduced in No. 38, II:3. The portion of the sermon's text (2 King 20:15) which captured Wesley's attention is the phrase: "Is thine heart right, as my heart is with thy heart? . . . give me thine hand." Expounding the passage, Wesley notes that no inquiry was made regarding either Jehonadab's "opinions" (I.1), or his "mode of Worship" (I.7). The reason for this is clear: "although a difference in opinions or modes of worship may prevent an entire external union, yet need it prevent union in affection? Though we can't think alike, may we not love alike? May we not be of one heart, though we are not of one opinion? With-out all doubt we may . . ." (Sermons, 11:82). But "catholic spirit" is not to be confused with "speculative latitudinarianism," "practical latitudinarianism," or "indifference to congregations" (92-94). In fact, in the midst of all of this warm catholicity, Wesley responds to the question: "Is thine heart right, as my heart is with thy heart?" by giving one of his most complete summaries of what he considers to be the essential doctrines of Christianity(87-89).

The sermon reflects Wesley's weariness with pointless controversy. This was a rather common theme in SOSO: "How dreadful and how innumerable are the contests that have arisen about religion!" (Sermons, I, 449). In fact, a "peacemaker" in Wesley's reading of the Beatitudes is a person who "being filled with the love of God and of all mankind cannot confine the expressions of it to his own family, friends, . . . or those of his own opinions . . .(Ibid. I, 518). In a sense, this "catholic spirit" is the Golden Rule applied to liberty of thought: "Every wise man . . . will allow others the same liberty of thinking which he desires they should allow him; and will no more insist on their embracing his opinions, than he would have them to insist on his embracing theirs" (Ibid., II, 84-85).

This theological "mood" urged one to embrace the theological and practical verities of one's own tradition, and yet also to embrace people of vital piety who differed in matters that did not strike at the heart of Christianity. The person of a "catholic spirit" ". . . is steadily fixed in his religious principles, in what he believes to be the truth as it is in Jesus; while he firmly adheres to that worship of God which he judges to be most acceptable in his sight; ... his heart is enlarged toward all mankind.... This is catholic or universal love.... For love alone gives the title to this character-catholic love is a catholic spirit" (Ibid., 94). The person of "a catholic spirit," while not being indifferent to "opinions," does not base Christian love and concern upon agreement in "opinion" (Ibid., 85).

Wesley's theological posture reflects a weariness with the sort of religious disputes that ravaged both continental and English Protestant orthodoxy. Where an earlier generation of English evangelicals tried to draw up lists of "fundamental doctrines" (and have them passed by Parliament), Wesley lamented an obsession with "opinions" and looked to matters of practical divinity to identify genuine Christianity. This was certainly the approach he advocated in his apologetic tract, "A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion" (Pt. III):

. . . I am sick of opinions. I am weary to bear them. My soul loathes this frothy food. Give me solid and substantial religion. Give me an humble, gentle lover of God and Man; a man full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy; a man laying himself out in the work of faith, the patience of hope, the labor of love. Let my soul be with these Christians, . . (19)

His handling of the predestination controversy, presents an interesting study of Wesley's difficulty in maintaining the balance between theological essentials, 'a catholic spirit,' and his growing distaste for controversy over "opinions." His sermon, "Free Grace," preached and published in April, 1739, signaled an open break with the Calvinistic wing of Methodism, and caused a division 90 deep that later attempts to reconcile John Wesley with George Whitefield and the Countess of Huntingdon amounted to papering over a chasm. Paragraphs 1-9 of the sermon oppose eternal predestination, particular election and irresistible grace on doctrinal grounds. The position Wesley polemicized was a caricature of what Whitefield and others were preaching, and Wesley made no attempt to be conciliatory in his approach. A longer section of the sermon drew a connection between Calvinist soteriology and serious practical abuses.(11)The sermon's twice-recorded insistence that predestination was blasphemous was difficult for the Calvinists to overlook (Sermons, III, 554-555). By 1746, however, Wesley's mood may have softened, since "Free Grace" did not appear in his SOSO (First Series), issued that year. But "Free Grace" breathed none of the "catholic spirit" of the 1750 sermon by that title.(12)

By the mid-forties John Wesley's attitude toward the predestinarians had moderated somewhat. The "Minutes of a Conversation" from the 1745 Methodist Conference at Bristol could not allow that it was appropriate to come "within a hair's breadth" or "to the very edge of Calvinism."(13) That he was coming to see the Calvinist interpretation of God's eternal decrees not as heresy but as an "opinion" is indicated by Wesley's journal entry for April 7, 1746: "I spent an agreeable hour with an old fellow laborer Mr. Joseph Humphreys. I found him open and friendly, but rigorously tenacious of the unconditional Decrees. O that opinion should separate chief friends! This is bigotry all over."(14) In another letter, in 1751, Wesley went as far as to admit that he was learning "a catholic spirit" over the long haul ". . . It is true that for thirty years last past I have "gradually put on more and more catholic spirit,' finding more and more tenderness for those who differed from me either in opinions or modes of worship . . ." (15) And his letter to John Newton, May 14, 1765, describes "particular election and final per severance" as being compatible with his definition of an "opinion."(16)

Wesley's sermon "On the Death of George Whitefield" (1770) was, as Outler has said so well, "a labor of love, an exercise in honest candor, and an unaccustomed venture in diplomacy" (Sermons, II, 329). The third section of that sermon is of most interest for our discussion since in it Wesley establishes a distinction between "grand scriptural doctrines" which Whitefield preached "everywhere" and those "doctrines of a less essential nature . . . which even the sincere children of God . . . are and have been divided for many ages. In these [latter] we may think and let think, we may

'agree to disagree.' But let us hold fast to the essentials of the faith . . ." (Ibid., 341).

When Wesley identified Whitefield's "fundamental doctrines" as those which could be "summed up, as it were, in two words—"the New Birth, and justification by faith" (Ibid., 343)-he ran afoul of the preachers in connection with Calvinistic Methodism. William Romaine aired his displeasure with Wesley's sermon in the Gospel Magazine, and Wesley responded in a letter to the editor of Lloyd 's Evening Post (Feb. 26,1771). Romaine charged that Wesley had misrepresented the "fundamental doctrines" which Whitefield preached. Romaine's recollection of Whitefield's proclamation was that it was based in "the everlasting covenant between the Father and Son and the Absolute Predestination flowing therefrom."(17)

John Wesley's published reply to Romaine was controlled and factual, but his editorial work in SOSO suggests that he had given up on attempts at reconciling with the Calvinists. It is in this respect that "The Lord our Righteousness" is a landmark sermon. Written in 1765, and then inserted in the soteriological section of SOSO (First Series) in 1771, it is out of chronological but not theological sequence. The sermon begins with a rather typical lament: "How dreadful and how innumerable are the contests that save arisen about religion!" (Sermons, I, 449). Wesley applies the title phrase, "The Lord Our Righteousness," to describe real religion as righteousness in the inward person, based in the doctrine of justification by faith alone, which he views (citing Luther) as the doctrine upon which the Church stands or falls (*articulus stantis vel cadentis ecclesiae*). This is a "fundamental doctrine" around which revolve well-established differences of "opinion" (450). Thus, in the context of the Calvinist controversy, "The Lord Our Righteousness" had the two-fold task of demonstrating Wesleyan solidarity with the rest of catholic Christianity on the doctrine of "imputed righteousness" through justification by faith (contrary to the Calvinists' critiques), and then delivering a Wesleyan nuance, viz. "I believe God implants righteousness in every one to whom he has imputed it." (458-459).

By 1788, however, Wesley seems to have come to terms with this issue and could insert "On Predestination," which was written in 1773, into the Second Series of SOSO as No. 58. In that sermon he reached the tone he professedly sought and presented his case without the polemical rancour of the sermon, "Free Grace."

### **III. Religious Opinions**

Wesley did not leave a prescriptive list of which matters should be considered "opinions," but his willingness to describe these opinions" as "notions" suggests a clear discounting of their relative value.(18) His sermon, "The Catholic Spirit," offered the most extended indication of what he considered to be "opinions" (Sermons, II, 82-86). A distillation from that discussion includes matters such as forms and practices of worship, congregational polity, forrns of prayer, posture and liturgy for the Lord's Supper, the manner of administration of Baptism, and whether those two sacraments need to be administered at all. Almost everything Wesley suggested as an example of an "opinion" was not a doctrine of the "primitive church," in fact, his list of examples is long on Christian practices and short on Christian doctrines.

One of Wesley's letters to John Newton, May 14, 1765, accepted the definition of an "opinion" which Newton had offered (if only Newton's letter were extant!): "You have admirably well expressed what I mean by an opinion contradistinguished from an essential doctrine. What is 'compatible with a love to Christ and a work of grace' I term an opinion. And certainly the holding Particular Election and Final Perseverance is compatible with these."(19) Thus, Wesley evaluated "opinions" from the standpoint of their being acceptable as notions which maintain the vitality of an evangelical soteriology (e.g. justification by faith and sanctification). With the insight to be expected from a "folk" or "practical" theologian, Wesley connected the suitability of an "opinion" with its ability to accord with the transforming realities of the Christian faith; that is to say, he assesses the suitability of "opinions" with respect to their theological function. Yet, while "a love to Christ and a work of grace" are not optional features of Christian faith-they stand well within the outer boundary-these transforming realities can take various forms of expression and those various "forms" can also be considered "opinion." A useful example of this approach emerged in Wesley's sermon "On the Trinity" where he introduced a distinction between the "act" and the "manner" of that doctrine (Sermons, II, 383):

. . . as strange as it may seem, in requiring you to believe, "there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one;" you are not required to believe any mystery.... The Bible barely requires you to believe such facts, not the manner of them. Now the mystery does not lie in the fact, but altogether in the manner.

A specific conceptualization of the Trinity was not something Wesley considered an "essential"; the "manner" of it is an "opinion." But the "fact" (that God is Three in One) is not a matter of opinion for Christians. Thus, Ray Dunning is certainly correct to urge that for Wesley "the substance or fact" of this doctrine is "soteriological rather than ontological."(20) In a similar fashion, Wesley's sermon entitled "The Lord Our Righteousness," shuns "a particular mode of expression" in order to remove contention and preserve unity in Christian faith and service (Sermons I, 464-65).

The recognition of the existence of religious "opinions" should engender "a catholic spirit" regarding opinions, a willingness to "think and let think." On a practical level this distinction is a platform for religious liberty within the larger boundaries of primitive Christianity. What Wesley wrote concerning "modes of worship" seems thoroughly reflective of the dispositions that ought to accompany this liberty:

And how shall we choose among so much variety? No man can choose for or prescribe to another. But everyone must follow the dictates of his own conscience in simplicity and godly sincerity. He must be fully persuaded in his own mind, and then act according to the best light he has. Nor has any creature power to constrain another to walk by his own rule. God has given no right to any of the children of men thus to lord it over the conscience of his brethren. But every man must judge for himself, as every man must give an account of himself to God" (Sermons, II, 85).

The acknowledgment of the difference between "opinions" and "essentials" enables one to have "a catholic spirit" with respect to peripheral matters of the Christian faith and to have charitable attitude about the forms or expressions which that vital faith might take, but "opinions" do pose a persistent danger to the Christian faith. Since "opinions" are not essentials of genuine "religion," faith can too easily lose its vitality and degenerate into a bare assent to religious truth:

Whatsoever the generality of people think, it is certain that opinion is not religion: no not right opinion; assent to one or to ten thousand truths. There is a wide difference between them: even right opinion is as distant from religion as the east is from the west. Persons may be quite right in their opinions, and yet have no religion at all. And on the other hand, persons may be truly religious who hold many wrong opinions. (Sermons, II, 374).

The later Wesley often opposed contentiousness about "opinions" since ". . . fervor for opinion is not Christian zeal! And how innumerable are the mischiefs which even this species of false zeal has occasioned in the Christian world!" (Ibid., III, 317, cf. I, 451). He willingly distanced "opinions" from the core of vital religion. In "a truly religious man," he wrote, "right opinions are a very slender part of religion, [and] . . . in an irreligious, profane man, they are not any part of religion at all; such a man not being one jot more religious because he is orthodox."(21) According to Wesley's definition, a true Christian is not to be distinguished by his or her opinions of any sort, and the expectation of "entering into the Kingdom of heaven upon [the basis of] my orthodoxy or right opinions . . . is building a house on sand; or rather on the froth of the sea!" (Sermons, I, 694)(22)

#### **IV. Essentials and Real Religion**

Just as John Wesley distinguished between "opinions" and Christian. essentials, so also he distinguished between "essentials" and "real religion." While "essentials" were those theological matters which constituted primitive Christianity, "real religion" recognized that even orthodox doctrine could become an idolatrous hindrance to vital faith. Acknowledging that every truth which is revealed in the oracles of God is . . . of great importance,' Wesley urged that "it may be allowed that some of these . . . are of greater importance than others." His epistemological rod for measuring whether a doctrine is more or less important was located in the given doctrine's connection to the Scripture's soteriological core: was it "more immediately conducive to the ground and end of all [others], the eternal salvation of men" (Sermons, III, 31)? A second consideration was the frequency with which a given doctrine appeared within the Biblical record, hence "we may judge of their importance from this circumstance, that they are not mentioned only once in the sacred writings, but are repeated over and over" (Ibid.).

In his early, apologetic writings, Wesley was willing to call the components of the soteriological axis "fundamentals." In *An Earnest Appeal* (1743), for example, he identified "salvation by faith" as "the fundamental doctrine of the Church."(23) Affirmation of the "common fundamental principles of Christianity" was to be the only distinguishing mark of a Methodist.(24) By 1775, with the appearance of his sermon "On the Trinity," Wesley relin-

quished the term "fundamentals" as a way of describing those doctrines, practices and attitudes which he believed the Bible demanded of every Christian, but he continued to emphasize their "close connection to vital religion" as a way of determining which truths "are more important than others."(25)

Wesley expressed the content of these "essential" doctrines in a variety of ways- Often he treated them summarily by their doctrinal connections: 'there are two grand heads of doctrine which contain any truths of the most important nature, . . . I mean which relate to the eternal Son of God, and the spirit of God-to the Son of God giving himself to be a 'propitiation for the sins of the world,' and to the Spirit of God, renewing men in that image of God wherein they were created . . ." (Ibid., III, 200). In his "preface" to the 1765 Notes on the Old Testament Wesley offered a short list of "those grand fundamental doctrines, which included: original sin, justification by faith, the new birth, inward and outward holiness."(26)

With a rhetorical flourish, familiar to teachers and preachers alike, Wesley occasionally identified thus or that doctrine as the "whole of real religion" or the "foundation of Christianity." Even a casual catalogue of these descriptions takes on surprising dimensions.(27) Colin William's list of Wesley's "essential doctrines" appropriately reflects the fact that John emphasized all of the basic beliefs of classical Christianity:

A review of Wesley's writings indicates that the essential doctrines on which he insisted included Original Sin [Works IX, 429], the Deity of Christ [VIII,340], the atonement ,JW. Letters, VI, 297-8], justification by faith alone [Sermons, II, 226-227], the work of the Holy Spirit [Letters, VII,231] and the Trinity [Works, VI, 200]-(28)

But such a list is also misleading in several respects, since in constructing such a list of "essential doctrines" one misses the fact that Wesley described each of these as the foundation or fundamental truth (not the list as a whole but each item in it). The role of John Wesley as a rhetorician and evangelist looms in the background of any attempt to construct a list of "essentials." In fact, such a project seems to fly in the face of his own statements about the inappropriateness of such an undertaking.

Further, the list Williams produced, while aptly capturing the standard content of Wesley's "essentials," directs one away from the atypical breadth and shape of Wesley's affirmations. A more complete list would also have to rank "Divine Providence," "Charity" or Agape love, "Hell," the "New Birth" and "Sanctification," among Wesley's self-confessed essential themes. But more importantly, when Wesley set forth each of these "essentials" it was in its connection with the formation of vital piety. They were, as Outler recognized "distillates for edification rather than doctrinal formularies demanding a yes or no response" (Sermons, I, 55-56). These "essentials" were not intended to function as loci communes. Wesley's theological common-places were yet by the outer perimeter of Anglican Orthodoxy. They marked out, instead, the proclamation of vital piety and an apologetic statement of the core of the Gospel. This recognition carries us to the practical dimension of Wesley's "essentials"-real religion.

"Religion," for Wesley was a term that carried none of the negative connotations that it acquired later (e.g. Bonhoeffer's "religionless Christianity").

In fact the term served him well since it enabled him to fuse doctrine, practice, and inner dispositions into a functional whole. Thus, in response to his own question, "What is the proper nature of the religion of Jesus Christ?," Wesley replied: "It is Therapeia psuchas ["healing of souls"], God's method of healing a soul which is thus diseased [with sin]" (Ibid., II, 184). In a similar fashion, "the great end of religion is to renew our hearts in the image of God, to repair that total 1099 of righteousness and true holiness which we sustained by the sin of our first parent" (Ibid.). This "religion of the heart was larger than the sum-total of its parts. It included "essential doctrines" but was more than theological orthodoxy:

I say of the heart. For neither does religion consist in orthodoxy or right opinions; which, although they are not properly outward things, are not in the heart, . . . he may think justly concerning the incarnation of our Lord, concerning the ever blessed Trinity, and every other doctrine contained in the oracles of God. He may assent to all three creeds-that called Apostles', the Nicene, and the Athanasian-and yet 'tis possible he may have no religion at all.... He may be almost as orthodox as the devil ... and may be all the while a stranger as he to the religion of the heart" (Sermons, II, 220-21).

Although "real religion" manifests itself in true Christian dispositions and practices, praxis, no more than "orthodoxy" or "opinions," is the constitutive feature of true religion. Wesley's sermon on "The Way to the Kingdom of God" (I.1-6) stated this point emphatically: ". . . although true religion naturally leads to every good word and work, yet the real nature thereof lies deeper still even in 'the hidden man of the heart' " (Sermons, I, 21~220). When he sought to define religion "truly so-called" Wesley followed Rom. 14:17, where "the Apostle sums it up in three particulars- 'righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost' " (Ibid). In a later sermon ("The Important Question," 1775), Wesley returned to this question with his characteristic gift for compacting and clarifying his earlier statements: "What is religion then? . . . it lies in one single point; it is neither more nor less than love; . . . Religion is the love of God and neighbor; . . . This love ruling the whole life, animating all our tempers and passions, directing all our thoughts, words, and actions, is 'pure religion and undefiled' " (Sermons, III, 189).

The establishment of this "real religion," was "The End of Christ's Coming" (SOSO No. 62). It is nothing less than ". . . a restoration not only to the favor but likewise to the image of God, implying not barely deliverance from sin, but being filled with the fullness of God . . . nothing short of this is Christian religion" (Sermons, II, 482-83). It is the establishment of "Spiritual Worship" (SOSO No. 77), which ". . . does not lie in this or that set of notions, vulgarly called faith; nor in a round of duties.... It does not consist in any number of outward actions. No: It properly and directly consists in the knowledge and love of God, as manifested in the Son of His love, through the eternal Spirit. And this naturally leads to every heavenly temper, and to every good word and work" (Sermons, III, 99).

What was most characteristic about John Wesley's "essential doctrines" was not his affirmation of standard Protestant theological content. Rather,

it is his unwillingness to speak of Christian doctrine, disposition, or practice in isolation. This is certainly the approach one meets in the SOSO, where Wesley cements together Biblical words, phrases, and themes to form montages of doctrine, disposition, and practice. These extended summaries not only emerge in soteriological sermons such as "Salvation by Faith" (pt. II. 1-7), "The Almost Christian" (pt. II. 1-11), or "Scriptural Christianity" (Intro. 4-1.10)- they are equally prevalent in sermons treating Christian dispositions, as in "The Catholic Spirit" (I. 12-18), or "On Patience" (para. 9-10) for example.(29) These summaries of basic Christianity also appear in what might seem to be unusual contexts, such as "On the Death of Whitefield" (III. 1-8), "Original Sin" (III.3), "The Case of Reason" (I.6), "Of the Church" (II.21-26), and "On Family Religion" (I. 1-4)(30) Several of Wesley's apologetic works also present "real religion" by weaving together "essential" Christian doctrines, dispositions, and practices. Chains of Biblical phrases and teaching emerge in treatises such as A Farther Appeal, A Letter to a Roman Catholic, and the Character of a Methodist and the contents of these summaries mirror the substance of Wesley's sermons. (31)

## **V. The Analogy of Faith**

An inquiry after Wesley's "essential" doctrines, while accurately communicating his theological content, does not deliver what was most distinctive about his theology. This causes one to wonder whether there is a Wesleyan description that might characterize the Methodist theological task in a way that is more in harmony with Wesley's own method. His application of the phrase "the analogy of faith" seems to offer real promise in that direction.

The term, "analogy," based on the Greek analogian in Rom. 12:6, was originally a mathematical term meaning "proportion." In the hands of the philosophers "analogy" also described relationships of similarity or correspondence. In the Romans passage the term suggests a correspondence between prophetic preaching and the Christian community's received standards of doctrine and practice. Because of this type of application the "analogy of faith" stood in close connection with the "rule of faith." The latter term referred to the contents of Christian tradition and the former to the hermeneutical process that made received tradition the litmus test for new doctrines or practices.

Romans 12:6 was of interest to the Protestant Reformers and their orthodox successors. Martin Luther followed Erasmus and Faber in using "rule, comparison, proportion, or similarity" to translate the term, and he applied it hermeneutically.(32) Calvin described the "analogy of faith" as the hermeneutical correspondence between exposition and "the first principles of religion, and whatever doctrine is not found to correspond with these is here condemned as false."(33) Francis Turretin used the term to describe the "constant harmony or agreement of all of the articles (capita) of faith in the most glorious words of the revealed Scripture, to which all expositions must conform...."(34) Similar development can be found in the commentators of Lutheran orthodoxy, such as Abraham Calovius and Paul Gerhard, who used the term to emphasize the revelatory unity within Scripture and the hermeneutical unity between Scripture and Creed.(35)

The English divines also connected the harmony of Scripture with hermeneutics and the inter-relationship of Biblical exposition and Christian tradition. William Whitaker's Disputation on Holy Scripture, for example described the "analogy of faith," as "the sum of those central doctrines of the Christian faith which we believe on the authority of the clear and constant teaching of Scripture." Whitaker offered the Creed, the Articles, the contents of the Lord's Prayer, the Decalogue, and the whole Catechism as examples of these "central doctrines," and hence "whatever exposition is repugnant to this analogy must be false." (36) John Wesley's use of the term "analogy of faith" stood within this larger tradition. The fullest example of his use of the phrase is found in his comment on Romans 12:6:

Let us prophesy according to "the analogy of faith" St. Peter expresses it as the oracles of God; according to the grand tenor of them; according to that grand scheme of doctrine which is delivered therein, touching upon original sin, justification by faith, and present, inward salvation. There is a wonderful analogy between all these; and a close and intimate connection between the chief heads of that faith which was once delivered to the saints. Every article therefore, concerning which there is any question, should be determined by this rule, every doubtful scripture interpreted, according to the grand truths which run through the whole. (39)

While Wesley continued his predecessors' interest in the hermeneutical role of the analogy of faith, for him the focal point for interpreting "every doubtful scripture" is not so much to be found in the Creed or Articles but in basic Biblical doctrines, in "the grand truths which run through the whole." His emphasis upon the "harmony" suggested by the "analogy of faith" is found in the inner coherence of Biblical teaching ("that grand scheme of doctrine"), as opposed to an explicit linkage between Biblical exposition and a creedal "rule of faith." A similar sort of emphasis emerges in Wesley's "Preface" to his Notes Upon the OT (~1765), where he describes "the analogy of faith," as "the connection and harmony there is between these grand fundamental doctrines, original sin, justification by faith, the new birth. inward and outward holiness." (38) In the SOSO the hermeneutical focus of the "analogy of faith" is more explicit. In Wesley's sermon "Justification by Faith," for example, it has the function of demonstrating the utter consistency of the "oracles of God" (Sermons, I, 182-83). In some instances. the substance of the principle is present when the term is not, as in Wesley's first homily "Upon our Lord's Sermon on the Mount," where "all parts of the discourse . . . are all connected together, joined together as the stone in an arch, of which you cannot take one away without destroying the whole fabric" (Sermons, I, 473). In the third sermon on the same topic, Wesley punned the Greek word for "analogy" to describe the inter-connection he saw between the "fundamentals" of Jesus' discourse (the Beatitudes) on "genuine religion": ". . . What beauty appears in the whole! How just a symmetry! What exact proportion in every part! How desirable is the happiness here described! How venerable, how lovely the holiness! This is the spirit of religion; the quintessence of it. These are indeed the fundamental of Christianity. O that we may not be hearers of it only!" (Sermons, I, 530).

John Wesley's later work, like his sermon on "The End of Christ's Coming" (1781), extended the hermeneutical application of the analogy of faith" toward a more programmatic use, which he described as "that grand scheme of doctrine" delivered in the Bible. In "The End of Christ's Coming" was to be found that plan of "restoration, not only to the favor but likewise to the image of God, implying not barely deliverance from sin, but the being filled with the fullness of God. It is plain, . . . that nothing short of this is Christian religion.... It runs through the Bible from the beginning to the end, in one connected chain; and the agreement of every part of it, with every other, is, properly, the analogy of faith" (Sermons, II, 482-83). The "analogy" is only to be found in the wholeness of this "connected chain" (Ibid.). The harmony of the analogy of faith not only extends throughout the Biblical witness, its inner harmony is found in its identification as "real religion," and in the inter-connection of doctrine, practice, and dispositions that the term "real religion" implied for Wesley. Geoffrey Wainwright is certainly correct to identify the "proportion of the faith" as one of Methodism's chief contributions to Ecumenism, for "the connected, coherent and balanced configuration of the great doctrinal truths of Christianity . . ." seems endemic to Methodism and "real religion."(39)

## **VI. Conclusion**

Even a casual reading of Wesley's SOSO indicates that he presented the doctrines which he emphasized rhetorically as being "essential" or "fundamental" aspects of the Christian faith. But an approach which delineates his thought only in terms of those theological "essentials" hits a bit wide of the mark. Wesley repeatedly returned to those teachings he considered to be constitutive of "primitive Christianity," but his emphasis was on the issue of "real religion."

Wesley's "catholic spirit," albeit a bit thin with respect to Calvinists in his earlier years, eventually reached the scope that his soteriology demanded. His distinction between "opinions" and "essentials" leaves room for variance at the point of personal convictions (though primarily in areas of Christian practice) while his distinction between the "fact" (or reality) and the "matter" (or explication) of even essential doctrines (such as the Trinity) points to the heart of his approach. For Wesley, theological "essentials" were those "primitive Christian" doctrines which held the potential for producing "real religion." The truthfulness of a doctrine inhered not only in its veracity, but also in its vitality. We noted that, in fact, Wesley believed that even "essential" doctrines could become idolatrous or have debilitating effects. He also showed a willingness to re-consider whether a particular doctrine, such as the Calvinistic concept of predestination, was an "essential" or an "opinion."

What seems most "essential" about Wesley's doctrines was his willingness to affirm classical Christian teaching in solid connection with the larger context of Christian living. He had a pervasive sense of the inner symmetry of Christian theology. His appreciation for "the analogy of faith" felt the wholeness within Christian teaching and sought to apply it in order to produce whole Christian lives.

## NOTES

1 John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley* A.M. 14 vols. (London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, 1878, various reprints), XIV, p.340 [hereafter *Works* and etc.]

2 Albert Outler, ed., *Sermons* (Vol. I-III: *The Works of John Wesley* [Nashville: Abingdon, 1984-1986]) Since the majority of citations will be from this new edition of John Wesley's sermons they will be indicated by in-text notation using *Sermons*, vol. and page.

3 John Wesley's "Preface" to the *Sermons on Several Occasions* (hereinafter, *SOSO*), Second Series, makes it clear that he had a theological agenda in mind as he compiled that edition:

To make these plain Discourses more useful, I purpose now to range them in proper order; placing those first which are intended to throw light on some important Christian doctrines; and after-wards those which more directly relate to some branch of Christian practice: And I shall endeavor to place them all in such an order that one may illustrate and confirm the other. There may be the greater need of this, because they were occasionally written, during the course of years, without any order or connection at all; just as this or the other subject either occurred to my own mind, or was suggested to me at various time by one or another friend (*Works*, VI, 185-186).

4 *Works*, VIII, p. 340f.

5 Wesley's concept of "primitive Christianity" was drawn from a host of Church Fathers. Clement of Rome, Ignatius of Antioch, Polycarp, Tertullian, Origen, Clement of Alexandria, Cyprian, John Chrysostom, Basil the Great, Ephrem Syrus, and Macarius the Egyptian are listed in his sermon "On Laying the Foundation of the New Chapel," (1777) (cf. *Sermons*, III, 585). The list is certainly incomplete since Irenaeus and Augustine, who figure prominently into Wesley's soteriological constructs, are not mentioned there. The sermon does give a useful delineation of the breadth of his concept of "primitive Christianity."

6 Robert Monk's *John Wesley: His Puritan Heritage* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1966~), and his recent paper "John Wesley and Richard Baxter," presented at the Wesley Studies Group of AAR (1986), draw some striking parallels between the soteriology of the two men. Interestingly, both struggled mightily with the issue of imputed grace and empowered human works as a response to grace. My reading of the results of such a comparison is that Wesley's position is more Catholic than Baxter's, since Wesley directly affirms both imputed and imparted righteousness.

7 William Law heads the list of "most cited sources" from the area of practical divinity in the *SOSO*, but once again the scope of Wesley's readings is surprisingly broad for a man who touted himself as *homo unius libri*. In alphabetical order his most cited practical sources are: a' Kempis, II:274; III:69; 122; William Arndt, III: 124; Robert Barclay, I: 460; Behmen

(Boehme), II: 506; De Castaniza, III:506; De Renty, II:375,385; III:166,375;Uitliarn Law, I:246, 247, 460, 613, 628; II:198, 274; III:120, 123, 128, 183,268,349, 357, 392, 397, 504, 507, 524; Blaise Pascal, III: 182; Jeremy Taylor, I: 407; 111:79, 285.

8 Sermon II,184, cites Thomas Hobbes on reason; II: 254, Francis Hutcheson on the locus of natural evil; II: 570-72, Issac Newton and John Hutchinson on "the limit of human understanding;" II: 587 looks to Hobbes in support of the use of reason; II: 589 cites John Locke on the nature of reason. In Sermons III: 93, Wesley returns to Newton and Hutchinson, this on the issue of naturalism; III: 200, Andrew Ramsey; III: 279-80, Francis Hutcheson on human moral decay; III: 499, Wollaston on faith; in III: 361, Wesley dialogues with Locke and the Cambridge Platonists on the nature of ideas in the mind; III: 444 cites William Derham's Physio-Theology, and Samuel Clarke; and III: 480 refers to La Placette and Francis Hutcheson on conscience.

9 Thomas Langford, "Constructive Theology in the Wesleyan Tradition," in Ted Runyon ed., Wesleyan Theology Today: a Bicentennial Theological Consultation (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1985), pp. 58-59.

10 Gerald R. Cragg, ed., The Appeals to Men Of Reason and Religion (Vol. XI: The Works of John Wesley [London: Oxford University Press, 1975]), p. 321 (Hereinafter, Cragg, Appeals, etc.)

11 Wesley argued that the Calvinistic concept of predestination under-mines several particular branches of holiness: "such as i) 'the hope of future reward and fear of punishment,' ii) 'meekness and love' iii) 'the happiness of Christianity' that is the experience of assurance, iv) 'the zeal for good works,' and v) it tends to 'overthrow the whole Christian revelation.'" Sermons, III, pp. 547-552. '2Cf.

12 Sermons, II, pp. 79-97, No. 39, "Catholic Spirit."

13 Works, VIII p. 284-285. '

14 Nehemiah Curnock, ed., The Journal of John Wesley, A.M. 8 Vol. (London: Charles Kelley, n.d.), III, p. 238. [Hereafter, JW Journal and etc.]

15 Cragg, Appeals, "The Enthusiasm of the Methodists," p. 423.

16 John Telford, ed., The Letters of John Wesley, A.M. 8 Vol. (London: Epworth Press, 1931), IV, p. 297. [Hereafter, JW. Letters and etc.]

17 JW. Letters, V, pp. 224-225.

18 James Murray, ed., A New Dictionary on Historical Principles (Oxford: Clarendon Press,1908], Vol. VI, pt. 2, p. 233, OED. The OED indicates that within the Wesleys' life-time the word "notion" began to take on a "slightly or virtually negative connotation."

19 JW. Letters, IV, 297.

20 H. Ray Dunning, "Perspective for a Wesleyan Systematic Theology," in Runyon, ed., op. cit., p. 52.

21 Cragg, ed., Appeals, "The Enthusiasm of the Methodists," p. 425.

22 Works, VIII, p. 340.

23 Cragg, ed., Appeals, p. 82.

24 Works, VIII, p. 346.

25 Sermons, II, "On The Trinity," p. 376: ". . . there are some truths more important than others. Its seems there are some truths which are of deep importance. I do not term them fundamental truths, because that is an ambiguous word, and hence there have been so many warm disputes about the number of 'fundamentals.' But surely there are some which it really concerns us to know, as having a close connection with vital religion."

26 Works, XIV, p- 253-

27 Among these "essentials" were: "The Office and Operation of the Holy Spirit" (Letters, IV, p. 339~; "The New Birth and Justification by Faith alone," (Sermons, II, p. 343~; "Divine Providence," (Sermons, II, p. 537); "Faith, as a confidence in a pardoning God" (Appeals, p. 70); "Sanctification," (Letters, VIII p. 38~; "Justification and Sanctification by Faith," (Sermons, I, p. 241~; "The Trinity," (Sermons, II, 182-183~; "Original Sin," (Sermons, II, 182-183~; "Hell," (Sermons, III, 31~; "The Propitiation of Christ," (Sermons, I, 2143; and "Charity," or Agape love (Sermons, III, p. 306~.

28 Colin Williams, John Wesley 's Theology Today (Nashville: Abingdon, 1960~ pp. 16-17.

29 For doctrinal summaries in John Wesley's soteriological sermons see: Sermons, I, pp. 121-124; 137-141; 160-161; 187-193; 221; 650; Sermons, II, pp. 187-189; Sermons, III, 174-176.

30 Sermons, II, pp. 184ff; 341-344; 597; Sermons, III, pp. 53-54; 336.

31 Cragg, ed., Appeals, pp. 105-107; Albert Outler, ed., John Wesley (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), pp. 494-496; Works, VIII, pp. 340-346.

32 Wilhelm Pauck, ed., Luther: Lectures on Romans (Philadelphia: FortresY Press, 1961), p. 334.

33 John Owen, ed., Calvin 's Commentary on the Epistle of Paul The Apostle to the Romans (Grand Rapids: William B. Erdmans, 1947~, pp. 460-461.

34 William Beardslee, ed., Francis Turretin: The Doctrine of Scripture(Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1981), p. 207.

35 Heinrich Schmidt, ed., The Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church (Minneapolis: Augsburg Press, 1899~. pp. 70 and 77.

36 P. E. Hughes, The English Reformation (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 19663, p. 41.

37 John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament* [reprint edition] (Salem, Ohio: Schmul Pub., 1976), p. 397.-1 7x-

33 Works, XIV, p. 253.

39 Geoffrey Wainwright, "Ecclesial Location and Ecumenical Vocation," in Douglas Meeks, ed., *The Future of Methodist Theological Traditions* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1985), p.131.

# JOHN WESLEY AND THE ENTHUSIASTS

by  
Lowell O. Ferrel

Why are Holiness people and the Pentecostals so incompatible? No one seems to be able to give a convincing basis for this incompatibility. Surely, there is something deeper down and farther back than just the fact that one group does not speak in "tongues" and the other group does.

It is this writer's intent to show that there truly is a difference between the two movements and that this significant difference is most clearly seen in the interactions between John Wesley and the enthusiasts of his day. Wesley was definitive in rejecting enthusiasm. The fact that he maintained clear-cut boundaries between his own doctrinal distinctiveness and the enthusiasts helps to explain why there is so little compatibility today between the Holiness Movement and the Pentecostals.

## Definition of Enthusiasm

John Wesley understood enthusiasm as something of an ambiguous term. In his sermon, *The Nature of Enthusiasm*,<sup>(1)</sup> he discusses how sometimes the word is taken as: (1) ". . . a divine impulse or impression, superior to all the natural faculties, and suspending for the time, either in whole or in part, both the reason and the outward senses"; (2) ". . . in a different sense, such as is neither morally good nor evil . . . an uncommon figure of thought, a peculiar fervor of spirit, a vivacity in strength not to be found in common men"; and (3) "Something evil . . . as calling the religion of the heart enthusiasm." It was in the first and third sense that the term was usually applied pejoratively in Wesley's day. Wesley saw enthusiasm as a "disorder of the mind" and something that "not only dims but shuts the eyes of the understanding." He contrasts the "fool" with the "madman."<sup>(2)</sup> He contends that a fool starts with right premises but has such impaired logic that the conclusions he draws are erroneous. By contrast, the madman starts from wrong premises but logically draws right conclusions. Wesley's contention is that the madman and the enthusiast are similar. If one would accept the premise of the enthusiast, the logic would be quite reasonable. Wesley states the position rather strongly: "Every enthusiast, then, is properly a madman. Yet his is not an ordinary, but a religious, madness."<sup>(3)</sup> Wesley then goes on to give a formal definition of enthusiasm:

Enthusiasm in general may then be described in some such manner as this: A religious madness arising from some falsely imagined influence or inspiration of God; at least, from imputing something to God which ought not to be imputed to Him, or expecting something from God which ought not to be expected from Him.(4)

Wesley's comments here and elsewhere(5) make it clear that he considers enthusiasm to be gross subjectivity where one's impulses, impressions, visions, dreams and even conduct are assumed to be the result of direct communication with the Holy Spirit. In this particular way of thinking, the imminence of God is carried to such a logical extreme that one's own subjective impressions are confused with the activity of God. Before discussing some of the problems inherent in this approach to Christian experience, we shall examine what Wesley thought was characteristic of this approach.

### **Characteristics of Enthusiasm**

In Wesley's sermon, *The Nature of Enthusiasm*(6), he acknowledges that there are "innumerable sources of enthusiasm"; but he selects for discussion those which "are most common, and for that reason, most dangerous." He discusses them under separate headings. The following four subtypes are specifically mentioned:

1. The first subtype of enthusiasm that Wesley considered is constituted by those cases where persons assumed they had a grace which in reality they did not possess. Such individuals might profess to either having been justified or sanctified when in reality they had neither experienced the rebirth nor the cleansing from original sin. Wesley felt that this kind of enthusiasm was rooted in self-deception and gave rise to a superficial religious experience that had no real roots or permanence. It is probably Wesley's understanding of enthusiasm as it relates to this point that caused him to counsel his followers repeatedly to resist testifying to the experience of entire sanctification until they had a sure and certain witness of such from the Holy Spirit.

2. A second category of enthusiasm consisted of those who imagined themselves to have certain gifts from God which they did not actually possess. "Thus some have imagined themselves to be imbued with a power of working miracles, of healing the sick by a word or a touch, of restoring sight to the blind; yea, even of raising the dead.... Others have undertaken to prophesy, to foretell things to come, and that with the utmost certainty and exactness." Wesley felt that the dogmatic certainty that accompanied this form of enthusiasm eventually collapsed when "plain facts run counter to their predictions, experience performs what reason could not, and sinks them down into their senses."(7) Even in regard to prayer, Wesley felt that these kinds of enthusiasts often felt themselves to be under some kind of special control or direction of the Holy Spirit and while he acknowledged that there was a real influence of the Holy Spirit in the activity of prayer, he felt also that there is an imaginary influence, and this is often mistaken one for the other. He takes issue in this category with visions, dreams, strong impressions, or sudden impulses that are said to be an extraordinary activity of God on the individual. He is also concerned here with spectacular claims

to divine guidance. Wesley's primary objection on this point stems from his conviction that in such cases subjectivity has been elevated to such a degree that it has taken on authority beyond even that of the Scriptures. Wesley also seemed to take a rather dim view of the claim that there was a special class of Christians or a select group of Christians who seemed to possess special powers or enlightenment beyond that of their contemporaries.

3. Wesley considered another form of enthusiasm to be defined by those persons who ". . . think to attain the end without using the means, by the immediate power of God."(8) He is here alluding to an assumed tendency to neglect common means of grace (Scripture reading, prayer, Christian fellowship, et cetera) in deference to an expectation of spiritual experiences devoid of spiritual discipline. Examples of this type of enthusiasm would be people who expect to understand the Scriptures without reading them or who expect to be able to speak in a public assembly without any preparation.

4. A final category was designated by Wesley to be made up of those individuals who imagined certain things to be the direct result of the providence of God when they were not. Wesley believed in a general providence and a particular providence to all persons. What he objected to was the person imagining himself or herself to be a "peculiar favorite of heaven." "Do you not see that he who, believing this, imputes anything which befalls him to Providence, does not therein make himself any more the favorite of heaven, than he supposes every man under heaven to be?"(9)

## **Problems with Enthusiasm**

### **Subjectivity**

Wesley was very much a product of both the Reformation and the Age of Enlightenment. From the former, he inherited a high view of Scripture which grounded revelation in objective reality. From the latter he gained an appreciation for reason as an alternative to primitive superstitions and vain imaginations. Enthusiasm threatened to undermine both Scripture and the need for the rational capacities of individuals! When accused of being an enthusiast himself, Wesley responded, "I have declared again and again, that I make the word of God the rule of all my actions; and that I no more follow any secret impulse instead thereof, than I follow Mahomet or Confucius."(10) Wesley eschewed private interpretation as much as he did private revelation, and consistently counseled his followers to subject matters of judgment to the certainty of the "law and the testimony." He wrote:

From those words, "beloved, believe not every spirit; but try the spirits, whether they be of God," I told them they were not to judge of the spirit whereby anyone spoke, either by appearances, or by common report, or by their own inward feeling; no, nor by any dreams, visions, or revelations, supposed to be made to their souls anymore than by their tears, or any involuntary effects wrought upon their bodies. I warned them, all these were in them-selves of a doubtful, disputable nature; they might be from God and they might not; and were therefore not simply to be relied on, any more than simply to be condemned, but to be tried by a farther rule; to be brought to the only certain test, the law and the testimony.(11)

In referring to the role of reason, Wesley contended, "Among them that despise and vilify reason, you may always expect to find those enthusiasts who suppose the dreams of their own imagination to be revelations from God. We cannot expect that men of this turn will pay much regard to reason. Having an infallible guide, they are very little moved by the reasonings of fallible men."(12) Wesley's understanding of the appropriate role of reason was: "Let reason do all that reason can: employ it as far as it will go. But at the same time, acknowledge it is utterly incapable of giving either faith, or hope, or love; and, consequently, of producing either real virtue, or substantial happiness. Expect these from a higher source, even from the Father of the spirits of all flesh."(13)

Wesley believed that divine guidance was not to be rooted in the ex cathedra pronouncements of any given individual as in popery, in the silent meditation of small groups as in Quakerism, or in the impulsive impressions of fanaticism and enthusiasm.(14) Faith was to be grounded in the authoritative word of God which in turn could be interpreted by its plain and simple meaning according to the operations of reason enlightened by grace.

### **Lack of Discipline**

Besides undermining the authority of the Scriptures, Wesley thought that enthusiasm undermined Christian living as well. It must be remembered that the "method" in Methodism was at first a perjorative label applied to Wesley and his followers because of their strong commitment to living a disciplined life. For Wesley, the enthusiasts were an indolent group who, as he frequently put it, sought ". . . the end without the means; the expecting knowledge, for instance, without searching the Scriptures, and consulting the children of God; expecting spiritual strength without constant prayer and steady watchfulness; expecting any blessing without hearing the word of God at every opportunity." Wesley contended that the enthusiasts were often so certain that God had written the Scriptures on their heart that they felt they had no reason to study the Scriptures or even to attend the services of the church or to hear the preaching of the Scriptures. Wesley believed this carelessness or slackness in attending to means of grace was rooted experientially in pride.(15)

### **Misguided Priorities**

Another serious problem in enthusiasm for Wesley was the simple fact that he felt it undermined the true focus of Christianity. He expresses this sentiment beautifully in the following passage:

It were well you should be thoroughly sensible of this-"the heaven of heavens is love." There is nothing higher in religion; there is, in effect, nothing else; if you look for anything but more love, you are looking wide of the mark, you are getting out of the royal way. And when you are asking others, "Have you received this or that blessing?" If you mean anything but more love, you mean wrong; you are leading them out of the way, and putting them upon a false scent. Settle it then in your heart, that from the moment God has saved you from all sin, you are to aim at nothing more, than more of that love described in the thirteenth of the Corinthians. You can go no higher than this, til you are carried into Abraham's bosom.(16)

## **Heresy**

The essential elements of enthusiasm have presented a problem for the church in virtually every age. It would appear that the philosophical/psychological characteristics of enthusiasm were operative in the Corinthian church and occasioned the intervention of the Apostle Paul. In the last half of the second century, Montanism emerged in Phrygia. M. E. Dieter says of Montanism, "In one of the other of its many factions, it prevailed until the ninth century.(17) Montanism, as the reader may recall, was a revivalistic movement led by an individual named Montanus. Montanus proclaimed the "Age of the Spirit" and believed strongly in personal revelation, prophesy, radical moralism, celibacy, etc.

In our discussion of the enthusiasts it is quite interesting to note Wesley's reactions to Montanism. He was not as negative towards Montanism as one might anticipate. In one sermon, Wesley declared emphatically, "Nay, I have doubted whether that arch-heretic, Montanus, was not one of the holiest men in the second century."(18) On another occasion, when the Montanists were accused of being enthusiasts, Wesley defended their visions and ecstasies by claiming historical precedent in Joel and St. Peter.(19) Given the fact that Wesley was so much opposed to the enthusiasts, one wonders why he would have at times been so supportive of their Montanism. There may be two reasons for this. First, Wesley's theology, like most, evolved gradually over a period of time, and some of his favorable comments may have been reflective of his earlier thinking prior to his forming a strong reaction against enthusiasm. Secondly, Wesley may not have been defending the Montanists similarities with enthusiasts so much as he was affirming the positive qualities he saw in the character of the Montanists. He believed that the Montanists did not err greatly in their doctrinal understanding of the person of Christ and the respect they afforded to Jesus as the mediator between God and man. In addition, "Montanus was not only a truly good man, but one of the best men then upon earth; and that his real crime was, the severely reproving those who professed themselves Christians, while they neither had the mind that was in Christ, nor walked as Christ walked; but were conformable both in their temper and practice to the present evil world."(20)

In a similar vein, it is interesting to note Wesley's reaction to the Moravians, who also had marked similarities with the philosophical/psychological characteristics of the enthusiasts.(21) As in the case of Montanus, Wesley saw redeeming and highly admirable qualities in the lives of the Moravians. He spent a great deal of time with Moravians. Later, however, a serious breach occurred between Wesley and the Moravians. He felt that most of his actual objections to the Moravians stemmed from their "three grand errors":(22) Universalism, Antinomianism, and Quietism. As in the case of the enthusiasts, Wesley saw strong evidence of the Moravians' wanting the ends without the means. For example, the Moravians believed so strongly in salvation by faith that they felt a person could not attend to such things as reading the Scriptures, public and private prayer, fellowship, partaking of Communion attending the services of the church, etc., without trusting in these activities. Consequently, they downplayed their significance and urged their followers to rely solely on faith. This viewpoint was antithetical to Wesley's methodism which emphasized a strong reliance on Bible reading, prayer and other disciplines in Christian living. Secondly, the Quietistic emphasis

on doing nothing and simply attending to the inner voice tended also to undermine a disciplined Christian life and the authority and power of the Scriptures.(23)

In summary, Wesley seemed to object more to the enthusiasts on pragmatic grounds than on the basis of the full force of historical precedent where the church had tended to see such movements as heretical. The reason why he did not draw more on this historical precedent in his opposition to the enthusiasts is not really clear. It may very well be that, because he himself was often falsely accused of being an enthusiast(24) and because he seemed to have a specific aversion to "labeling"(25), he may not have been so inclined. In addition, Wesley had both of his feet squarely planted in two significant traditions. First, he stood in the awesome shadow of the Reformation with its emphasis upon the authority of the Scriptures and the Age of Enlightenment's appeal to reason. Secondly, this theological understanding was planted firmly in a religion of the heart, which added a subjective component. Consequently, various perspectives developed with respect to Wesley. From the perspective of the Moravians and enthusiasts, Wesley no doubt took on the character of a mildly liberated but essentially dead practitioner of orthodoxy. But from the perspective of the orthodox, Wesley looked like an enthusiast, a Montanist, or a Moravian. Maybe, however, Wesley was a needed moderating influence that gave necessary balance and proportion to these two extremes and is a voice that needs to be heard today as much as it needed to be heard in his day.

### **The Wesleyan Response**

Before asking how Wesley might counsel us today in dealing with the revival of enthusiasm, we should first look at his response to the enthusiasts of his day. Here there can be no question because Wesley was so explicit in what he advocated as the appropriate and proper response to them. One ". . . ought to be very careful to act with a Christian spirit, and to advance nothing but with temper, charity, and truth.(26)

In 1762, there had been a general outbreak of enthusiasm in London. Wesley says:

But almost as soon as I was gone, enthusiasm broke in. Two or three began to take their own imaginations for impressions from God, and then to suppose that they should never die; and these, laboring to bring others into the same opinion, occasioned much noise and confusion. Soon after, the same persons, with a few more, ran into other extravagances; fancying they could not be tempted; that they should feel no more pain; and that they had the gift of prophesy and of discerning of spirits.(27)

Wesley arrived in London in the fall of that same year and was criticized severely, as he puts it, "almost from every quarter." On one hand, the enthusiasts objected to him because "I was checking them on all occasions"; and others were reproaching him, saying that he was not checking them. A friend some distance from London wrote Wesley giving him the following advice which Wesley seemed to regard highly:

But what can real Christians do? Why, if they would act worthy of themselves, they should, (1.) Pray that every deluded soul may

be delivered; (2.) Endeavor to reclaim them in the spirit of meekness; and, Lastly, take the utmost care both by prayer and watchfulness, that the delusion of others may not lessen their zeal in seeking after that universal holiness of soul, body, and spirit, "without which no man shall see the Lord."(28)

Wesley's approach to the enthusiasts was, in other words, redemptive. He engaged them forthrightly and attempted by the Scriptures to convince them of the error of their ways. For example, "About the same time, five or six honest enthusiasts were told the world was to end on the 28th of February. I immediately withstood them, by every possible means, both in public and in private. I preached expressly upon the subject both at Weston-Street and Spitalfields. I warned the society, again and again, and spoke severely to as many as I could; and I saw the fruit of my labor."(29)

On another occasion, Wesley wrote directly to a woman whom he suspected, among other things, of enthusiasm. He admonished her as follows:

A second thing which has given me concern is, I am afraid you are in danger of enthusiasm. We know there are divine dreams and impressions. But how easily may you be deceived here! How easily, where something is from God, may we mix something which is from nature! Especially if we have a lively imagination and are not aware of any danger.(30)

### **The Wesleyan Application to Charismatic Movement**

What the writer has attempted to show throughout this paper is that John Wesley provides an adequate model for effectively responding to the historically constant problem of enthusiasm in its philosophical/psychological dimensions. Wesley stood on the side of tradition in insisting that theology be grounded in the Scriptures rather than in personal revelation and subjective impressions. Because of his emphasis on heart religion and personal involvement, he was obviously more empathetic towards the enthusiasts than many who would have simply labeled them as "heretics" or "fanatics." He viewed the enthusiasts as misguided and potentially dangerous in the sense that their practices, if not corrected, would eventually undermine the authority of the Scriptures and give host to a variety of problems such as an over-concern with supernaturalism, spiritual gifts, pride, etc. Consequently, Wesley did not subscribe to a "live and let live" philosophy but was given to active intervention in what he perceived as a real problem. What is especially interesting and instructive is the fact that Wesley did not major in minor points. That is, he did not focus on the superficial, secondary characteristics of enthusiasm, e.g., discerning of spirits, prophecy, predicting the end of the world, etc. He aimed his arrow directly at the more insidious, underlying problem of the enthusiasts' mind set which gave such a high view to the imminence of God and the blurring of boundaries between subjective impressions and divine revelations that the whole issue of accountability in the Christian community and the role of objective revelation was undermined. In this writer's opinion, Wesley was correct in identifying the true Achilles heel of the enthusiast movements; and where we go wrong today is in losing his vital focus and in believing, mistakenly, that the real difference between the holiness movement and charismatics is in the "tongues"

issue By debating this relatively minor point, our arguments often lack credibility and persuasiveness-not only to charismatics but also to ourselves.

## NOTES

1 The Works of John Wesley, 14 vols. (London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, 1872; Reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1986), 5:467-478.

2Works 5:469.

3Works 5:470.

4Works 5:470.

5Works 8:106, 405-406, 445.

6Works 5:467-478

7Works 5:472.

8Works 5:475.

9Works 5:476.

10Works 8:406.

11Works 9:12.

12Works 6:351.

13Works 6:360.

14Works 8:214.

15Works 11:429.

16Works 11:430.

17Richard S. Taylor, ed., Beacon Dictionary of Theology (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1983).

18Works 6:328.

19Works 10:47.

20Works 11:485-486.

21 I.e., inasmuch as both gave great emphasis to subjective experiences.

22Works 1:333.

23Works 1:334.

24Works 3:35.

25Works 8:106.

26Works 1:216.

27Works 11:406.

28Works 11:407.

29Works 11:408.

30Works 12:26f.

# **“THE WITNESS OF THE SPIRIT”: QUESTIONS OF CLARIFICATION FOR WESLEY’S DOCTRINE OF ASSURANCE**

by  
Michael E. Lodahl

One of the hallmarks of classic Wesleyan thought has been its emphasis upon the authority of personal religious experience. Indeed, it has been suggested more than once in the pages of this journal that the primacy afforded the category of experience puts Wesleyanism in a position to “say something” to secular modernity, for which the only acceptable authority must arise out of human experience.(1)

This contention may well be true. But it is an underlying assumption of this paper that if the Wesleyan emphasis upon religious experience—specifically as that experience is interpreted as “the witness of the Holy Spirit”—is to speak authentically to the questions and concerns of our “postmodern” age, it must be reconsidered and reformulated in light of certain pressing issues which confront contemporary theologians. In this paper I have three specific issues in mind: 1) confrontation with other religious traditions; 2) Christianity’s eschatological hope; and 3) the growing recognition of the hermeneutical nature of human experience and existence.

Accordingly, the intention of this paper is twofold: first, to offer an interpretation of Wesley’s doctrine of assurance, particularly as it is expressed in his two discourses called “The Witness of the Spirit” (1746 and 1767); and second, to ask three clarifying questions of the Wesleyan doctrine, the suggested answers to which might provide a more satisfactory formulation of the doctrine in our time.

## **I. An Explication of Wesley’s Doctrine**

In Wesley’s first sermon entitled “The Witness of the Spirit,” one of his obvious concerns is to defend the Methodists against the charge of “enthusiasm” which had been raised against them for their claiming to have experienced an assurance of salvation. Wesley wastes no time indicating who are the “enthusiasts truly and properly”; they are those who have “mistaken

the voice of their own imagination for this witness of the spirit of God "(2)When such fanaticism abounds, is it not to be expected that all reasonable people might discount such talk? But Wesley suggests that the truly reasonable course is to steer between "enthusiasm" and the denial of the experience of assurance.

Wesley admits that in his immediate text, Romans 8:16, the preposition to could be translated either "to" or "with" our spirit. He opts for "with" on the strength of the message of I John. That is, there is a testimony of our own spirit—"And this is how we may discern that we are coming to know him: if we keep his teachings"—with which the Spirit's witness concurs. "How does it appear (to ourselves, not to others) that we do love God and our neighbor, and that we keep his commandments?" he then asks. (3) His answer, quite simply, is that it is evident in our immediate consciousness, or better, in our conscience. Thus, the testimony of our spirit is the testimony of our conscience or "moral sense," bearing witness that we love God and neighbor and keep God's commandments.

However, the question of the nature of the Holy Spirit's witness in conjunction with this witness of the individual's conscience is not so easily answered. Wesley readily admits,

The manner of how the divine testimony is manifested to the heart, I do not take upon me to explain.... But the fact we know; namely, that the Spirit of God does give a believer such a testimony of his adoption, that while it is present to the soul, he can no more doubt the reality of his sonship, than he can doubt of the shining of the sun, while he stands in the full blaze of his beam.(4)

It appears, then, that Wesley is speaking of an immediately intuited knowledge of the Spirit's witness to our adoption. He is quite aware that it is a highly subjective corner into which he has painted himself, and that in such a corner there is plenty of room for self-deception. How then, may this be distinguished from "damning presumption"?

At this point Wesley returns to the more objective authority of Scripture for certain "marks" which distinguish the person whose experience of assurance is authentically Spirit-given. First, preceding this witness there must be both repentance (or conviction of sin) and the new birth from God. Then there are the "present marks" of meekness, patience, gentleness, and longsuffering, all of which might be encapsulated in the phrase "humble joy." For the self-deceived, "The stronger the witness he imagines himself to have, the more overbearing is he to all around him; the more incapable of receiving any reproof; the more impatient of contradiction."(5) For Wesley, the witness of the Spirit did not lead to an unyielding, teeth-gritting fanaticism, but to openness, humility and obedience to God.

Yet Wesley is aware that such past and present "marks" do not get at the heart of the matter: the experience itself. "But how may one who has the real witness in himself distinguish it from presumption?"(6) An inherent, essential difference for Wesley is that it

is immediately and directly perceived, if our spiritual senses are rightly disposed.... To require a more minute and philosophical account of the manner whereby we distinguish these, and of

the criteria, or intrinsic marks, whereby we know the voice of God, is to make a demand which can never be answered. (7)

Thus Wesley hoped to put the experience beyond the criticism of the curious but skeptical philosopher who might ask, "How do you know?" The question simply could not be answered on the human level, for human language and reason, unaided by the Spirit, are inadequate to the task. As Colin Williams indicates, for Wesley the "natural man" is a dichotomy of soul and body, and the "spirit," in Wesley's words, "is the supernatural gift of God, to be found in Christians only." (8) Williams comments, "God does not witness to our feelings or natural capacities, but creates a supernatural power of discernment. It is literally true that God creates his own 'point of contact.' " It is only a Spirit-given "point of contact" that makes knowledge of God, and relation to God, possible. As Helmut Thielicke has written, "The doctrine of the Holy Spirit . . . tells us that we are called to participation in the divine self-knowledge and that we are thus set in the true analogy." (10)

But then, Wesley asks rhetorically, how can one know that his or her spiritual senses are rightly disposed? "Even by the testimony of your own spirit; by the answer of a good conscience toward God." (11) Thus he has gone full circle back to the testimony of the individual conscience, and it becomes evident that the witness of the individual's spirit (outward fruits) and the witness of the Holy Spirit ("immediate fruits") not only complement one another, but co-exist in a dynamic and interdependent tension.

Twenty years later, Wesley again took up the pen to write a discourse with the same title and Biblical text, primarily to explain and defend the doctrine against some of the criticism which had been leveled against it. Apparently his first sermon had not silenced all critics! Of the objections to the doctrine which Wesley mentions as being the most considerable he has heard, three seem to be particularly pertinent to us here: 1) that many religious enthusiasts and fanatics, while utterly decrying the Bible, have claimed to have the witness, thus deceiving themselves and placing themselves beyond all true conviction; 2) that though the witness is intended to prove that the profession we make is genuine, it does not indeed prove such; and 3) that the direct witness of the Spirit does not safeguard against "the greatest delusions," and is a questionable source of assurance in that one "is forced to fly to something else [the indirect witness], to prove what it asserts." (12)

Wesley's corresponding replies to these three objections are, respectively, 1) that thousands who have experienced and pleaded for the doctrine of assurance have the highest esteem for the Bible, and the abuse of a doctrine by quacks and cranks is no repudiation of its truth; 2) that the purpose of the witness of the Spirit is indeed not to prove the authenticity of our profession, but "to assure those to whom it is given, that they are children of God" (13) and "does not suppose that their preceding thoughts, words, and actions are conformable to the rule of Scripture. It supposes quite the reverse, namely, that they are sinners all over; sinners both in-heart and life"; (14) and 3) that the direct witness of the Spirit is intended by God precisely to witness with our spirit, that by the joining together of these two witnesses "every word shall be established" (Mt. 18:16).

Wesley concludes this second discourse by reiterating the point which was so obvious in the first: that these two witnesses must exist in a creative and dynamic tension:

Two inferences may be drawn from the whole. The first: let none ever presume to rest in any supposed testimony of the Spirit which is separate from the fruit of it.... The second inference is: let none rest in any supposed fruit of the Spirit without the witness (of the Spirit).... If we are wise, we shall be continually crying to God, until his Spirit cry in our heart, "Abba, Father!". . . Without this we cannot retain a steady pace, nor avoid perplexing doubts and fears.(16)

## **II. Questions of Clarification of the Doctrine**

Certainly there is far more that could be said concerning Wesley's doctrine of assurance, but at least the basics are before us. I would now like to address three questions to the Wesleyan doctrine, corresponding fairly closely to the three issues isolated from Wesley's second discourse, the answering of which I believe would help to clarify its meaning and significance today:

1)What relationship does this "witness of the Spirit" bear to one's antecedent presuppositions and religious beliefs, i e., the tradition in which one stands?

This question is loosely related to the first of the three objections mentioned above in the previous section: "But madmen, French prophets, and enthusiasts of every kind, have imagined they experienced this witness." His specific reply to this question near the end of his second discourse is telling: "Though many fancy they experience what they do not, this is no prejudice to real experience."(16) The obvious counter-question is, How do you define "real experience"? That madmen, French prophets and enthusiasts had religious experiences, Wesley could not deny. Similarly, modern Wesleyans cannot deny the authenticity, or at least the occurrence, of religious experience among Jews, Hindus, Moslems, Mormons and Moonies. When one has encountered such religiously experienced people outside the Christian tradition, it appears artificially arbitrary to label the Christian religious experience "real" and all other experience "unreal" or "phony" or even "of the devil."

The philosopher of religion David Pailin has asserted that which is something of a truism for modernity: immediate experience is the most conclusive kind of verification for any particular thesis or statement. Even if one accepts this modern truism-and there is good reason to be suspicious of it-the question still arises whether this holds in the case of theistic verification by religious experience. "Unfortunately, although there is no need to doubt the genuineness of the basic experience," he writes, "there is considerable doubt about the justifiability of the theistic significance given to these experiences." (17) There are analogous experiences among those of other religious traditions, so that "in the end the significance attributed to religious experiences seems to reflect rather than to confirm existing beliefs."(18) (the classic example of this is that often the visions of Catholic mystics seem to be of the Virgin Mary.) The data of religious experience may confirm theis-

tic or specifically Christian claims ("that I am a child of God; that 'Jesus Christ hath loved me and given himself for me;'" ) only if the experiencer lives within the context of theistic or Christian traditions. In other words, that "Jesus Christ hath loved me and given himself for me" does not come given in the experience of assurance. Thus, assurance of God's acceptance is applied to the experience rather than being demanded by the experience. C. H. Whitely says the same when he writes, "What the subject of religious experience supposes himself to be apprehending cannot be unaffected by what he already believes there is to be apprehended."(19)

How, then, is one to interpret the Wesleyan experience and doctrine of the Spirit's witness in light of the plurality of religious experience? Three options quickly suggest themselves: a) to follow Wesley, more or less, in affirming that the evangelical experience is "real." while all else is at best. self-deception and at worst inspired by Satan; b) to relativize all religious experience as a human phenomenon explainable entirely in psychological (e.g., Freud), sociological /Durkheim) or cultural (Feuerbach, Marx) terms; or c)to regard all religious experience as human intimations of awareness of an Other (e.g., Schleiermacher, Otto). It is at the point of this third option that Wesley's doctrine of prevenient grace, which pictures God's Spirit drawing to the Father all persons by whatever possible means, might be most useful. I believe, however, that the most honest and fruitful approach to the question will involve a fusion of options b) and c), so that all religious experience is relativized as a wholly human function, which at the same time (and in all its humanness) may become a means of divine grace. This "incarnational" approach to religious experience should become clearer as we proceed.

2) In light of the first question concerning the relationship between the Spirit's witness and antecedent religious beliefs and presuppositions, is the doctrine of assurance sufficiently anchored in the eschatological soil of Romans 8 (the best scriptural support for it, and Wesley's primary text in this connection) in particular. and of the New Testament as a whole?

It should be remembered that, to the second objection to his doctrine. Wesley replied that the Spirit witnesses that we are God's children, and not that all our "thoughts, words and actions are conformable to the rule of Scripture." The intention behind this question is to try to bring Wesley's doctrine more in line with "the rule of Scripture," not simply in terms of our thoughts about doctrine (theoria), but in our words and actions (praxis) too.

Particularly in the work of Wolfhart Pannenberg and Jurgen Moltmann. Christian theology has begun to recover its apocalyptic roots. Thus, in Carl Braaten's estimation, modern theology with Barth recovered its Christological norm, but until recently sidestepped its eschatological form, "its definite connection with the question of man's hope for the future."(20)

This recovery ought to have a profound effect on a modern experience and understanding of assurance, for indeed Romans 8 is brimming with the eschatological hope of God's children being revealed, an event for which "all of creation waits expectantly and longs earnestly" (8:19). The whole creation moans with the pain of labor, awaiting the day of liberation when it "will be set free from its bondage to decay and corruption into the glorious

freedom of God's children" (8:21, 22). Thus the witness of the Spirit points to a new age in which all of creation will share in God's liberty.

As the theologians of hope have reminded us, the Christian kerygma proclaims that, in the resurrection of Jesus, this new age has already dawned. It is the same Spirit who raised up Jesus from death who dwells in and among us, and who testifies to our eschatological sonship and daughterhood through the resurrected Son. As Pannenberg writes, "In early Christianity the Spirit had eschatological significance. The word designated nothing else than the presence of the resurrection life in the Christians." (21) Thus we see that Braaten's criticism of modern theology is appropriate also for the Wesleyan doctrine of assurance; for Wesley, the norm of religious experience was indeed Christological-which is arguably one of Wesleyanism's strengths-but the form was, at best, only incidentally eschatological.

A possible bridge of understanding in Wesley, however, is the distinction he makes between the "assurance of faith" (the doctrine of assurance as usually understood) and the "assurance of hope." The assurance of which Wesley normally speaks, the assurance of faith, "is an assurance of present salvation only; therefore not necessarily perpetual, neither irreversible." (22) Here of course Wesley freed the idea of assurance from the weighty chains of predestinarian theologies. But Wesley spoke also of "the assurance of hope." or an assurance of personal perseverance to the end. "Wesley," writes Williams, "believed that to some God does give the full assurance that they will endure to the end, a conviction 'given immediately by the power of the Holy & host.' Yet it is not common, and it is not a necessary gift." (23) If this "assurance of hope" can be considered a corollary of the witness of the Spirit, it is perhaps at this point that Wesley can be said to have contributed to an eschatological religious experience which expresses itself in a theology of hope.

Of course, Wesley's hope was rather narrowly defined in terms of individual salvation, whereas modern theologians have better captured the Biblical hope of corporate or communal salvation. The hope of Romans 8 is one shared by "all creation" with those "who have the first fruits of the Spirit" (8:23) The fact that, in the resurrected Christ, this hope is proleptically fulfilled in this age also means that those who share his Spirit are called to be, in Moltmann's words, "construction workers and not only interpreters of the future whose power . . . in fulfillment is God. This means that Christian hope is a creative and militant hope in history." (24)

This revolutionary thrust of the Spirit in history is more evident, perhaps, in the more "enthusiastic" sects on the fringe, such as Joachim of Fiore and later Joachimism, than in Wesley and the Methodists. Nonetheless, as his own life indicates, it would be a great injustice to Wesley to suggest that he shared none of this visionary spirit. More significant than this, though was the revolutionary dynamic which, in his doctrine of Christian perfection, he injected into the stream of Christian thought: love expelling all sin in this life. In many ways his identification of Christian perfection with the infilling work of the Holy Spirit was analogous to Joachim's "age of the Spirit" As Theodore Runyan has indicated,

The theological rationale behind (early Methodism's) transformationist impulses was the Wesleyan doctrine of sanctification

or "Christian perfection." This doctrine is distinctive from notions of sanctification in other Christian traditions in that it expects the finite equivalent of eschatological fulfillment (i.e., entire sanctification) as something which can happen in history rather than beyond it. This gives birth to a fundamental hope for the reformability of history in the power of the Spirit.(25)

Even if Wesley himself did not perceive fully the eschatological dynamic of the Holy Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead, we as his twentieth century students certainly should. Thus, again borrowing from Braaten, it is not sufficient to continue emphasis on the Christological norm of religious experience for Wesley; we must also live within its eschatological form.

3) Does the Wesleyan doctrine of assurance sufficiently take into account the vital importance of the Christian community, the body of Christ, as a mediating presence and context for the believer and his or her religious experience?

The relationship this question bears to the previous one is obvious. For as long as the doctrine and experience of assurance pertain only to the individual and his or her present acceptance by God, there is no pressing need for the community. But when the corporate nature of humanity and consequently of the church is understood in all of its Biblical and sociological importance, and when the Spirit is experienced as the guarantor of a glorious eschatological freedom for all creation, it becomes quickly evident that the individualistic approach to the Spirit's witness is wholly inadequate. We do not become Christians or experience God's acceptance in isolation any more than we become persons in isolation or sinners in isolation. The self, whether viewed as person, sinner, or Christian, is forged and formed through relationships.

Insofar, then, as the witness of the Spirit continues to be understood as a religious experience of the solitary person, it seems appropriate to ask: What role does the faithful community play in functioning as a vehicle of divine forgiveness and acceptance, and of imparting consciousness or assurance thereof? We should remember that Wesley's own experience of assurance occurred not in solitude but in the company of fellow believers. It is doubtful whether he would have gained assurance had he followed his inclinations to stay home that evening! H. Richard Niebuhr voiced a similar sentiment when he wrote in his classic work, *Christ and Culture*:

The Christ who speaks to me without authorities and witnesses is not an actual Christ; he is no Jesus Christ of history. He may be nothing more than the projection of my wish or my compulsion; as, on the other hand, the Christ about whom I hear only through witnesses and never meet in my personal history is never Christ for me. We must make our individual decisions in our existential situation; but we do not make them individualistically in confrontation by a solitary Christ as solitary selves.(26)

The Christ "in my personal history," the "Christ for me," is undoubtedly the Christ of Wesley's doctrine of assurance: "I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation; and an assurance was given me that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death." The

issue where doubt arises is whether Wesley was sufficiently aware of "the Jesus Christ of history" who speaks through authorities and witnesses-or, stated differently, of the mediated nature of this experience of assurance. My assumption is that religious experience involves the mediation of the religious dimension through the other dimensions of human experience. The physical, moral, social, emotional and religious dimensions of the person all interpenetrate and are mediated through one another, and in fact can be considered separate "dimensions" only on paper. This process of mediation certainly is no different in the case of religious experience.

Thus, as Jerry Gill writes, "Disclosures of what may be called 'the divine dimension' do not occur in an experiential vacuum, but rather arise out of perceptual, conceptual, moral, and personal disclosures, which in turn arise out of empirical settings." (27) Ian Ramsey has rightly suggested that the most religiously significant of such finite and empirical experiences are those which involve interpersonal relationships. In this he echoes Martin Buber's poetic but powerful I and Thou, as well as Scripture, particularly as it is interpreted by liberation exegetes such as Jose Miranda. This personal or relational dimension comes especially to the fore when Gill emphasizes that, in every disclosure situation no matter what level of experience, there must exist the element of personal involvement and commitment, of risk and ambiguity. In this vale of ambiguity-"we see in a glass, darkly," Paul wrote-one speaks not of experience of God, strictly speaking, but of a knowledge of God related to experience, and mediated through experience. In this connection Hans Kung has written,

Statements on God will be verified and tested against the background of our experience of life: not in conclusive deduction from a supposedly obvious experience that renders unnecessary a decision on man's part, but in a clarifying illumination of the always problematical experience that invites man to a positive decision.(28)

This understanding of religious experience and knowledge as mediated through the "mundane" dimensions of experience-where the task of human interpretation is continually necessary-leads to a humble hesitance to define doctrine too neatly. Because of God's hiddenness in the realms of ordinary human history and experience, religious experience is tacit, not readily articulated. Religious knowledge," writes Gill, "is primarily tacit because the deepest religious response is always a matter of action as distinguished from concepts. (29) It is better embodied than encoded; or, as John's gospel puts it, truth is something which we do (3:21). Here we move very near Wesley's insistence on the dynamic interplay of the inner or direct witness and the outward fruit or indirect witness of the Spirit in our lives.

If this view of religious experience is accepted, then Wesley's idea of the immediacy of the Spirit's witness must be clarified and qualified. He often stated that the Spirit bore direct, immediate witness with our spirit that we are God's children. At the same time, when the doctrine of assurance is placed within the context of Wesley's emphases upon Scripture, the church and its traditions, the sacraments and human reason, it is possible to understand him quite differently. Indeed, for Wesley the Spirit's witness came in and through these means of grace, never apart from them. Hence his disdain for Moravian quietism, which taught that religious seekers ought

to do absolutely nothing but wait for Christ's unmediated word of assurance, and hence his own opposing teaching that the seeker ought to attend to every means of grace available to her or him. Wesley probably never did shake completely the Moravian stress on the immediacy of the Spirit's witness, but his denial of Moravian quietism and his own emphasis on the means of grace indicate at least a leaning in the direction suggested by this clarifying question.

### **III. Concluding Remarks**

It has been my aim to re-examine the Wesleyan doctrine of assurance, or the witness of the Spirit, in the light of certain crucial issues with which contemporary theology is faced. The questions which have been directed at the doctrine, and the answers suggested, might be summarized in these three programmatic theses: that the doctrine of the Spirit's witness

- 1) must acknowledge the reality of profoundly religious experience among non-Christians, and realize that human interpretations of such experiences are not derived from, but applied to and formative of, such phenomena through the conceptual tools and labels from one's religious tradition;
- 2) must be cognizant of the eschatological form in which the Spirit works and witnesses according to Christian proclamation, and show how this eschatological hope ought to move us to visionary, revolutionary words and deeds; and
- 3) must take into account the absolute necessity of the Church, Christ's body, as a means of mediating assurance of divine forgiveness and acceptance, because of the mediated and interpreted nature of all human experience, including, of course, religious experience.

### **NOTES**

1 See, for example, Paul Bassett, "Conservative Wesleyan Theology and the Challenge of Humanism," *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (Spring 1973), esp. p. 76; and Rob Staples, "The Present Frontiers of Wesleyan Theology," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* Vol. 12, o. 1 (Spring 1977)

2Wesley, Sermon X, "The Witness of the Spirit," Discourse I, *The Works of John Wesley*, Vol. V (Kansas City: Nazarene Publishing House reproduction of the Wesleyan Conference Office edition, 1872), p. 111.

3Ibid., p. 114.

4Ibid., p. 117

5Ibid., p. 119.

6Ibid., p. 121.

7Ibid .

8Quoted by Colin Williams, *John Wesley's Theology Today* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1960), p. 49.

9Ibid., footnote 8.

10Helmut Thielicke, *The Hidden Question of God* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1977), p. 129.

11Wesley, *op. cit.*, p. 122.

12Wesley, Sermon XI, "The Witness of the Spirit," Discourse II, Works, Vol. V, p. 131. The three objections are the first, second and fifth in Wesley's list, pp. 129-131.

13Ibid., p. 130.

14Ibid.

15Ibid., pp. 133, 134-

16Ibid., p. 133.

17David Pailin, "Theistic Verification," in *The Living God*, ed. Dow Kirkpatrick (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971), p. 56.

18Ibid.

19C. H. Whiteley, "The Cognitive Factor in Religious Experience," in *Religious Experience and the Problem of Religious Knowledge*, ed. Ronald Santoni (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1968), p. 262.

20Carl Braaten, *The Future of God* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), p.60.

21Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus-God and Man* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1968), p. 67.

22Quoted by Williams, *op. cit.*, p. 123.

23Ibid., p. 124-

24Jurgen Moltmann, *Religion, Revolution and the Future* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1969), p. 217.

25Theodore Runyan, "Sanctification and Liberation: A Re-examination in the Light of the Methodist Tradition," manuscript of paper presented at 1977 Oxford Conference, on Methodist Theological Studies, p. 2.

26Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1951), pp. 245-246.

27Jerry Gill, *The Possibility of Religious Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Wm.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1971), p. 182.

28Hans Küng, *Does God Exist?* (Garden City: Doubleday & Co., 1980). 550.

29Gill, *op. cit.*, p. 189.

# **PHOEBE PALMER AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF PENTECOSTAL PNEUMATOLOGY**

by  
Charles Edward White

More than one hundred million of the world's one billion Christians call themselves "Pentecostals" or "charismatics."<sup>1</sup> Most of them share the belief that believers should experience a work of grace subsequent to justification in which they receive a baptism of the Holy Spirit similar to the experience of the first Christians on the day of Pentecost. This Spirit baptism cleanses their hearts from sin and empowers them to witness.<sup>2</sup> Although many Pentecostals feel that their pneumatology arose simply from an unbiased reading of the Bible, others see a more complex combination of causes. Historians of doctrine generally agree that the origin of modern Pentecostal teaching about the Holy Spirit lies in the thinking of John Wesley, but they do not agree on the process by which his thought was transformed into it.<sup>3</sup> One universally neglected area is the influence of Phoebe Palmer, a Methodist laywoman. Mrs. Palmer's speaking and writing played a decisive role in that transformation and thus make her arguably the most influential female theologian in Christian history.

Phoebe Palmer was born in New York City in 1807 and died there in 1874. Besides her contributions as a theologian, she also significantly influenced the course of American religion as a revivalist, feminist, and humanitarian.<sup>4</sup> As a theologian she provided the link between John Wesley and the Pentecostals by modifying his theology of Christian perfection.

Phoebe Palmer simplified and popularized John Wesley's doctrine of entire sanctification, modifying it in six different ways. First, she followed John Fletcher in his identification of entire sanctification with the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Second, she developed Adam Clarke's suggestion and linked holiness with power. Third, like Clarke, she stressed the instantaneous elements of sanctification to the exclusion of the gradual. Fourth, again following Clarke, she taught that entire sanctification is not really the goal of the Christian life, but rather its beginning. Fifth, through her "altar theology" she reduced the attainment of sanctification to a simple three-stage process of entire consecration, faith, and testimony. Sixth, she held that one

needed no evidence other than the Biblical text to be assured of entire sanctification. Each of these changes was later incorporated into the pneumatology of the Pentecostal movement.

Although Phoebe Palmer did not think of herself as a theologian, the eighteen books she published and the *Guide to Holiness*, which she edited from 1864 to 1874, constantly explicated her theological ideas. Some male Methodist leaders refused to take her seriously as a theologian, but to the bishops, professors, and editors who came to weekly meetings in her home, to the thirty-seven thousand who subscribed to her magazine, and to the hundreds of thousands who read her books, she was an important teacher of theological truth.<sup>5</sup>

Like John Wesley, Phoebe Palmer taught that entire sanctification is a second distinct work of grace in which God cleanses the believer's heart of sin, and fills it wholly with His love. Such heart holiness is a requirement for entry into heaven. Because God commands it, He must also supply the ability to attain it, and He gives that ability in response to the Christian's faith.<sup>6</sup>

John Fletcher, Wesley's lieutenant, was the first theologian to equate the experience of entire sanctification with the baptism of the Holy Spirit given at Pentecost.<sup>7</sup> Phoebe Palmer adopted this identification and in her first theological book compared the instantaneous sanctification of a friend to the events of Pentecost, and added "many others were baptized as suddenly at the same time [as he was]."<sup>8</sup> This idea continued to occur in her other early works, and received fuller explication in *Promise of the Father*, published one year after the revival of 1857-58.<sup>9</sup> Even before the revival, Phoebe Palmer urged her hearers at a camp meeting to receive the "Pentecostal baptism."<sup>10</sup> With the coming of the revival, the frequency of Mrs. Palmer's use of Pentecostal language began to increase. During a four-year trip to promote the revival in England, Mrs. Palmer and her husband developed an order of service based on Pentecost which later became their standard pattern. They would start by leading a hymn about Pentecost, then have Dr. Palmer read and comment upon Acts 2. Next Mrs. Palmer would exhort those present to be baptized with "an inward baptism of pure fire." Those wishing to receive the blessing would then come forward for a prayer service around the altar, after which they would be urged to bear testimony about what the Lord had done for them.<sup>11</sup>

Not only did Mrs. Palmer begin to preach more about Pentecost after the beginning of the revival of 1857-58, but she also began to report the results of her meetings in Pentecostal terms. She reported the results of her first week in Hamilton, Ontario not by listing the number of saved and sanctified, but by saying "twenty-one souls were blessed with pardon, and several others, I trust with the full baptism of the Holy Ghost." She went on to equate the revival with Pentecost itself: "It is that which was foretold by the prophet Joel, and of which the apostle Peter spoke, . . . furnishing a marked demonstration that the same power still continues in the church that was in the apostolic church...."<sup>12</sup> Her use of Pentecostal language characterized her reports from England, and continued after she returned to America.<sup>13</sup>

Donald Dayton has pointed out that the revival of 1857-58 led to an increased interest in Pentecost in the whole Evangelical movement; Mrs.

Palmer's increasing use of Pentecostal language was paralleled by the practice of Baptists, Congregationalists, Presbyterians, and other Methodists.<sup>14</sup> He attributes the shift to a variety of cultural and theological factors. Most persuasive of his cultural arguments is his observation that the culture of the late 1850s was not as optimistic as the culture of the late 1830s had been. Immigration, urbanization, and industrialization made American society more complex, and the powers of evil, especially that of slavery, seemed more deeply entrenched than ever. Perfectionistic language was optimistic and future-oriented. It looked forward to the day when humans, by obeying God perfectly, would usher in the new age. It seemed appropriate in the heyday of Jacksonian democracy, when everyone was founding a utopia. With the dissolution of the cultural supports for the language of Christian perfection, those who held the doctrine were open to a new way to express their belief. Unlike the forward-looking perfectionist language, Pentecostal language looked back. It called to mind a time when God had miraculously intervened to give His followers purity and power, and then enabled them to turn the world upside down. Such restorationist language was more suited to a time when people felt powerless in the face of complex social problems and institutionalized evil.<sup>15</sup>

Besides this cultural reason for a shift to Pentecostal imagery, Dayton has also suggested a theological reason. As an interest in holiness spread beyond the Methodists, it became easier to present the doctrine in Pentecostal terms than in perfectionistic. Perfectionistic language had always been subject to misunderstanding: John Wesley himself felt constrained to spend almost as much time explaining what Christian perfection was not as he did explaining what it was.<sup>16</sup> Perfectionism was particularly distasteful to those in the Reformed tradition because Luther and Calvin had explicitly taught that no one achieves perfection in this life. Thus when speaking among their spiritual heirs, it was helpful to adopt another vocabulary. In addition to this longstanding aversion to speaking of perfection, recent American events had placed the word in even worse odor. In 1848 John Humphrey Noyes moved his community to Oneida, New York. Its well-publicized activities in the name of perfectionism caused the word to stand for heterodoxy, communism, and adultery. In order to avoid confusion, another term was expedient.<sup>17</sup>

It is possible that there was another factor in Phoebe Palmer's increasing use of Pentecostal language. In 1856 an English Methodist, William Arthur, published a book in New York called *The Tongue of Fire; or the True Power of Christianity*. In this immensely popular book, Arthur hints at the equation of entire sanctification with the Pentecost experience, and states that if Christians would allow themselves to be baptized in the Holy Ghost the whole world could be won for Christ.<sup>18</sup> Because this latter idea appears in Mrs. Palmer's writings after 1856, it is possible she was influenced by Arthur's work.<sup>19</sup>

An even more likely cause of Phoebe Palmer's increasing use of Pentecostal language was her study of Acts 2 in preparation for her book on women in the church. In December of 1856 she realized that the baptism of the Spirit given at Pentecost empowered and impelled its recipients to speak for Christ. Realizing that the Spirit was poured out on women as well as men, she came to see that women had the power and obligation to testify

about the Lord. Over the next two years she developed this insight into a four-hundred-page book. These were the years of the revival, and the years in which she began to speak more frequently about Pentecost. Evidently her own study of Scripture combined with the external influences to lead her to a greater use of Pentecostal terminology.<sup>20</sup>

Closely tied to Pentecostal imagery is the linkage of entire sanctification with divine power. The Scriptural account of the events previous to Pentecost equates "power from on high" with the baptism of the Holy Ghost. John Fletcher noticed this connection, but did not develop its significance. In listing nine benefits of entire sanctification, he never mentioned a greater influx of God's power.<sup>21</sup> Adam Clarke devoted one sentence to the idea, but Phoebe Palmer made it a central element of her teaching.<sup>22</sup>

Even prior to her increasing use of Pentecostal language, Mrs. Palmer had understood the connection between entire sanctification and energy in the Lord's service. Those who have been sanctified need not worry about their internal state, but may give themselves wholly to the Lord's service. This message became more explicit after Mrs. Palmer adopted Pentecostal imagery; she often declared, "Holiness is power."<sup>23</sup> She went on to say that entire sanctification was "the promised ordination of power" and that "heart holiness and the gift of power should ever be regarded as identical."<sup>24</sup> She told ministers that holiness was exactly the power needed "to raise low churches," and blamed their failures on a lack of sanctification. What Peter accomplished for the Lord in five hours after Pentecost would probably have taken him five years without the baptism, she averred.<sup>25</sup>

Once again historical events and cultural factors may have played a role in Phoebe Palmer's increasing emphasis on the connection between holiness and power. The event was the revival. Mrs. Palmer believed that God had released His Pentecostal power in the revival because Christians had been seeking holiness: wherever she went preaching holiness she saw the power poured out.<sup>26</sup> Conversely, the cultural factor was the declining influence of Evangelicals in the second half of the century. Despite the revival of the late 1850s, the nation was torn by war, the immigrants kept coming, and the cities grew. Even worse, many of those who thought the end of slavery would bring on "The Marriage Supper of the Lamb" lived to see that event turned into "The Great Barbeque" with most Americans left out.<sup>27</sup> The cultural pessimism of the late 1850s became despair in the next decades. Perhaps this sense of powerlessness made people especially hungry for Mrs. Palmer's explanation of how to get power. Thus she was eager to preach about power because she had found it, while her listeners were eager to hear about power because they had lost it.<sup>28</sup>

The third change Phoebe Palmer made in the Wesley's doctrine of entire sanctification was to disrupt the balance between the instantaneous and the gradual elements. In Wesley's doctrine of Christian perfection there is a tension between sanctification as a gradual process and sanctification as an instantaneous blessing. Repeatedly Wesley said that entire sanctification comes as the result of a gradual process and an instantaneous crisis. More specifically, he taught that a gradual process of growth both precedes and follows the instantaneous crisis.<sup>29</sup>

Phoebe Palmer uncoupled this tension between gradual and instantaneous sanctification in Wesley's thought, placing all her emphasis on the instan-

taneous. As with the idea of holiness and power, she again developed a brief comment of Adam Clarke into a fundamental doctrine.<sup>30</sup> The thesis of her first theological book is that there is a shorter way to holiness; "long waiting and struggling with the powers of darkness is not necessary" because "THERE IS A SHORTER WAY!" In fact, the shorter way is the only way.<sup>31</sup> She reiterated this idea in all her works, arguing for its truth from her own experience and from the Scripture. She told how she had lingered just shy of holiness, waiting for deeper convictions which would enable her to ask for this grace confidently, only to find that she had been wasting her time. God did not require her to wait for the blessing. In fact, He had commanded her to possess it.<sup>32</sup>

In addition to citing her own experience, Mrs. Palmer strengthened her case by quoting Scripture. She used the analogy of the Exodus, pointing out that just as the Jews could have made the trip to Canaan in forty days instead of forty years, so the Christian need not wander aimlessly for years outside the promised land of holiness.<sup>33</sup> She quoted Matthew 11:12 about the kingdom of heaven being taken by violence, urging her readers to be bold in their quest for sanctification.<sup>34</sup> Most often she cited 2 Corinthians 6:2, "Now is the day of salvation" to prove her point.<sup>35</sup>

The fourth modification Phoebe Palmer made in the doctrine of Christian perfection was to shift the place of entire sanctification in the chronology of the Christian life. Because entire sanctification is available to every believer at this very instant, and because each Christian ought to receive all the blessing that God wants to bestow, no believer should tarry long at the point of justification, but should quickly move on to entire sanctification. John Wesley believed the same thing, but his emphasis was different. As early as 1739 John Wesley came to believe that Christian perfection was not the unreachable goal of the Christian life, but a present possibility. He admitted that there was no reason why one may not be sanctified soon after justification, and urged his hearers to expect it immediately.<sup>36</sup> Nevertheless, in his later writings sanctification was often presented as the goal of the Christian life.<sup>37</sup> Wesley wrote of sanctification as a gift usually given shortly before death as preparation for heaven.<sup>38</sup> In addition, Wesley asked his preachers not, "Are you perfect?" but, "Are you going on to perfection?" despite his insistence that God could sanctify the believer this instant as easily as He could in the next thousand years.<sup>39</sup>

Exemplary are the verses of the hymns John Wesley prints to illustrate his teaching on sanctification. All of them speak of aspiring after holiness, but none of them speaks of having attained it. They long for the benefits of full salvation, but do not testify of having received them yet.<sup>40</sup> Thus while John Wesley believed that sanctification could occur early in a believer's Christian life, in most of his writings and his brother's hymns sanctification is presented as something not yet attained, giving the impression that it is the goal of the Christian life. Perhaps the clearest example of change in emphasis from sanctification as the goal of the Christian life to sanctification as its beginning can be seen in the differences between the hymns John Wesley directed the Methodists to use and those Phoebe Palmer wrote. John Wesley published this hymn written by his brother Charles. It is typical of those the Methodists sang about entire sanctification:

O Jesus, at Thy feet we wait  
Till Thou shalt bid us rise  
Restored to our unsinning state,  
To love's sweet paradise.

Savior from sin we thee receive,  
From all indwelling sin  
Thy blood, we steadfastly believe,  
Shall make us thoroughly clean.

Since Thou wouldst have us free from sin  
And pure as those above  
Make haste to bring Thy nature in,  
And perfect us in love.

The counsel of thy love fulfil,  
Come quickly, gracious Lord!  
Be it according to Thy will,  
According to Thy word.

According to our faith in Thee  
Let it to us be done  
O that we all Thy face might see,  
And know as we are known!

O that the perfect grace were given,  
The love diffused abroad!  
O that our hearts were all a heaven  
Forever filled with God!<sup>41</sup>

Note Wesley's use of the future tense, the confession that the singers are waiting to be sanctified, and the prayer that God would finish the work. In this and most other of Wesley's hymns, sanctification is a goal that the singers are still seeking, not a present attainment. Compare Wesley's hymn to the most famous of Phoebe Palmer's songs:

O now I see the crimson wave,  
The fountain deep and wide;  
Jesus, my Lord, mighty to save,  
Point to His wounded side.

*Refrain:*

The cleansing stream I see, I see!  
I plunge, and O it cleanseth me;  
O praise the Lord, it cleanseth me,  
It cleanseth me, yes, cleanseth me.  
I see the new creation rise  
I hear the speaking blood;  
It speaks! polluted nature die,  
Sinks 'neath the crimson flood.

*Refrain:*

I rise to walk in heav'n's own light,  
Above the world and sin,  
With heart made pure and garments white,  
And Christ enthroned within.

*Refrain*

Amazing grace! 'tis heav'n below,  
To feel the blood applied,  
And Jesus, only Jesus know,  
My Jesus crucified.

*Refrain42*

Here there is no prayer for cleansing, and no waiting for holiness. There is no future tense in the song; everything is past or present. Now the cleansing stream is available, and now the singer is plunging and being cleansed. By the third verse sanctification is an accomplished fact. The believer can testify to a pure heart and a sinless walk.

Melvin Dieter argues that Mrs. Palmer's change in Wesley's doctrine shows the application of "all that was America in the nineteenth century" to the preaching of the eighteenth-century divine. He points out that her upsetting of the Wesleyan balance between the gradual and the instantaneous, and her shifting of sanctification from the goal of the Christian life to its beginning exactly parallel the transformations Jonathan Edwards and others effected in the Puritan doctrine of conversion.<sup>43</sup> While John Cotton and other early American Puritans preached as if regeneration were the goal of the believer's life and minutely described the stages in the conversion process, Edwards preached that one had an "immediate duty" to repent, and Finney telescoped the stages of conversion into a single event.<sup>44</sup>

As correct as Dieter is to see the influence of American optimism and impatience in Phoebe Palmer's treatment of Wesleyan doctrines, there may be another explanation of the data. Not only was Phoebe Palmer applying "all that was America in the nineteenth century" to Wesley, but she was also carrying Wesleyan doctrines to their natural conclusion; she was working out their inner logic. If it is true that all Christians will eventually be sanctified, and if it is true that it is better to be sanctified than merely justified, and if it is true that God can sanctify the believer now just as easily as a thousand years from now, and if it is true that God gives sanctification in response to the believer's faith, then every Christian should be sanctified now. Wesley preached each of the protases, and he admitted the truth of the apodoses, but, as he said of others, *Non persuadebis, etiamsi persuaseris* (You will not persuade me even though you do persuade me): he was not confident of the conclusion, no matter how logical it seemed.<sup>45</sup> "Plain matter of fact" had convinced him that people could not merely believe and be sanctified whenever they wanted, yet the logic of his theology told him that all could be sanctified if they wanted to. He expressed the problem this way: "That every man may believe if he will earnestly maintain, and yet that he can believe when he will I totally deny." Not knowing how to resolve the dilemma, in the end he remained content to leave it a paradox: "But there will be always something in the matter which we cannot well comprehend or explain."<sup>46</sup>

Phoebe Palmer's experience was different from Wesley's. Leading up to her own experience of entire sanctification she followed his reasoning to its logical conclusion, and then found the blessing she had been seeking. "Plain matter of fact," that is, her own experience, had convinced her that

people could be sanctified not only if they willed but when they willed. That conviction was strengthened when she preached holiness to others and saw them find full salvation before they left the meeting. Thus both Phoebe Palmer and John Wesley agreed on two sides of the Wesleyan quadrilateral: both Scripture and reason led them to expect instantaneous entire sanctification not long after the beginning of the Christian life. But they disagreed about the third side, experience. Wesley's experience led him to pull back from the logic of his conclusions; Palmer's led her to preach Wesley's logical conclusions vigorously.

The fifth change Mrs. Palmer made in Wesley's theology was to systematize the way to seek sanctification. Once again she unhitched two contradictory elements in Wesley's thought, putting all her emphasis on the simpler, quicker element. John Wesley urged his hearers to expect instantaneous entire sanctification by faith: "Look for it then every day, every hour, every moment! Why not this hour, this moment? Certainly you may look for it now, if you believe it is by faith."<sup>47</sup> He had also, however, advised those seeking sanctification to "wait" for God's action

in vigorous, universal obedience, in a zealous keeping of all the commandments, in watchfulness and painfulness, in denying ourselves, and taking up our cross daily; as well as in earnest prayer and fasting, and a close attendance upon all the ordinances of God. And if a man dream of attaining it any other way (yea, or of keeping it when it is attained, . . . ), he deceiveth his own soul. It is true, we receive it by simple faith; but God does not, will not, give that faith unless we seek it with all diligence, in the way which He hath ordained.<sup>48</sup>

In other words, by living the normal life of a Methodist. In place of believing in instantaneous entire sanctification, and waiting for it by practicing Wesley's generalized Christian discipline, Phoebe Palmer substituted a "shorter way" to holiness. All one needed to do was follow this simple three-step process for being sanctified: (1) entire consecration, (2) faith, and (3) testimony.<sup>49</sup>

The first step to entire sanctification is entire consecration, "a perfect and entire yielding up of all to Christ, an entire trust in Christ, and a continuous reliance on Christ, for all needed grace under every diversity of circumstance or experience."<sup>50</sup> It is a once-and-for-all surrender of "body, soul, and spirit; time, talents, and influence; and also of the dearest ties of nature, . . ." which must be reaffirmed daily.<sup>51</sup> It is a determination that "we give ourselves at once wholly and for ever away to [God's] service, in order that we may be unto him a peculiar people, zealous of good works, not living to ourselves. . ."<sup>52</sup>

The second step to entire sanctification is to exercise faith. According to Mrs. Palmer, in 2 Corinthians 6:16-7:1 God promises to receive the offering of those who separate themselves from all evil through entire consecration.<sup>53</sup> If believers entirely consecrate themselves to the Lord, they have God's word that He sanctifies them. Whether or not one feels any different after devoting every area of one's life to the Lord, one must not question whether God has sanctified the heart. To doubt that one is entirely sanctified is to doubt God's word.<sup>54</sup> One must not trust feelings; one must trust the written word of God.<sup>55</sup>

The third step in the sanctification process is testimony. The work has already occurred, but it must be ratified as believers publicly bears witness to what, on the basis of the Scripture, they know God has done in the heart. While John Wesley had opined that those who received the blessing should tell other believers, Phoebe Palmer asserted the "binding nature of the obligation to profess the blessing.<sup>56</sup> Mrs. Palmer taught that Romans 10:9-10, which speaks of believing in the heart and confessing with the mouth, requires public profession as well as heart faith for God's work to be effective. Not to tell others is to withhold the honor due to Christ; in addition, simple gratitude requires the Christian to acknowledge what the Lord has done in the heart.<sup>57</sup>

So important is this third step that Mrs. Palmer warns those who do not confess the blessing that they will not retain it.<sup>58</sup> Citing the case of John Fletcher who lost holiness five times because he refused to testify to it, and quoting John Wesley's words she told those who were unwilling to profess entire sanctification publicly that they would not be able to keep the blessing.<sup>59</sup>

Mrs. Palmer developed her three-step plan for achieving entire sanctification in conjunction with her "altar theology." She was seeking for some Scriptural basis for applying 2 Corinthians 6:17, "I will receive you," to herself. She found this assurance by arguing from a catena of passages containing sacrificial imagery. In Romans 12:1-2 she read that Christians are commanded to offer themselves as sacrifices to God, in Matthew 23:19 that the altar sanctifies the gift, in Exodus 29:37 that whatever touches the altar is holy, and in Hebrews 13:10 that Christians have an altar which is more sacred than the one in the tabernacle. Following Adam Clarke, she believed that this greater altar is Christ Himself.<sup>60</sup> From these passages Mrs. Palmer deduced that Christians who entirely consecrate themselves to Christ are presenting their bodies as living sacrifices. Christ Himself is the altar upon which the offering is made and so as long as believers rest themselves entirely on Him, their all is on the altar. Because whatever touches the altar is holy, the believers themselves are holy. Thus entire consecration guarantees entire sanctification.<sup>61</sup>

Phoebe Palmer's sixth change in the Wesleyan doctrine of entire sanctification was to insist that the witness of the Spirit, giving assurance of full salvation, was not some subjective experience, but was the objective word of Scripture. In the Plain Account of Christian Perfection Wesley had said that believers ought not to consider themselves sanctified until they had the unmistakable inner witness of the Spirit: "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>62</sup> In the same work, however, he said that "the witness of sanctification is not always clear at first," that it is "sometimes stronger and sometimes fainter," and that one needs no inner witness if he has no doubt.<sup>63</sup>

In contrast to Wesley's equivocal view was Phoebe Palmer's teaching about the evidence of sanctification. She believed that to demand the inner witness is to question God. The Lord has said "I will receive you" to all who offer everything to Him. Those who refuse to believe His plain word dishonor God. They cannot be sanctified, and are rightly sent to hell if they persist in their unbelief.<sup>64</sup> Mrs. Palmer based her argument on the reason-

ing which led to her own sanctification. When she sought assurance that she was sanctified she remembered the Scripture, "I will receive you." When she wondered if she should believe it without any other evidence, she realized that if she had heard a voice from heaven speaking to her she would believe it. How much more then should she believe the Bible!<sup>65</sup>

That Phoebe Palmer shaped the pneumatology of the holiness movement is generally agreed. The changes she made in Wesley's theology were institutionalized by the establishment of the National Camp Meeting Association for the Promotion of Holiness in 1867, and by the founding of the holiness denominations in the next three decades. These holiness groups, many of which later merged to form the Church of the Nazarene in 1907 and 1908, adopted all six of her changes in the Wesleyan idea of Christian perfection. Her three steps to sanctification became one of the main ways to receive the second blessing, and her altar imagery helped to shape their preaching and singing.<sup>66</sup>

Although most historians trace the pneumatology of the holiness movement back to Phoebe Palmer, the connection between her and Pentecostalism has been overlooked. Most often the credit for the reshaping of Wesley's theology has gone to Charles Finney, and to his colleagues at Oberlin, Asa Mahan and John Morgan.<sup>67</sup> While it is true that the Oberlin theologians identified entire sanctification with the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and said it could be received in an instant, the cynosure of their teaching was that a person could receive the power to will what was right. This right willing, or perfect submission to the will of God, was available as a free gift from the Lord. The gift did not guarantee perfect obedience, but it did secure consistent right intention.<sup>68</sup> Missing from their doctrine is the strong emphasis on power, the initiatory nature of sanctification, and the simple three-step process for attaining sanctification. All these elements later became important parts of Pentecostal pneumatology.<sup>69</sup>

Today Mrs. Palmer's influence on Pentecostalism is seen most clearly . the three steps commonly taught as a means of receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Seekers for the full baptism in Pentecostalism are usually told: (1) be converted, (2) obey God fully, and (3) believe. The first step, conversion, is implicit in the teaching of Phoebe Palmer. The second step, obey, is a renunciation of all sinful practices and attitudes, and promise uture commitment. It is exactly what Mrs. Palmer meant by entire consecration. Faith, the third step, means believing that God will fulfill His promise Pentecostals teach that when faith is sufficient, God sends the baptism. Similarly, Phoebe Palmer said that God sanctifies the believer when the gift apprehended by faith. Many Pentecostals do not explicitly mention Mrs. Palmer's third step, testimony, but the public speaking in tongues that occurs the "tarrying meeting" serves the same function.<sup>70</sup>

A major difference between Mrs. Palmer and most modern Pentecostals that they differ about assurance. Many scorn the idea that one could receive the baptism and not feel any different. For them glossolalia and strong emoons give the assurance; without them one has not yet received the baptism.<sup>71</sup> Nevertheless, there are some Pentecostal teachers who tell their Illy-consecrated hearers that God has baptized them, even if they do not feel any different. These newly-baptized people are then told to express their faith in what God has done by beginning to make glossolalic sounds. In

response to their naked faith shown by their obedience, God will give the sign of tongues.<sup>72</sup> The affinities of this doctrine with Mrs. Palmer's are clear.

While it is unlikely that many in the Pentecostal movement today know about Phoebe Palmer, the situation of their theological forebears was different. They were only a generation removed from Mrs. Palmer herself, and her ideas were still being publicized through her books, through various Tuesday Meetings, and through the Guide to Holiness which for three years at the turn of the century bore the title, Guide to Holiness and Pentecostal Life. Even if they had no direct contact with Phoebe Palmer, they certainly could have imbibed her ideas from the preaching and singing of the Holiness Movement.

Thus Phoebe Palmer prepared the way for the modern Pentecostal movement by modifying John Wesley's doctrine of Christian perfection in six ways. In the next generation people who accepted her pneumatology added the expectation that the sanctified would evidence the fact by speaking in tongues. When that expectation was fulfilled, Pentecostalism was born. Although Phoebe Palmer was not really the mother of the movement, she may lay claim to the title of grandmother. As such today she has one hundred million spiritual descendants and may thus be the most influential female theologian the Church has yet produced.

## NOTES

1David B. Barrett, ed., *World Christian Encyclopedia* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 838. Although "Pentecostal" usually refers to separate denominations espousing Pentecostal beliefs while "charismatic" refers to those who hold Pentecostal belief while belonging to non-Pentecostal denominations, I will use the term "Pentecostal" to refer to both groups.

2Ibid.; Frederick Dale Bruner, *A Theology of the Holy Spirit: The Pentecostal Experience the New Testament Witness* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1970), p. 21.

3Ibid., pp. 43-44; Donald W. Dayton, "Theological Roots of Pentecostalism," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1978; Vincent Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Movement in the United States* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1971), pp. 13-32.

4The full story of Mrs. Palmer's career and thought may be found in the author's *The Beauty of Holiness: Phoebe Palmer as Theologian, Revivalist, Feminist, and Humanitarian* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986).

5Guide to Holiness 29 (1856): 155; 57 (1870): 186; 82 (1882) 64. [Hereafter the Guide to Holiness will be GTH.]

6John Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection in The Works of John Wesley*, Thomas Jackson, ed., 3rd ed., 14 vols. London: The Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, 1872; reprint ed., Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), 11:366-445; Phoebe Palmer, *Incidental Illustrations of the Economy of Salvation* (New York: Foster & Palmer, Jr., 1855), pp. 38, 283;

Phoebe Palmer, *The Way of Holiness with Notes by the Way*, 2nd ed., (New York: Lane & Tippett, 1845), pp. 32, 118; Phoebe Palmer, *Faith and Its Effects* (New York: Joseph Longking, 1852), p. 349. Hereafter Incidental Illustrations will be II, *The Way of Holiness* will be WOH, and *Faith and Its Effects* will be F&E.]

7John Fletcher, *Third Check to Antinomianism and Last Check to Antinomianism in The Works of the Reverend John Fletcher, Late Vicar of Madeley*, 4 vols. (New York: Carlton & Porter, n.d.), 1:160, 2:630-31; Timothy L. Smith, "How John Fletcher Became the Theologian of Wesleyan Perfectionism, 1770-1776," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 15/1 (Spring 1980): 70; and Dayton, pp. 56-67.

8WOH, p. 185 9II, p. 75; F&E, p. 256; GTH 6 (1844): 27-28, 8 (1845): 94, 23 (1853~: 176, 30 (1856): 112; and Phoebe Palmer, *Promise of the Father* (Boston: H. V. Degen, 1859; reprint ed., Salem, Ohio: Schmul Publishers, 1981) passim. Elereafter PF.]

10Mrs. Palmer made the statement at the camp meeting in Millbrook Ontario on September 13, 1856. See GTH 32 (1857): 24-25.

11GTH 44 (1863): 162; George Hughes, "Letter from England," *New York Christian Advocate and Journal* 23 July 1863, p. 233. See also GTH 55 (1869): 90, (1871): 154, and 61 (1872): 58.

12PF, pp. 252, 257-58.

13See, for example, Phoebe Palmer, *Four Years in the Old World*, 3rd ed. (New York: Foster & Palmer, Jr., 1866), p. 416 and GTH 50 (1866): 59ff.

14Dayton, pp. 86-89.

15Ibid., pp. 91-93.

16 See, for example, John Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, Works, 11:374-75.

17Alice Felt Tyler, *Freedom 's Ferment* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), pp. 184-195; Dayton, p. 99.

18William Arthur, *The Tongue of Fire; or the True Power of Christianity*, New York: Harper & Brothers, 1856), pp. 48-56, 321-337; Dayton, p. 89.

19GTH 56 (1866): 151.

20Phoebe Palmer, *Diary, December, 1856*, in Richard Wheatley, *The Life and Letters of Mrs. Phoebe Palmer* (New York: W. C. Palmer, Jr., 1876), pp. 496-97.

21Fletcher, "Last Check," 2:630-32, 619-25.

22Clarke, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (New York: Lane & Scott, 1851), pp. 202.

23See, for example, GTH 33 (1858):11 and [Phoebe Palmer], *The Parting Gift to Fellow Laborers and Young Converts* (New York: Walter C. Palmer 1869)), p. 7.

24GTH 50 (1866): 189; 64 (1873): 24.

25aTH 39 (1861): 149, 68 (1875): 43, and 33 (1858): 39.

26Phoebe Palmer to Sarah Lankford, 10 October 1857, in Wheatley, p 329; GTH 33 (1858): 11-12; 42 (1862): 178.

27 Vernon Louis Parrington, *Main Currents in American Thought*, 3 vols (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1930), 3:23-24; Timothy Smith *Revivalism and Social Reform* (New York: Abingdon, 1957), p. 7.

28Dayton, pp. 91-97.

29John Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, Works 11 :402. See also John Wesley to "John Smith," 30 December 1745, and John Wesley to Charles Wesley, September 1762; both in John Wesley, *The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.*, Nehemiah Curnock, ed., st. ed., 8 vols. (London: Epworth Press, 1906-1916), 2:62, 4:187. [Hereafter Letters.]

30Clarke, pp. 207-208.

31WOH, pp. 17-18. Emphasis original.

32Ibid., pp. 18-19.

33Ibid., p. 100.

34Ibid., p. 231.

35II, pp. 15, 80; GTH 46 (1864): 103.

36Timothy Smith, "George Whitefield and Wesleyan Perfectionism," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 19/1 (Spring 1984): 67-68; Wesley, "The Scripture Way of Salvation," in Works, 6:54.

37David L. Cubie, "Perfection in Wesley and Fletcher: Inaugural or Teleological?" *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 11 (Spring 1976): 22-37.

38Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, Works, 11:387, 423.

39Wesley, "The Scripture Way to Salvation," and "Minutes of Several Conversations between the Rev. Mr. Wesley and Others from the year 1744, to the year 1789," in Works, 6:52, 8:325.

40Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, Works, 11:369-70, 382, 385-87, 392-93, and Charles Wesley, "The Promise of Sanctification," printed in Works, 6:20-22.

41Charles Wesley, "O Jesus, At Thy Feet We Wait," t~378 in John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, ed. Frank Baker, vol. 7: *A Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People Called Methodists*, ed. by Franz Hildebrandt and Oliver A. Beckerlegge with the assistance of James Dale (Oxford: Clarendon Press of the Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 551.

- 42 "The Cleansing Wave," GTH 59 (1871): 192.
- 43 Melvin E. Dieter, *The Holiness Revival of the Nineteenth Century* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1980), pp. 18-21.
- 44 *Ibid.*, p. 18; Norman Pettit, *The Heart Prepared: Grace and Conversion in Puritan Spirituality* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), pp. 86-141; Charles Grandison Finney, *Revival Lectures*, ([Old Tappan, N. J.]: Fleming H. Revell, n.d.), pp. 180-81, 193.
- 45 Wesley, "On Patience," in *Works* 6:490.
- 46 John Wesley to Mr.-. 9 November 1777, in *Letters*, 6:287.
- 47 Wesley, "The Scripture Way of Salvation, in *Works*, 6:53.
- 48 Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, *Works*, 11:402-3.
- 49 II, p. 320.
- 50 *Ibid.*, p. 131.
- 51 WOH, pp. 86, 126.
- 52 F&E, p. 15
- 53 *Ibid.*, pp. 99, 343; GTH 32 (1857): 77, 48 (1865): 159.
- 54 Phoebe Palmer, afterword to J. Boynton, *Sanctification Practical* (New York: Foster & Palmer, Jr., 1867) pp. 119-22. [Hereafter SP.]
- 55 WOH, p. 38; II, p. 151
- 56 Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, in *Works*, 11:397-98; F&E, p. 83.
- 57 II, p. 114; GTH 33 (1858): 121, 46 (1864): 104; SP, p.128
- 58 II pp, 141, 191.
- 59 *Ibid.*, pp. 40-41.
- 60 GTH 4 (1842-3): 81; Adam Clarke, *The Holy Bible*, 6 vols. (New York: T. Mason & G. Lane for the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1837), 6:787.
- 61 WOH, pp. 62-67; GTH 46 (1864): 102-3; GTH 82 (1882): 136-37.
- 62 Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, *Works*, 11:398-99, ~01-2.
- 63 *Ibid.*, p. 420
- 64 WOH, p. 67.
- 65 *Diary*, 27 July 1837, in *Wheatley*, pp. 40-41.
- 66 Dieter, pp.98-119; Peters, pp.133-50; J. Wesley Corbin, "Christian Perfection and the Evangelical Association through 1875," *Methodist History* 7 (January 1969): 28-44. One example of Mrs. Palmer's influence on holiness

hymnody is Elisha Hoffman's invitation song, "Is Your All on the Altar of Sacrifice Laid?" which clearly articulates her teaching. The song still appeared in the hymnals of the Nazarene, Wesleyan, and Free Methodist Churches through 1960. Hoffman's song is number 280 in the Nazarene hymnal, *Worship in Song* (Kansas City, Mo.: Lillenas Publishing Company, (1972) and number 280 in *Hymns of the Living Faith* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Light and Life Press, 1951).

67Dayton, pp. 85-88, 204; Bruner, pp. 43-44; Synan, pp. 13-32; Timothy L. Smith, "The Doctrine of the Sanctifying Spirit: Charles G. Finney's Synthesis of Wesleyan and Covenant Theology," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 13 (Spring 1978): 103-6, and Timothy L. Smith, "Righteousness and Hope: Christian Holiness and the Millennial Vision in America, 1800-1900," *American Quarterly* 31/1 (Spring 1979): 25, 35-36.

68Asa Mahan, *Scripture Doctrine of Christian Perfection*, 7th ed. (Boston: Waite, Pierce, & Co., 1844), p. 188; Charles G. Finney, *Autobiography*, pp. 350-51; John Morgan, "The Gift of the Holy Ghost," *Oberlin Quarterly Review* 1 (1845): 90-116; Barbara Brown Zikmund, "Asa Mahan and Oberlin Perfectionism" (Ph.D. dissertation, Duke University, 1969), pp. 112-28.

69A general discussion of Pentecostal pneumatology may be found in Walter J. Hollenweger, *The Pentecostals: The Charismatic Movement in the Churches* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1972), pp. 330-347.

70Bruner, pp. 92-111.

71Ibid.

72Dennis and Rita Bennett, *The Holy Spirit and You: A Study-Guide to the Spirit-filled Life* (Plainfield, N.J.: Logos International, 1971), pp. 69-70.