

Wesleyan Theological Journal

Publication of the
Wesleyan Theological Society

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WESLEYAN THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY
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The Society's mission is to encourage the exchange of ideas among Wesleyan-Holiness theologians; to develop a source of papers for CHP (Christian Holiness Partnership) seminars; to stimulate scholarship among younger theologians and pastors; and to publish a scholarly journal.

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EDITOR'S NOTES

This Fall 2000 issue carries a wide range of materials. The first three articles by John W. Wright, Thomas E. Phillips, and John Tyson explore aspects of Christian faith in dialogue with postmodernism. The next two, by Kenneth Collins and John Chrysavgis, address John Wesley's appropriation of tradition, especially the Eastern tradition of Christian faith and practice. The remaining five articles range among subjects from the United Brethren, United Methodist, and Free Methodist contexts and include consideration of African-American preaching women in the nineteenth-century Holiness movement.

In the pivotal 2000 year, an intellectual biography of Clark H. Pinnock, *Journey Toward Renewal*, was written by Barry L. Callen and published by Evangel Publishing House in cooperation with the Wesleyan Theological Society. Included here is a book review and ad on this project. The year 2000 also saw the Society select its first volume to be honored with the Society's *Smith-Wynkoop Book Award*. See the ad by Syracuse University Press highlighting the significant book *Perfectionist Politics* by Douglas Strong.

Further, in 2000 the Society choose to honor Delbert R. and Susan A. (Schultz) Rose with the Society's *Lifetime Achievement Award*. The tribute to them, delivered by William Kostlevy at the annual meeting of the Society in March, 2000, is included in this issue.

Special thanks goes to David Bundy who oversees the development of book reviews. He ensures consideration of key publications that address many aspects of the history, theology, and practice of the Wesleyan/Holiness tradition—including a global emphasis on this tradition, represented in this issue by a significant study of the Korean Holiness Church and the English origins of the Salvation Army.

I commend the following material for your careful consideration. Contained in this Wesleyan/Holiness tradition are memories, traditions, and prophetic biblical and theological insights that are well-suited for nurturing the church's life in a new century and millennium.

Barry L. Callen, Editor
October 2000

WESLEY'S THEOLOGY AS METHODIST PRACTICE: TOWARD THE POST-MODERN RETRIEVAL OF THE WESLEYAN TRADITION

by

John W. Wright

Recent readings of John Wesley as a theologian have accurately characterized him as a “practical theologian.”¹ For Wesley, theology was not an endeavor to articulate clear and distinct doctrinal propositions nor principles to which one could intellectually assent and thus be identified as “Wesleyan.” Theology, for Wesley, was practical, advocating certain linguistic patterns necessary to sustain practices that formed holy believers in order to keep the church faithful to God. As noted by Randy Maddox, not only is this seen particularly in the content of Wesley’s theology, but it is also apparent in the types of documents that Wesley produced. He published sermons, liturgies and prayers, hymns, conference notes, occasional essays, medical handbooks, among others.² Wesley stands in a theological tradition that reaches back into early Christianity when bishops articulated the theology of the church as a crucial aspect of the day-by-day ecclesial care of their congregations.

While Wesley’s understanding of theology relates to the theological task as often pursued in early Christianity, it nonetheless stands outside

¹See, for instance, Thomas Langford, *Practical Divinity: Theology in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Nashville: Abingdon, Press, 1983); Randy Maddox, “John Wesley—Practical Theologian?” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 23 (1988), 122-47; Randy Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley’s Practical Theology* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1994), especially 16-25.

²See Maddox, “John Wesley.”

the mainstream of nineteenth and twentieth-century theology. Nineteenth and twentieth-century theology has largely pursued the related concerns of systematic and apologetic theology. Systematics has tended to see Christian doctrine as an abstract system of thought built on the universal foundation of Scripture or experience.³ Theology becomes the task of developing the correct method in order to build a coherent, rational superstructure on this universal foundation. One may then discover the implications and interconnections between the various realms of Christian beliefs.

In its preoccupation with foundations and theological methodology, this systematic genre relates closely to modern theology's apologetic concern. In modernity, however, the apologetic concern or rational defense of the Christian faith to outsiders has largely followed the route of translating Christian language and concepts into language already accessible to the intellectual world at large. As William Placher has written:

. . . ever since the Enlightenment in the seventeenth century, many forces in our culture have taught that "being rational" meant questioning all inherited assumptions and then accepting only those beliefs which could be proven according to universally acceptable criteria. . . . If Christians wanted to join the general conversation, it seemed that these were the rules by which they would have to adjust accordingly—or else find themselves in increasing intellectual isolation.⁴

In both dogmatic and apologetic forms, therefore, modernist theologians have understood their audience to be, not the church and its practices, but rather, the public at large, especially its cultural/academic elite. The attempt has been to show the coherence and viability of Christianity to institutions that have long disassociated themselves with formal identification with the church. Theology has, thus, desperately aimed to retain the cultural influence of the "glory days" of Christendom amidst a world that no longer has any intention of surrendering such power to the church ever again.

³See Nancey Murphy, *Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism: How Modern and Postmodern Philosophy Set the Theological Agenda* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996); Murphy herself develops a typology put forth by George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Post-liberal Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984).

⁴William Placher, *Unapologetic Theology: A Christian Voice in a Pluralistic Conversation* (Louisville, KY: WJK Press, 1989), 11.

Such a process has given rise, largely if not exclusively in the last half century, to the whole quest for "Wesleyan theology." Transformed into a "belief system" in search of a "world view," I will argue that "Wesleyan theology" signals the relocation of Wesley's heirs into the body politic of North American liberal democracy. This is hardly the original home of the bodies of Methodists. This more recent stance is in stark contrast to what one finds in Wesley's work itself. Secondly, I will argue that Wesley's thought arose within the context of Methodist practice; indeed, it *was* a central Methodist practice, in form and substance profoundly interrelated to the Methodist Societies and class meetings. Finally, I will suggest that any attempted retrieval of the Wesleyan tradition must retrieve the original political aim within the Methodist movement and see this aim as the primary matrix for reading and embodying the Wesleyan theological tradition today.⁵

Modernity, Ritual Theory, and the Practice of "Wesleyan Theology" as a Practice of Liberal Democracy

In the past half century, the phrase "Wesleyan theology" has risen quickly and spread widely, particularly in North America. While present already in the nineteenth century, its current ubiquity is of recent vintage. While this is not the place nor am I the person to conduct a wide analysis of its blooming, we should observe that the phrase is an abstraction that makes those within the Methodist and Holiness churches, particularly its scholars and academic institutions, the presumed proud bearers of a systematic belief parallel to Lutherans or Calvinists or Jews. "Wesleyan theology" can be a practice of "Wesleyan theologians" as they engage in the systematic and apologetic task that has widely characterized Christian theology within modernity. Indeed Wesley becomes the mentor for just such a task.

For instance, Mildred Bangs Wynkoop wrote in her *Theology of Love: The Dynamic of Wesleyanism*:

John Wesley was a theologian, as we hope to show. He worked out from a "system" which in his mind was not materially dif-

⁵By "political" I do not mean, as is commonly supposed, engaging society at large to work for social change, but rather, a broader sense of the word as the regulation of "a structured social body. . . [that] has its ways of making decisions, defining membership, and carrying out common tasks" (see John Howard Yoder, *Body Politics: Five Practices of the Christian Community before the Watching World* [Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1992], viii). Indeed, the first definition of the "political" is itself embedded in the liberal democratic notion of politics that I wish to contest.

ferent from traditional Christian doctrine. He added a spiritual dimension which put theology into a new framework—personal relationship and experience. This “addition” threw the balance of doctrines into a different configuration but did not actually alter the system. . . . Love, the essence of the new perspective, served as a unifying factor in theology and a humanizing application to life. The structure of theology was, under Wesley’s hand, made to fit human possibilities. This does not destroy theology but it does ask penetrating questions of it.⁶

For Wynkoop, Wesleyan theology is a systematic intellectual endeavor, anchored in “human possibilities” that are addressed through the apologetic categories of “personal relationship” and “experience.”

It is no accident that Wynkoop’s treatment of Wesley includes no treatment of particular Methodist practices. Until very recently scholars have pursued the study of Wesleyan theology in disjunction from an analysis of Methodist practices.⁷ Interestingly, this disjunction parallels the disjunction between conceptuality and practice found in twentieth century ritual studies. Catherine Bell, in *Ritual Theory, Ritual Knowledge*, presents a postmodern critique of this phenomenon and offers a way through its difficulties for ritual studies, and possibly for reconfiguring our understanding of Wesley’s theology as a Methodist practice.

⁶Mildred Bangs Wynkoop, *A Theology of Love: The Dynamic of Wesleyanism* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1972), 19.

⁷Historically, scholars have tended to treat the Methodist practices as distinct from the treatment of Wesley’s thought. Cf., for instance, Frank Baker, *Methodism and the Love Feast* (London: Epworth, 1957) and David Lowes Watson, *The Early Methodist Class Meeting: Its Origins and Significance* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1985). Only recently, under the rubric of “the means of grace,” have scholars like Henry H. Knight [see, for instance, his *The Presence of God in the Christian Life: John Wesley and the Means of Grace* (Pietist and Wesleyan Studies, 3; Metuchen, New Jersey: Scarecrow Press, 1992)] and Randy Maddox [for instance, his “Reconnecting the Means to the End: A Wesleyan Prescription for the Holiness Movement,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 33.2 (1998), 29-66] begun to tie the Wesley texts and Methodist practices together. This paper builds on the work of such scholars.

⁸For a review of the significance of Bell’s work, see Dennis E. Owen, “Ritual Studies as Ritual Practice: Catherine Bell’s Challenge to Students of Ritual,” *Religious Studies Review* 24 (1998), 23-30. Owen begins his review with high praise, stating, “Catherine Bell’s *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (RTRP) represents the most significant contribution to the area of ritual studies since perhaps Victor Turner’s *Ritual Process*” (p. 23).

A brief review of Bell's argument can open the way to this end.⁸ Bell notes that the academic analysis of ritual has tended to draw a strong line between conceptuality and action, thought and practice, belief and behavior, with conceptuality more fundamental than action. Ritual has consistently been understood as expressive of a deeper conceptuality. Bell's observations are worth quoting:

Theoretical descriptions of ritual generally regard it as action and thus automatically distinguish it from the conceptual aspects of religion, such as beliefs, symbols, and myths. . . . Rarely do such descriptions question this immediate differentiation or the usefulness of distinguishing what is thought from what is done. Likewise, beliefs, creeds, symbols, and myths emerge as forms of mental content or conceptual blueprints: they direct, inspire, or promote activity, but they themselves are not activities. Ritual, like action, will act out, express, or perform these conceptual orientations. . . . Ritual is then described as particularly *thoughtless* action—routinized, habitual, obsessive, or mimetic—and therefore the purely formal, secondary, and mere physical expression of logically prior ideas. Just as the differentiation of ritual and belief in terms of thought and action is usually taken for granted, so too is the priority this differentiation accords to thought.⁹

Bell also observes, however, that some theorists have pushed beyond understanding ritual as expressive of thought to understanding ritual as the place of the integration of action and thought. Yet even in seeing ritual as integrative of thought and action, such a theoretical construct reinforces thought and action as distinct categories. Again, Bell:

. . . at this second stage ritual is seen as synthetic, as the very mechanism or medium through which thought and action are integrated. The elaboration of ritual as a mechanism for the fusion of opposing categories simultaneously serves both to differentiate and unite a set of terms. . . . Ritual emerges as the means for a provisional synthesis of some form of the original opposition.¹⁰

This "original opposition," however, still defines the relationship between the theorist and the participants in ritual. As participants, those involved

⁹Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 19.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 23.

in ritual act or practice do so as unthinking subjects, or even as “objects.” The theorist/academician, on the other hand, provides the privileged access to meaning, texts that contain the more foundational element of thought. The theorist stands in a position of power over against the participant, exposing what the participants mindlessly experience. Note:

The construction of ritual as a decipherable text allows the theorist to interpret simply by deconstructing ritual back into its prefused components. The theoretical construction of ritual becomes a reflection of the theorist’s method and the motor of a discourse in which the concerns of the theorist take center stage.¹¹

Manifesting the more fundamental aspect of thought, the theoretician’s concerns are assumed to “justifiably” frame the participant’s action. Thought/belief originates in the subjective realm of the individual theoretician; action/practice lay in the public, ruled “objective” realm of the rite.

There is an even deeper problem with this thought/belief, action/practice opposition that has framed the study of ritual. By positing this opposition, the theoreticians subtly but powerfully assimilate ritual into the categories of the modern liberal democratic nation-state and project cultural contours of the First World West, particularly North America, upon ritual. Texts produced by such ritual theorists themselves ritually duplicate the political structures foundational to the modern liberal democratic nation-state. Ritual studies, therefore, assimilate all ritual into a First World’s cultural context, making this political framework “natural” and normative.

The presuppositions and structures of the modern liberal-democratic nation-state are as simple in their articulation as they are profound and persuasive. Modern liberal democratic political theory is grounded in the rights of an autonomous individual to pursue his, and more recently, her own self-interests in the public realm. Of course, this supposition makes the governance of a large population, each one pursuing his/her own self-interests, problematic. As analyzed by Stanley Hauerwas, “politics is understood as the means necessary to secure cooperation between people who share nothing in common other than their desire to survive.”¹²

¹¹Ibid., 54.

¹²Stanley Hauerwas, *After Christendom? How the Church is to Behave if Freedom, Justice, and a Christian Nation are Bad Ideas* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991), 29.

One issue becomes paramount within such political convictions: the society's ability to simultaneously maintain public order and individual rights. Yet these concerns about public order and individual rights easily and often stand in opposition to each other. How might this conflict be resolved? Liberal democratic theory attempts to diffuse this opposition by projecting it onto a conceptual map of the society. In order to maintain both the public order and the individual right to pursue self-interests, such a political order must draw a profound, if artificial, opposition between the public and private realms, realms of action and thought. Hauerwas continues: "Crucial to sustaining such politics is the distinction between the public and the private. The only area that legitimates the intervention of public authorities into our private lives is whether another's action will cause undue harm."¹³ Thought/belief remains in the realm of private individual, outside the watchful eye of the state; action/practice, however, falls within the realm of public, state governance, disciplined by the power of the state for the maintenance of public order.

The outcome of this public/private, action/belief distinction for "religious groups" (a phrase itself shaped by liberal democratic presuppositions) is far-reaching, though usually underestimated. Hauerwas quotes the conservative columnist, George Will, concerning the Supreme Court's ruling about the illegality of peyote use in Native American "religious" ritual:

A central purpose of America's political arrangements is the subordination of religion to the political order, meaning the primacy of democracy. The founders, like Locke before them, wished to tame and domesticate religious passions of the sort that convulsed Europe. They aimed to do so not by establishing religion, but by establishing a commercial republic—capitalism. They aimed to submerge people's turbulent energies in self-interested pursuit of material comforts. Hence religion is to be perfectly free as long as it is perfectly private—mere belief—but it must bend to the political will (law) as regards to conduct. Thus Jefferson held that "operations of the mind" are not subject to legal coercion, but that "acts of the body" are. Mere belief, said Jefferson, in one god or 20, neither picks one's pocket nor breaks one's legs.¹⁴

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴George Will, in Hauerwas, 30-31.

Or as Will succinctly states, “If conduct arising from belief, not just belief itself, is exempt from regulation, that would permit ‘every citizen to become a law unto himself.’”¹⁵

The opposition between belief/thought and action/practice, therefore, is necessary for the successful maintenance of power of the modern liberal democratic nation-state. “Religion” is “free” as long as it remains conceptual, apolitical, and individual. Therefore, it is no surprise that Robert Bellah and the others in their cultural anthropological analysis of the United States, discovered that Americans placed religion firmly in the personal, “therapeutic” realm of individual meaning as a means to support and enrich the public, behavioral “managerial” realm.¹⁶ The political opposition of thought/action has become firmly encoded in the material and social reality of our culture.

Given the subtle pervasiveness of the political realities of the liberal democratic nation-state, one can also see the depth and pervasiveness of the problem of ritual theorists such as those analyzed by Bell. In positing the thought/behavior opposition, not only do “the concerns of theorist take center stage,” but such theorists collapse all ritual into categories originating in and consistent with the liberal democratic nation-state. Ritual theorists thus not only become apologists for the liberal-democratic political order; they also assimilate the performers of ritual into the modern liberal nation-state by imposing alien political categories upon them. Because of the assumption that the real point of the ritual is its underlying belief, any ritual, if found to disrupt the public order, may be extinguished by the state, while all the time maintaining the “religious freedom” of the individual adherents of the group. Religion is divorced from the political except in so far as it supports, or at least does not disrupt, the nation-state.¹⁷

¹⁵Ibid., 31.

¹⁶Robert N. Bellah, et al., *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1985), especially 45-51, 219-37. A similar categorical bifurcation, the “extra-local” and the “local” realms, has been analyzed by the feminist sociologist Dorothy Smith, *The Everyday World as Problematic: A Feminist Sociology* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1987).

¹⁷Stephen Carter recognizes the threat that “religious communities” provide for “liberal states”: “A respect for religious autonomy demands a respect for that group activity of searching. But, for liberal theories of politics, that respect constitutes a considerable risk: after all, a group that searches for ultimate meaning

This excursus into ritual studies is relevant for understanding the underlying commitments of "Wesleyan theology." The Methodists were, above all, a ritually formed people.¹⁸ Indeed, shifts in Methodist ritual show a profound discontinuity between the "Methodism" of the Holy Club, the "Moravian Methodism" of the late 1730's and early 1740's, and "classical Methodism" as it emerged with its distinct Methodist rites in the 1740's and on. In its classical form, particular Methodist rituals marked every step along the way of the development of "the character of a Methodist." From initial exposure to awakening found in field preaching, to the society and class meetings, to incorporation into the band meetings through love feasts, to the select society meetings, Methodist life was governed by the specific rituals in which bodies and communities were shaped.¹⁹ Yet it is precisely this bodily and political formation that becomes secondary in the later promulgation of "Wesleyan theology."

It is therefore not surprising to find the same categories governing ritual studies present even in the best of recent scholarship on "Wesley's theology." Kenneth J. Collins, in his recent book *The Scripture Way of Salvation: The Heart of John Wesley's Theology*, exhibits the same thought/practice opposition as found in ritual studies. Collins analyzes the Wesley text through conceptual categories: "My larger task . . . is to explore the full range of Wesley's doctrine of salvation in terms of his entire literary corpus. . . . As such, this work is essentially a doctrinal

might find it. Having found it, the group would then place that meaning at the center of its conceptual universe (otherwise, the meaning is not *ultimate*). But if that discovered ultimate meaning becomes the *center* of the group's conceptual universe, it will necessarily displace the competing claims for ultimate meaning that are made by that powerful agglomeration of individuals known as the state. Thus, the group that is free to search for meaning will almost unavoidably become, for its members, a source of sense and value—an authority—that they will, in many cases, consider superior to the authority of the state. A tension will be created between the effort by the state to impose a set of meanings on the world and the search by the religions for meanings of their own." Stephen L. Carter, *The Culture of Disbelief: How American Law and Politics Trivialize Religious Devotion* (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 271-72.

¹⁸For an approach to early Methodism from the perspective of liturgical studies, see Karen Westerfield Tucker, "Liturgical Expressions of Care for the Poor in the Wesleyan Tradition: A Case Study for the Ecumenical Church," *Worship* 69 (1994), 129-44.

¹⁹For the interrelatedness of the various Methodist ritual meetings, see David Michael Henderson, *John Wesley's Class Meeting: A Model for Making Disciples* (Nappanee, Indiana: Evangel Publishing House, 1997).

study.”²⁰ Collins, then, finds exactly what he looks for: a distinctive Wesleyan theology, parallel to other ecclesial tradition’s founders. Collins writes, “[Wesley’s] own best thinking about salvation took a particular shape . . . marked by a certain form, shaped by recurring normative elements, and distinguished by particular characteristics or traits . . . that set it apart from other conceptions such as that of Luther, Calvin, and others.”²¹ Collins rightfully recognizes that, despite Wesley’s consistent soteriological conceptual structure, Wesley’s purpose was pastoral, not merely cognitive. Even so, note the opposition between thought and practice for Collins, with the priority of thought:

. . . a different view, and one that is much more expressive of Wesley’s basic theological posture, sees the *formal* elements of Wesley’s doctrine of salvation . . . arising out of the normative use of Scripture, the insights culled from Christian tradition, and a judicious employment of reason as these elements are brought to bear on diverse pastoral situations. This means, then, that the order evident in Wesley’s doctrine of salvation emerges not prior to the pastoral setting, from the dictates of an incipient scholasticism, but as a result of the application of normative theological elements (Scripture, especially the moral law, reason, and tradition) to the pastoral setting itself.²²

For Collins, Wesley primarily put forth a belief system, based on Scriptural norms, the moral law, tradition, and reason. These are then “applied” to the pastoral practice, which exists as a secondary application of the real ideational core of Wesley’s thought. With Wesley’s thought clearly and distinctly laid out, then, Methodists are free to transmit their heritage to others as a belief system: “Having understood we will also be free, most

²⁰Kenneth J. Collins, *The Scripture Way of Salvation: The Heart of John Wesley’s Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), 14. For Collins, it is not the chronological shifts but continuities across time that are determinative. Collins is therefore able to reconstruct Wesley’s thought as a conceptual whole: “However, this wholeness does not simply involve the entirety of Wesley’s life, as if chronology itself were the key to interpretation. While chronological concerns are important, they must be matched by close attention to the depth and sophistication that was characteristic of Wesley’s thought during most stages of his career. This means, then, that as one grapples with Wesley’s doctrine of salvation, at *any* point in his life, one must endeavor to take notice of *all* the nuances that pertain to his thought at that time” (Ibid., 17).

²¹Ibid., 187.

²²Ibid., 186.

important of all, to bear witness to the hope and promise of a distinctively *Wesleyan via salutis*.”²³

It is no wonder, then, that amidst the careful exposition by Collins of Wesley's theology, we find only five pages devoted to particular Methodist ritual gatherings.²⁴ As a matter of fact, while Collins recognizes that “there is no holiness but social holiness,”²⁵ he gives little attention to Wesley's formation of the Methodists as a peculiar community/culture, a phenomenon recognized by the English society at large and, judging by the name of some of Wesley's most important tracts, by Wesley himself. Instead, a de-politicized Methodist society emerges, with Wesley concerned with personal salvation: “the *purpose* of the Wesleyan way of salvation is to transport believers to a larger world than they had previously imagined: to God through faith and to their neighbors through love.”²⁶ As a matter of fact, the church remains entirely subsidiary to Collin's treatment. In Collin's Wesley, one finds a belief that leads to a “personal” experience, secondarily embedded in a social support system. Wesley presents a theology, a Wesleyan theology, that finds its expression primarily in a pietistic experience, and secondarily in Methodist practices.

The parallel between Collins and Bell's analysis of ritual theorists is striking. Despite Collins' attempt to present the “real Wesley” as a resource to maintain or restore Methodist/Holiness identity, his presentation actually represents a movement already assimilated to the mainline of

²³Ibid., 207.

²⁴See Ibid., 59-61, 159-60.

²⁵Collins writes: “Wesley, being the astute pastoral counselor that he was, realized that individuals, left to their own devices, would hardly progress in grace. Accordingly, each person who looked to him for spiritual direction was expected to become a part of a group that was not only characterized by genuine fellowship, but that also required accountability in the Christian life. Growth in grace, in other words, was best fostered, according to Wesley, through the mutual care and concern that is indicative of face-to-face relationships. Group meetings, then, like Christian conferences, are a real means of grace” (p. 61). For Collins, the social exists to enhance the personal experience of grace.

²⁶Ibid., 16. Even when Collins speaks of the “sophisticated depth dimension to Wesley's theology,” he is speaking of “the language of the human heart” (p. 13). Thus, when Collins writes of the necessity of understanding the existential, not merely conceptual, dimensions of Wesley's thought, he remains within the confines of the individual: “In fact, if one fails to take this ‘depth dimension’ into account, if one's description of Wesley's soteriological thought proceeds *merely* on an ideological or conceptual level, then one is no longer describing Wesley's thought” (p. 13).

the culture of the North American liberal-democratic nation-state. For Collins, as in liberal democratic theory, belief and practice dwell in two realms. Collins' Wesley emerges as a promulgator of a public belief and a personal experience, not the strategist of alternative practices that form a distinct political/ecclesial community. Collins' Wesley, and all "Wesleyans" thereby, are subtly but powerfully incorporated into the structures of the liberal democratic nation-state, with no ultimate communal/political dimension to resist the nation-state's continuous pull. Through Collins, Wesley now has his clearly articulated theology that may be embraced by individuals within the contemporary nation-state and thus be identified as "Wesleyan."

This is not to detract from Collins' achievement in his book. Yet it is to point out how deeply embedded the whole notion of "Wesleyan theology" is in the modern politics of the liberal-democratic nation-state. Even Randy Maddox, who champions Wesley as a "practical theologian" in his book *Responsible Grace*, clearly distinguishes the Methodist practices from Wesley's thought, only to bring the two back together in a synthesis accomplished by Wesley's moral-affectional psychology.²⁷ Yet, as Bell reminds us, the opposition is still maintained in the guise of the synthesis.

If the above analysis holds, the widespread rise of "Wesleyan theology" as a conceptual construct ironically signals the political assimilation of Wesley's heirs, and the relocation of Wesley's thought from the politics of the Methodists to the politics of the liberal society. This, however, is not a phenomenon that occurred first in the works of Wynkoop, Maddox, or Collins. These scholars stand at the end of a historical process that has roots deep in the transference of Methodism to North America. Randy Maddox has recently shown that already in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the Methodists themselves were transforming Wesley from being a "respected divine" who sought to form the Methodists through his production of textual resources to a "scholastic source" for the construction of a Methodist belief system.²⁸ It is no accident that with

²⁷Maddox places his separate chapter on the means of grace (chapter 8) following the rest of Wesley's theology, except for his eschatology. He thereby not only clearly demarcates between Wesley's thought and practice, but also strongly implies the priority of Wesley's thought over the Methodist's practices. See *Responsible Grace*, 192-229. See also his "Reconnecting."

²⁸Randy Maddox, "From Respected Founder to Neglected Guide: John Wesley," *Methodist History* 37 (1999), 71-88.

this re-placement came a simultaneous shift in underlying moral psychologies²⁹ and the loss of the class meeting as a ritual context for the formation of the Methodists.³⁰ These shifts themselves participated in and encouraged the additional changes in nineteenth-century Methodism as it moved into the mainstream of social and political power of the United States.³¹ The political/cultural matrix of the Methodists had changed from an ecclesial to a national basis within a North American liberal-democratic environment. As Stanley Hauerwas, himself a Methodist, writes:

. . . the cultural establishment of Christianity in liberal societies necessarily forced Christians to divorce their convictions from their practices so that we lost our intelligibility as Christians. By being established, at least culturally established in liberal societies, it became more important that people *believe* rather than be incorporated into the church.³²

“Wesleyan theology” has become our belief, so that we no longer have to worry about being incorporated into a people called Methodists who pursue their politics in a particular manner.

The Methodist Class Meeting and “The Scripture Way of Salvation”

I have argued above that the development of “Wesleyan theology” as a category distinct from Methodist practice reveals the assimilation of the Wesleyan tradition into a liberal democratic community. Therefore, I would contend that to separate Wesley’s thought from Methodist practices fundamentally misconstrues Wesley, removing the Wesley text from its properly *Sitz im Leben* within the Methodist Societies. Yet, obviously,

²⁹See Maddox, “Reconnecting.”

³⁰See, for instance, David F. Holsclaw, *The Declining of Disciplined Christian Fellowship: The Methodist Class Meetings in Nineteenth-Century America* (Doctoral dissertation, University of California, Davis; Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms International 1979); William W. Dean, “The Methodist Class Meeting—The Significance of Its Decline,” *The Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society* 43 (1981), 41-48; *ibid.* “Disciplined Fellowship: The Rise and Decline of Cell Groups in British Methodism (unpublished dissertation, University of Iowa, 1985); Henry Derman Rack, “The Decline of the Class-Meeting and the Problem of Church Membership in Nineteenth-Century Methodism,” *The Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society* 39 (February 1973), 12-21.

³¹See Robert Chiles, *Theological Transition in American Methodism, 1790-1935* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1984; reprint of 1965 edition).

³²Hauerwas, *After Christendom*, 24-25.

Wesley did have a “theology.” How, then, should we understand Wesley’s thought, if not within a thought/practice opposition?

Bell suggests the usefulness of the word “practice”: “As a term to represent the synthetic unity of consciousness and social being within human activity, ‘practice’ appears to be a powerful tool with which to embrace or transcend all analogous dichotomies.”³³ The notion of practice does not exclude thought, or more precisely, the production of texts. Itself a function and manifestation of an embodied culture, Wesley produced texts as a Methodist practice, originating from within and for “a people called Methodists.” Rather than Methodist rituals expressing Wesley’s thought, the relationship between the Wesley text and Methodist rituals is more complex and interactive, although we should perhaps grant a certain priority to the Methodist rituals.³⁴ Here Wesley is no different from any properly Christian theology. As noted by Katherine Tanner, Christian practices in some sense always lie prior to the practice of Christian theology in that theology always emerges within a particular cultural context:

Christian communal practices are the ones most pertinent to, and most directly responsible for, Christian theology as a specific cultural production in its own right. To say that Christian theology is a part of culture is to say that theology itself is a cultural production; theology is something shaped by concrete social practices, and those social practices must be at least, and in their most important respects for these purposes, Christian ones.³⁵

³³Bell, *Ritual Theory*, 76. The term also has the utility of appearing in a central role in the important text of Alastair McIntyre, *After Virtue* (2nd ed.; Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), especially 187; see also the theological appropriation of the McIntyre text in Nancey Murphy, Brad J. Kallenberg, and Mark Thiessen Nation (ed.), *Virtues and Practices in the Christian Tradition: Christian Ethics after McIntyre* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1997), especially 21–22.

³⁴“Wesley did not develop a theology which he then applied; he participated in a range of practices which became both the source and object of his theological reflection (emphasis in the original). Henry H. Knight III, *The Presence of God in the Christian Life: John Wesley and the Means of Grace* (Pietist and Wesleyan Studies, 3; Metuchen, New Jersey: Scarecrow Press, 1992), 6. It is interesting to note that Knight recognizes that the organization of his book, based on the thought/action bifurcation, distorts Wesley. Nonetheless, he maintains the categories, subtly altering the politics of Wesley’s textual and embodied practices of the means of grace. See Knight, 6.

³⁵Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Guides to Theological Inquiry; Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1997), 67.

The notion of practice, then, can provide a helpful construct to avoid the problems inherent in "Wesleyan theology."

The priority of the practice of the Methodists is evident in the relationship between the Methodist class meeting and Wesley's doctrine of sanctification. Both doctrine and class meetings developed into their classic Methodist form during the same period, as Wesley altered earlier practices and formulations. Yet we can see how the class meeting shaped Wesley's doctrine of sanctification by comparing the sermon "The Scripture Way of Salvation" and the textual prescription for the class meeting in *The Nature, Design, and the General Rules of the United Societies*.

"The Scripture Way of Salvation" is the classic statement of Wesley's doctrine of sanctification. While produced to answer a controversy that had erupted within the Methodist societies, the sermon summarizes the full range of Wesley's soteriological teaching. Yet, significantly, the sermon revises Wesley's earlier sermon "Salvation by Faith," the sermon that launched Wesley's post-Aldersgate Methodist career. By comparing "The Scripture Way of Salvation" and "Salvation by Faith" with simultaneous Methodist ritual meetings, we may see how the Methodist practices explicitly shaped the production of Wesley's text.

Wesley's sermon "Salvation by Faith," based on Ephesians 2:8, reads as a great Protestant manifesto, presented to his colleagues at Oxford on June 11, 1738, a mere eighteen days after his Aldersgate experience.³⁶ Prior versions of the sermon had aroused opposition, as did subsequent presentations, and he continued preaching the sermon at least until 1760. It was the initial sermon in the 1746 publication of "Sermons on Several Occasions" and remained the initial sermon as that collection grew into four volumes and received the title "Standard Sermons." In the sermon, Wesley melds a Moravian Lutheran piety within an Anglican Catholic concern for perfection.³⁷

While this sermon was used later by the Methodists, its composition predated the formation of the Methodist class meetings. Wesley here engages in Reformation polemics. Impacted by participation with the

³⁶See Albert Outler's "Introduction to Sermons 1-4," *The Works of John Wesley*, Bicentennial ed., vol. 1-4: Sermons (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984), 1:110.

³⁷Cf. Outler's comment, "It is worth noting that its Moravian substance is qualified by echoes from the Edwardian Homilies, as in the claim that salvation involved a power not to commit sin (*posse non peccare*)." Ibid., 110.

Moravians and the Fetter Lane Society, Wesley seems to have seen himself in this Oxford sermon as continuing the struggle for the Protestant reformation of the Church of England. Wesley explicitly uses the sermon to push the Church of England from “the Romish delusion among us” to the “doctrine . . . that first drove popery out of these kingdoms,” much like that “glorious champion of the Lord of Hosts, Martin Luther.”³⁸ Yet, even as Wesley invoked Luther, he maintained simultaneously a much broader understanding of the justification that is wrought by faith:

7. This is the salvation which is through faith, even in the present world: a salvation from sin, and the consequences of sin, both often expressed in the word “justification,” which, taken in the largest sense, implies a deliverance from guilt and punishment, by the atonement of Christ actually applied to the soul of the sinner now believing on Him, and a deliverance from the power of sin, through Christ “formed in his heart.”³⁹

Wesley here has no doctrine of sanctification distinct from justification, and, likewise, no conception of the repentance of the believers. He not only emphasizes the experience of justification by faith as absolutely central to the Christian life; he also sets the implications of that faith incredibly high, so if one has faith, one has fully restored holy “tempers,” thereby receiving Christlikeness:

. . . while they trust in the blood of Christ alone, use all the ordinances which He hath appointed, do all the “good works” which He had prepared that they should walk therein, and enjoy and manifest all holy and heavenly tempers, even the same “mind that was in Christ Jesus.”⁴⁰

If one did not manifest, therefore, “all holy and heavenly tempers,” one did not really have faith, and therefore, was not a Christian at all.⁴¹ No

³⁸Ibid., 1:128-29.

³⁹Ibid., 1:124.

⁴⁰Ibid., 1:125.

⁴¹6. He that is by faith born of God sinneth not, (1), by any habitual sin; for all habitual sin is sin reigning; but sin cannot reign in any that believeth. Nor, (2), by any wilful sin; for his will, while he abideth in the faith, is utterly set against all sin, and abhorreth it as deadly poison. Nor, (3), by any sinful desire; for he continually desireth the holy and perfect will of God; and any unholy desire he by the grace of God, stiflenth in the birth. Nor, (4), doth he sin by infirmities, whether in act, word, or thought; for his infirmities have no concurrence of his will; and without this they are not properly sins.” Ibid., 1:124.

wonder Wesley was asked not to return to pulpits after preaching such a sermon!

While the impact of Moravian theology is apparent here and widely recognized, to my knowledge the impact of the Fetter Lane Society, with the influence of Moravian practice, is not. Wesley's notion of salvation/justification by faith has a strong subjective focus as practiced in the early, pre-Methodist Society Band Meetings. While Wesley did not write the "Rules of the Band Societies" until Christmas Day, 1738, he had participated with such a group for over a year. When one compares the "Rules of the Band Societies" (1738) with the "Salvation by Faith" sermon, one finds both of them focusing on the inward assurance of the individual of salvation by faith alone. Both emphasize the present experience of "no sin, inward or outward, [having] dominion over you."⁴² No penitent works of piety or mercy are required or specifically prescribed. Indeed, when one examines the 1738 "Rules of the Band Societies" with Wesley's description of "What is the Salvation which is through Faith," one finds significant, even verbal overlap. The 1738 Bands were for those who had experienced the justification/salvation as described in the sermon "Salvation by Faith." Thus, both the initial interview for admittance into the band and the initial description of salvation in the sermon begins with forgiveness.⁴³ Each speaks of the witness of the Spirit, "peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ," and "the love of God shed abroad in your heart."⁴⁴ Finally, after describing the inward state of the believer, both then move on to discussion of deliverance "from the power of sin, as well as the guilt of it."⁴⁵ The subsequent, weekly questions of the band ensure that the believer is sustained in this initial experience, allowing no self-denial that would suggest inward or outward sin gaining dominion.

⁴²Rupert E. Davies, ed., *The Works of John Wesley*, Bicentennial ed., vol. 9: The Methodist Societies: History, Nature, and Design (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 77.

⁴³Compare "Have you forgiveness of your sins?" (Davies, 77) with "First, from the guilt of all past sin" (Outler, *Sermons*, 1:122).

⁴⁴Compare "4. Is the love of God shed abroad in your heart?" (Davies, 77) with "And the Love of God is shed abroad in their hearts, through the Holy Ghost which is given unto them" (Outler, 1:123).

⁴⁵Compare "5. Has no sin, inward or outward, dominion over you?" (Davies, 77) with "again, through this faith they are saved from the power of sin as well as the guilt of it" (Outler, 1:123).

Both the initial band interview, then, and the description of “the salvation which is through this faith” follows the same structure of moving from its “presentness” to forgiveness, assurance, love of God in heart, and finally, complete dominion over all sin. If the Moravian/Fetter Lane Society practice followed such a rule, then Wesley’s practice preceded his sermon. Indeed, the practice of the bands essentially “wrote” Wesley’s sermon. The sermon textually inscribed the “salvation” that the band embodied. At the very least, the overlap implies that the practice of the sermon and the practice of the early bands belong together. While the sermon attempted to feed people into the bands, the bands ensured the experience of faith as prescribed by the sermon. The ritual was not merely expressive of Wesley’s thought; the sermon was a practice complementary to the practice of early band meeting. Together, both combined to form a Moravian enclave within the Anglican church.

Wesley never explicitly retracted this sermon. He even continued to preach it until 1760, and it remained in his *Sermons on Several Occasions* as the collection grew into eight volumes. Perhaps if one read the sermon very narrowly, one could even defend Wesley’s statement in *The Plain Account of Christian Perfection* that he did not change his teachings on Christian perfection from 1733 on.⁴⁶ Yet much did change after 1738. Most significantly, Wesley became the head of a wider Methodist movement, with the new practices of the Methodist Society and its offspring, the Methodist class meeting. Even the band meetings were radically revised in 1744 from their 1738 introspective Moravian form into a model based on the class meeting.⁴⁷ It is precisely during this time that Wesley conceived his doctrine of sanctification as the progressive cleansing of inward sin through the infilling of the love of God and neighbor.

⁴⁶“This was the view of religion I then had, which even then I scrupled not to term *perfection*. This is the view I have of it now, without any material addition or diminution.” Thomas Jackson, ed., *The Works of Rev. John Wesley*, 14 vols. (London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, 1829-31, reprinted Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1978), 11:369.

⁴⁷Wesley transformed the band meetings in 1744 from their Moravian, deeply subjective nature to a shorter, yet broader version of the class meeting rules with its “abstain from evil, maintain good works, and attend all the ordinances of God” format. See Davies, 79. Often, the earlier Moravian-based band is held up as the norm for the Methodist Band meetings and its subjective focus, because it, not the revised Band Rule of 1744 based on the class meeting, is included in Outler’s collection of Wesley’s work as *the Methodist Bands*. See Albert Outler (ed.), *John Wesley* (New York: Oxford University, 1964), 180-181.

Over twenty-five years after first preaching "Salvation by Faith," Wesley revised the sermon in what may be the most significant statement of Wesley's mature soteriology, "The Scripture Way of Salvation."⁴⁸ Without explicitly doing so, Wesley seems to correct his previous sermon when he talks about sin remaining in the believer after justification and initial sanctification:

5. How naturally do those who experience such a change imagine that all sin is gone! That it is utterly rooted out of their heart, and has no more any place therein! How easily do they draw that inference, "I *feel* no sin; therefore, I *have* none. It does not *stir*; therefore, it does not *exist*: it has no *motion*; therefore, it has no *being*!"
6. But it is seldom long before they are undeceived, finding sin was only suspended, not destroyed.⁴⁹

Justification and salvation are not completely merged; rather, Wesley recognized that inward sin remains in the individual, "frequently *stirring* in their heart, though not *conquering*."⁵⁰ Therefore, it is necessary that "from the time of our being 'born again', the gradual work of sanctification takes place."⁵¹ No longer is Luther cited, nor does the English reformation loom in the background. Instead, Wesley cites Macarius, tying the Methodists to early Christianity. The political/ecclesial horizon of the sermon is entirely different from its predecessor.

This difference is most clearly seen in the description of repentance in "The Scripture Way of Salvation," a subject entirely absent from "Salvation by Faith." The gradual work of sanctification takes place as "we are enabled 'by the Spirit' to 'mortify the deeds of the body,' of our evil nature. And as we are more and more dead to sin, we are more and more alive to God."⁵² Indeed, while repentance is not necessary for justification, it is "necessary *conditionally*."⁵³ Likewise, after justification "repentance, rightly understood, and the practice of all good works, works

⁴⁸"The Scripture Way of Salvation" develops the same biblical text with the same Scripture basic outline as "Salvation by Faith," indicating that the sermon was a revision of the earlier text.

⁴⁹Outler, 2:158-59.

⁵⁰Ibid., 159.

⁵¹Ibid., 160.

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³Ibid., 163.

of piety, as well as works of mercy (now properly so called, since they spring from faith) are in some sense, necessary to sanctification.”⁵⁴ While grace is still the source, and faith the condition of salvation, Wesley embraces repentance, both before and following justification, as the normative means by which the Spirit brings “grace upon grace” to the person.

The language Wesley uses to describe repentance in “The Scripture Way of Salvation” finds its echoes structurally and linguistically within the Methodist Class and Band (1744) rules. When Wesley initially discusses “the gradual work of salvation,” he described it in terms of the wording and the threefold structure of the Class and Band rules: “We go on from grace to grace, while we are careful to ‘abstain from all appearance of evil,’ and are ‘zealous of good works,’ ‘as we have opportunity doing good to all men’; while we walk in all His ordinances blameless, therein worshipping him in spirit and in truth.”⁵⁵ This trifold structure defines the activities of the believer as “we wait for entire sanctification.”⁵⁶

Methodist practices have shaped the sermon here at its most crucial, distinctively “Wesleyan” point. For Wesley to go on from grace to grace in gradual sanctification was clearly to partake in the Methodist ritual meetings. Thus, later in the sermon when he discusses the repentance consequent to justification, again the language/practices of the classes and bands come to light: “And is it not incumbent upon all that are justified to be ‘zealous of good works’? Yea, are not these so necessary, that if a man willingly neglect them he cannot reasonably expect that he shall ever be sanctified in the full sense; that is, perfected in love?”⁵⁷ Thus, when Wesley catalogues the “good works . . . the practice of which you affirm to be

⁵⁴Ibid., 164.

⁵⁵Ibid., 160. “The Nature, Design, and General Rules of the United Societies” follows the same threefold format, with nearly exactly the same language: “*First*, by doing no harm, by avoiding evil in every kind. . . . *Secondly*, By doing good, by being in every kind merciful after their power, as they have opportunity, doing good of every possible sort and as far as is possible, to all men. . . . *Thirdly*, By attending upon all the ordinances of God.” Davies, 70-73. Likewise, the “Directions given to the Band Societies” (1744) contains nearly the exact wording: “I. Carefully to abstain from doing evil; . . . II. Zealously to maintain good works; . . . III. Constantly to attend on all the ordinances of God;” Davies, 79.

⁵⁶Outler, 2:160.

⁵⁷Ibid., 164.

necessary for sanctification?," his list reads as a slight reorganization of the society rules:

First, all works of piety; such as public prayer, *family prayer*, and praying in our closet; receiving *the supper of the Lord*, *searching the Scriptures*, by hearing reading, meditating; and using such a measure of *fasting or abstinence* as our bodily health allows.

10. Secondly, all works of mercy; whether they relate to the bodies or souls of men; such as feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, entertaining the stranger, visiting those that are in prison, sick, or variously afflicted; such as endeavouring to instruct the ignorant, to awaken the stupid sinner, to quicken the lukewarm, to confirm the wavering, to comfort the feeble-minded, to succour the tempted, or contribute in any manner to the saving of souls from death.⁵⁸

Concerning these activities, Wesley then concludes: "This is the repentance, and these the fruits meet for repentance, which are necessary to full salvation."⁵⁹

Whereas the relationship between "Salvation by Faith" and the 1738 practice of the Moravian/Fetter Lane Society bands is chronologically ambiguous, no such chronological ambiguity remains here.⁶⁰ Here the practice of the Methodists clearly precedes the production of the Wesley sermon, and encodes itself textually into the sermon, even as the practice of the sermon seeks to be encoded within the bodies of the Methodists. In "The Scripture Way of Salvation," there is no "Wesleyan theology" dis-

⁵⁸Ibid., 166. Exact verbatim overlaps between the class or band rules are italicized by the author; the rest of the passage remains closely paralleled in the Society and Band rules.

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰According to Ken Collins, the threefold structure of repentance appears first in the 1743 "crafting" of the Methodist class meetings: "The . . . three elements, however, 'ceasing from evil, doing good, and using the ordinances of God,' form a structural triad for Wesley and are duplicated elsewhere and in different contexts. For example, this triad emerged in the deliberations of the first Methodist Conference in 1744 as well as in 1785 when Wesley detailed, in an important sermon, just what it means 'to work out our own salvation.' Moreover when he crafted *The Nature, Design, and the General Rules of the United Societies* in 1743, Wesley utilized these same three elements as the principal rules to guide the societies. This fact demonstrates quite clearly that the very design and purpose of the Methodist societies was one of repentance, of preparing sinners to 'flee from the wrath which is to come.' " Collins, 59-60.

tinct from Methodist practice. Indeed, the sermon itself emerges as a collateral practice within the Methodist Societies in order to maintain, guide, and direct the Societies to form a distinct Methodist people within the Church of England. Therefore, the shift between “Salvation by Faith” and “The Scripture Way of Salvation” was not merely a shift of thought; it represents a shift in Wesley’s political/ecclesiological aim from forming Moravian/Lutheran enclaves within the Church of England in order to protestantize the church and transform it from its “fallen state” into the “true Church,” to forming a distinct Methodist people in order to christianize the Church of England through the presence of a holy people in its midst. The shift in practices, both ritual and textual, was directed to this end.

In the early tract, “The Character of a Methodist” (1742), Wesley defines a Methodist first by what one is not. He begins by stating:

The *distinguishing marks* of a Methodist are not his *opinions* of any sort. His assenting to this or that scheme of religion, his embracing any particular set of notions, his espousing the judgment of one man or of another, are all quite wide of the point. Whosoever therefore imagines that a Methodist is a man of such or such an *opinion* is grossly ignorant of the whole affair; he mistakes the truth totally.⁶¹

As in his definition of faith, Wesley consistently refused to define the theological task as a “belief” or as an assent to a particular doctrine. We cannot merely look to Methodist rituals as the expression of Wesley’s theology. Indeed, it may be more accurate to look at Wesley’s theology as an expression of the Methodist rituals. Seen in light of the data above, Wesley’s thought itself emerges as a practice for the formation of a peculiar people, a people called the Methodists that bears the unique character of “the love of God shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost.”⁶²

If this is so, “Wesleyan theology” cannot be abstracted from Methodist practice without fundamentally distorting its most central convictions and rhetorically coopting the phrase for a different political end. Wesley’s theology was a Methodist practice. Methodist ritual did not “express” the “theology” any more than the theology “expressed” the ritual. Both Methodist ritual and Wesley text contributed to form a certain

⁶¹Davies, 33.

⁶²Ibid., 35.

people within the Church in order to call the church to faithfulness to her Lord—a cultural and political task to its core.

A People Called Methodist: Towards the Theological Retrieval of the Wesley Text

If the above argument holds, it seems that the contemporary interest in reviving “Wesleyan theology” in order to provide a confession/conceptual basis to preserve/restore the identity of “Wesleyans,” although well-intentioned, is fundamentally misguided. Indeed, in its very endeavor, such a task shows that Wesley’s heirs have been assimilated into a distinctly different political order with a different agenda than Wesley’s Methodists. Yet, the above argument is not merely negative, but also opens a space for such a retrieval in the post-modern world.

First, the Wesleyan tradition is fundamentally ecclesial, not apologetic. It seeks God’s activity in the world via the church; such theology, therefore, always arises from the midst of the Christian community for the sake of the Christian community. Theology itself is a practice performed by all its members, especially its ecclesial leaders, for the shaping of a distinct Christian community. Those with the particular vocation to serve God as theologians have the responsibility to reflect critically upon the practices of the church in light of its history in order to empower her to shine forth as a light to the world.

Second, the Wesleyan tradition therefore seeks to Christianize Christianity. It is unapologetically perfectionist, not primarily through assenting to a creed or even a soteriology, but through the communal production of saints, those who have embodied the gospel so that they love God with their whole heart, soul, mind, and strength, and their neighbor as themselves. Acknowledging the presence of sin in the church, as sin in the believer, it never condones the church’s unfaithfulness as normative or necessary, yet never denies that the church is the church, the people of God. The “Wesleyan tradition” seeks to form a “pure church” amidst the church, calling the larger body to repentance and perfection. This ecclesiology, the *ecclesiola in ecclesia*, is not tangential to the tradition, but central.

Third, in order to Christianize the church, the doctrine of sanctification is central. Sanctification is the process whereby God cleanses believers of inward sin and transforms them into the image of Jesus Christ—God forms the saint within the church in order to call the church

to faithfulness. Christian salvation encompasses the entire movement of God in the human being from total corruption to entire sanctification, a social process pursued in the context of the ecclesiola, which itself finds its place in the ecclesia.

Fourth, salvation, then, entails participation in particular communal practices of the ecclesiola amidst the ecclesia. These practices provide the prudential means of God's transforming grace, whereby God renews the individual believer. Through the believer, God renews the ecclesiola, and through the renewal of the ecclesiola, God renews the ecclesia. Ultimately, it is through the ecclesia that God renews the world, calling all things into the new creation.

The practices of the ecclesiola focus on works of devotion and mercy, with a special emphasis on the works of mercy.⁶³ The ecclesiola thus intersects the life of the individual believer (and therefore the ecclesiola, and thus the ecclesia) with the lives of the poor, especially the poor of the ecclesiola, and thus, the ecclesia. Interaction with the poor therefore is central to the ecclesiola's practices.⁶⁴ The system then works outward from the practices of the individual Methodist formed amidst the ecclesiola. The ecclesiola's practices are central to the process of an individual's salvation, which itself is central for the formation of the ecclesiola. Yet the ecclesiola does not exist for itself. The ecclesiola's renewal of the ecclesia then becomes central to God's activity in the world via the

⁶³"Works of mercy were means of grace through which love of neighbor was formed, deepened, and expressed. They were at the same time reminders of God's presence and involvement in the world. Christians undertook works of mercy as a response to God's love for them and in recognition of God's love for the world. Through their experience of practicing love, Christians deepened their knowledge of what God's love for a fallen creation entails. As they increasingly experienced the depths of God's love, the vision of their faith and the strength of their love grew as well." Knight, *Presence of God*, 113.

⁶⁴For the theological centrality of the poor in the practices of Wesley's text and Methodist ritual, see Theodore W. Jennings, Jr., *Good News to the Poor: John Wesley's Evangelical Economics* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1990). While Jennings convincingly shows the importance of the poor for Wesley within Methodist practice, he does not adequately grasp the relationship between the acts of mercy and sanctification, nor the formation of the Methodists as a distinct ecclesiola. Rather, he tries to take the Methodist ecclesial practice to support a politics of social change within liberal democratic presuppositions. For Wesley, it was the ecclesial practice from the poor among the Methodists that formed his primary concern rather than a social agenda to improve the lot of the poor in English society.

church. The church/believer's love of God and neighbor becomes the primary witness of God's reconciling love for the world.

If this is so, the renewal of the "Wesleyan tradition" does not lie first and foremost in the affirmation of "Wesleyan beliefs," but in the retrieval of the works of mercy, more specifically, the retrieval of each believer's bodily interaction with the bodies of the poor, especially the poor of the church. "Wesleyan theologians" therefore must engage in the practice of the production of texts to show why this is so. As the church engages in this task, it seems likely that the theologian's political agenda might again shift from the "belief/practice" dichotomy that legitimates the modern liberal democracy to the politics of the church.⁶⁵

⁶⁵A version of this paper was presented at the 1999 meeting of the Wesleyan Theological Society at Southern Nazarene University in Bethany, Oklahoma. Thanks to my colleagues in the Department of Philosophy and Religion at Point Loma Nazarene University, and especially Kenneth Collins of Asbury Theological Seminary, for modeling gracious collegial conversation as the paper went through its various versions. Of course, any errors or inadequacies are the responsibility of the author alone.

READING THEORY AND BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION FOR POSTMODERN WESLEYANS

by

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Let me, in defiance of the classical canons of rhetorical practice, begin with a little autobiography. I was led by providence to a small rural church within the Wesleyan/Holiness tradition. It was within this context, and while still very much in my formative years, that I experienced Christian conversion. Then, under the tutelage of a faithful and committed Wesleyan/Holiness pastor, I learned *what the Bible meant*. Life was good; God was in heaven and all was well—until I sensed a call to ministry and went to study at a prominent Wesleyan/Holiness university.

Very shortly after I arrived at this university, I began to discover that I did not really know much about *what the Bible meant*. My naive, often fundamentalistic understandings of the Bible were quickly undermined by a group of faithful and committed Wesleyan/Holiness professors. These folks took upon themselves the sometimes daunting task of equipping me with the interpretive tools of a historical-critical exegete. After mastering these tools, I quickly learned *what the Bible really meant*. Life was good; God was in heaven and all was well—until I went to seminary.

Very shortly after I arrived at a prominent Wesleyan/Holiness seminary, I began reading the work of narrative critics and, yet again, I discovered that I did not really know much about *what the Bible really meant*. But, having gone this route before, I was quickly able to equip myself with the even better interpretive tools of a narrative critic and was thus

able to learn *what the Bible really, really meant*. Life was good; God was in heaven and all was well—until I went to graduate school.

Now that I have finished graduate school and been exposed to the acidic influences of postmodernism, I am tempted to say that I have absolutely no idea *what the Bible means*. Instead of yielding to this temptation, however, let me suggest that my experience, an experience with which many can no doubt sympathize, is illustrative of the problem which postmodernism has dropped on the doorstep of biblical scholarship. That is, postmodernism (and I am not brave enough to attempt to define this slippery term) has forcefully confronted biblical scholars with the demise of the concept of a single, unified, and objective (unconditioned) meaning for biblical texts. Let me explain.

The Postmodern Challenge

Just a few decades ago when K. Stendahl wrote his influential article on biblical theology in the *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, he could speak of “what the text meant” and “what the text means,”¹ as if the two types of meaning existed independently of one another and could be easily distinguished. The Stendahl approach seemed to advocate a method of exegesis which sought to recover the text's original meaning that was free from the taint of the reader's own historical context. The exegete's task was twofold. First, the exegete was to discern a meaning which was separate from the reader's own experiences, ideas, and norms. Then, the exegete was somehow to transfer that pot of untainted meaning into the reader's world of experience, ideas, and norms.

The problem, as postmodernism (and, I would argue, the history of exegesis) has taught us, is that this pot of untainted meaning at the end of the exegetical rainbow has never, will never, and could never exist. Any

¹K. Stendahl, “Biblical Theology, Contemporary,” *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. George Buttrick (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), 1:418-32, especially, 419-20. A similar distinction exists in Hans Frei's discussion of a text's “explicative meaning” and “applicative meaning.” See “Apologetics, Criticism, and the Loss of Narrative Interpretation,” *Why Narrative? Readings in Narrative Theology*, ed. Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 45-64. In a consciously Wesleyan/Holiness context, this approach can be witnessed in Robert Traina's discussion of “Interpreting the Text” and “Applying the Truth.” See his “Inductive Bible Study Reexamined in the Light of Contemporary Hermeneutics,” *Interpreting God's Word for Today, Wesleyan Theological Perspectives* (Anderson, Ind.: Warner Press, 1982), 53-109.

meaning that any interpreter takes from any text will invariably be “tainted” by the interpreter’s *sitz im leben*. Although our understandable enthusiasm for the task and our naive confidence in our methods have often fueled the illusion that our much-sought-after pot of untainted meaning would be found just over the next exegetical hill, the ever-present and ever-deconstructing forces of new approaches and new insights have always moved that elusive pot of untainted meaning to some other more distant hill.

To speak in clear and concise terms, postmodernism has rendered the concept of a single, unified, and objective meaning for the biblical writings untenable in the eyes of many contemporary biblical scholars. The central insight of (and, at the same time, the central challenge from) postmodernism is the awareness of the conditioned and reductionistic nature of all statements about meaning. That is, any statement about *what the Bible means* (or *really means*, or *really, really means*) is a statement about what the Bible means to a particular interpreter at a particular point in time, from a particular vantage point, and with a particular set of historical, ideological, social, cultural, religious, methodological, and personal limitations. Postmodernism has confronted us with the plausible assertion that there does not exist nor could there ever exist a single, unified, and unconditioned meaning for any biblical text because meaning is not a Platonic something which exists independently of human beings and social contexts.

If this postmodern assertion has any claim to legitimacy (and I believe that it does), it poses a tremendous challenge to persons who wish to make normative statements about Christian faith and practice based upon their understandings of Scripture. How may one acknowledge the conditioned nature of one’s understanding of Scripture and still have a reasonable amount of confidence in the normative claims derived from that understanding? Is acceptance of the postmodern insight the first step down the road of total relativism? I do not think so. Let me offer some musings about reading theories and strategies that may enable us to present normative readings of Scripture while at the time acknowledging the plausibility of the postmodern insight.²

²For a useful introduction to the challenges presented to biblical scholarship by postmodernism, see Stephen D. Moore, *Literary Criticism and the Gospels: The Theoretical Challenge* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

Wolfgang Iser and the Reading Process

Wolfgang Iser, a contemporary literary theorist, has dedicated much of his distinguished career to analyzing the reading process, that is, to understanding what one does when one reads. In numerous books and articles,³ Iser has laid out a coherent and influential theory of the reading process. Even though Iser never claimed to devise a method for literary interpretation,⁴ his theories and the categories contained within those theories have played a leading role in what has come to be called "reader-response criticism."⁵ In spite of Iser's association with the much maligned (and widely misunderstood) set of reading strategies known as reader-

³Wolfgang Iser's major books are: *The Act of Reading* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978); *The Implied Reader* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974); and *Prospecting: From Reader Response to Literary Anthropology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989). His most important articles, which have been reprinted many times, are: "The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach," *The Implied Reader* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), 274-94; "Talk Like Whales: A Response to Stanley Fish," *Diacritics* 11 (1981): 82-87; "Indeterminacy and the Reader's Response in Prose Fiction," *Prospecting* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 3-30; "Interaction Between Text and Reader," *The Reader in the Text*, ed. Susan R. Suleiman and Inge Crosman (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 106-19; "For the Readers," ed. Edward Bloom, *Novel* 11 (1977): 19-25; and "Interview: Wolfgang Iser," ed. Rudolf E. Keunzil, *Diacritics* 10 (1980): 57-73.

⁴On Iser's understanding of the difference between literary theory and literary criticism, see Wolfgang Iser, "The Current Situation of Literary Theory," *New Literary History* 11 (1979): 5-6 and *Act of Reading*, ix-xii.

⁵On Iser's relationship to and influence upon secular reader-response criticism, see Stanley Fish, "Why No One's Afraid of Wolfgang Iser," *Doing What Comes Naturally* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1989), 68-86; Elizabeth Freund, *The Return of The Reader: Reader-Response Criticism* (New York: Methuen Press, 1987); and Samuel Weber, "Caught in the Act of Reading," *Demarcating the Disciplines* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 181-214. On Iser's relationship to and influence on the use of reader-response criticism within biblical scholarship, see Stanley Porter, "Why Hasn't Reader-Response Criticism Caught on in New Testament Studies?" *Journal of Literature and Theology* 4 (1990): 278-92; Joseph B. Tyson, "Jews and Judaism in Luke-Acts," *New Testament Studies* 41 (1995): 19-38; James L. Ressaigue, "Reader-Response Criticism and the Synoptic Gospels," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 52 (1984): 302-24; J. Botha, "Iser's Wandering Point of View," *Neotestamentica* 22 (1988): 253-68; and Jouette M. Bassler, "The Parable of the Loaves," *Journal of Religion* 66 (1986): 157-72.

response criticism,⁶ I propose that the categories contained within Iser's theory of the reading process may provide the constitutive elements of a mature Wesleyan response to postmodernism.⁷

Iser begins with the simple questions: Where does meaning come from? And what happens when we read? In regard to this first question, Iser insists that "meanings in literary texts are generated in the act of reading; they are the product of a complex interaction between text and reader."⁸ For Iser, the meaning of a literary text results from the "coming together of text and imagination"⁹ and does not have its sole point of origin in either the "author's intention or the reader's psychology."¹⁰ Rather, meaning is created by "the two-way traffic between the text and reader."¹¹ Thus, to this first question, Iser answers that meaning comes from the interaction of a reader and a text.

In answer to the second question (what happens when we read?), Iser presents a detailed theory of the reading process. He begins by reflecting on how a reader encounters a text and concludes that a reader encounters a text progressively, within a time sequence. If one wishes to understand the reading process, Iser suggests that the "first problem is the fact that the whole text can never be perceived at any one time."¹² What

⁶Reader-response criticism includes many competing schools of thought that tend to share only one common characteristic, an opposition to the idea that the meaning of a literary text resides exclusively within the text itself or in the mind of the author. See Jane P. Tompkins, "The Reader in History," *Reader-Response Criticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), 201-32.

⁷Iser's relationship to postmodernism is ambiguous. He is regarded as postmodern by some critics (e.g., Robert M. Fowler, "Postmodern Biblical Criticism," *Forum* 5 [1989]: 3-30 and George Aichele, "On Postmodern Biblical Criticism and Exegesis," *Forum* 5 [1989]: 547-62). He is regarded as not postmodern by other critics (e.g., Stephen D. Moore, "The 'Post' Age Stamp: Does it Stick?" *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 57 [1989]: 543-59 and "Postmodernism and Biblical Studies," *Forum* 5 [1989]: 36-41). If one regards the defining characteristic of postmodernism to be an acceptance of the plausibility of multiple meanings for any text, then Iser is postmodern. If, however, one regards the defining characteristic of postmodernism to be the assumption of the instability of all texts, then Iser is not postmodern.

⁸"Indeterminacy," 5.

⁹"Reading Process," 279.

¹⁰See "Interaction," 106-07.

¹¹"Interview," 64. Also see "Interaction," 106-07 and *Act of Reading*, 107.

¹²*Act of Reading*, 108-09. Iser, "Reading Process," 280, also notes that "it is impossible to absorb even a short text in a single moment."

the reader encounters within a text is not a neatly packaged meaning of the entire text, but rather a progressively unfolding repertoire of diverse ideas, attitudes and perspectives from which the reader is able to build a consistent meaning for the text. For Iser, the reading process is, therefore, understood primarily as an exercise in consistency-building, that is, the process of taking the diverse ideas and perspectives given within a text and creating a consistent meaning (I prefer the word “reading”)¹³ from those competing ideas, norms, and perspectives.¹⁴

As Iser envisages the reading process, readers build this consistency by organizing the various elements of the text within overlapping and interacting frames of reference. According to Iser’s theory, readers employ these diverse frames of reference as a means of establishing connections and relationships between the various elements of the text. Iser suggests that the reader’s organizational activity occurs on both conscious and unconscious levels¹⁵ and that this activity (both on conscious and unconscious levels) is characterized by progressiveness and tentativeness. As Iser understands the reading process, readers focus upon the themes that they find most adequate for creating a consistent meaning for the textual perspectives which they have encountered up to that point in the text. Perspectives which the reader discerns but does not regard as central for consistency-building remain within view, but are left on the periphery of the reading as “alien associations.” As the reading process progresses, these alien associations may either remain on the periphery of the reader’s emerging (and tentative) consistency, or they may overwhelm and replace it.¹⁶

¹³Stephen Fowl’s “The Ethics of Interpretation or What’s Left Over After the Elimination of Meaning,” *Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers*, ed. David J. Lull (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), 70, has wisely counseled that “we should eliminate talk of meanings in favor of terms that will both suit our interpretive interests and be precise enough to put a stop to futile discussions.” Iser, himself, shows some uneasiness with the term “meaning” (which he describes as “the hobbyhorse ridden by critics of yore”), but offers no suitable alternative (see *Act of Reading*, 54). I prefer the term “reading.”

¹⁴Iser acknowledges that some “propagandist literature” contains a high degree of consistency within its repertoire, but he suggests that such literature has little power to challenge or transform readers because it fails to engage their critical thinking skills. See *Act of Reading*, 82-85.

¹⁵On primary and secondary consistency-building, see *Act of Reading*, 118-25.

¹⁶On alien associations, see *Act of Reading*, 126-29 and “Reading Process,” 286.

According to Iser, themes become more established and thus gain a greater degree of determinacy over the reader's organization of subsequent textual perspectives as the reader builds consistency by organizing them within meaningful frames of reference, particularly: (1) historical and social frames of reference; (2) literary frames of reference; and (3) the reader's personal frames of reference.

First, in regard to historical and social frames of reference within the reading process, Iser explains that texts assume a repertoire of historical, cultural, and social norms that

. . . consists of all the familiar territory within the text. This may be in the form of references to earlier works, or to social and historical norms, or to the whole culture from which the text has emerged.¹⁷

Iser believes that the reader must organize the elements of this repertoire into coherent (but not necessarily familiar) images in order to discern a comprehensible setting for a text.¹⁸ Although a text's repertoire is often familiar to the reader, Iser acknowledges that a text's repertoire may in fact contain norms, values, and practices which are unfamiliar to a particular reader. When readers are faced with a familiar repertoire, their readings are informed by familiar norms and values. But when readers are faced with an unfamiliar repertoire, their readings must be informed "by a historical reconstruction of then prevailing values."¹⁹ Thus readers may draw upon familiar historical frames of reference or may be compelled to create unfamiliar (though coherent) historical frames of reference for a text. However, whether the historical frames of reference are familiar or unfamiliar, the text's repertoire forces the reader to begin building consistency by understanding the elements of the text within the historical frames of reference appropriate to the text itself.

Second, in regard to literary forms of reference, Iser acknowledges that the reading process is not exhausted by creating coherent historical frames of reference within which to read a text. Because the elements of the repertoire have been placed within a new literary context, consistency-building must also take place within literary frames of reference. Whereas

¹⁷*Act of Reading*, 69.

¹⁸On passive syntheses and image formation, see *Act of Reading*, 136-42 and "Reading Process," 285.

¹⁹*Act of Reading*, 152.

the historical frames of reference are external to the text and can only be inferred from the elements of the repertoire, the literary frames of reference are internal to the text. Iser suggests that the literary frames of reference which readers find within a text provide connections between the various elements within the text and relate these elements to another. Readers employ these literary frames of reference (which Iser calls textual strategies) in conjunction with historical frames of reference in their consistency-building.²⁰

Third, in regard to the reader's personal frames of reference, Iser acknowledges that a broad range of plausible historical and literary frames of reference may be constructed for most texts and textual segments. He, therefore, suggests that readers are always involved in a process of selection. That is, readers are constantly forced to choose which of the text's potential meanings are excluded from actualization.²¹ Iser insists that this process of selection is unavoidable because "with all literary texts . . . the potential text is infinitely richer than any of its realizations."²² Inevitably, therefore, a reader's "acts of understanding will *always* result in an *unavoidable* reduction of the potential contained in the literary text."²³ Iser insists that consistency-building is thus not only creative but also reductionistic because a consistent reading (i.e., a statement about meaning) "can only be created if one possibility is selected and the rest excluded."²⁴

Iser suggests that this process of selection and exclusion involves both conscious and unconscious interpretive judgments. First, on the unconscious level, he argues that interpretation begins as soon as the reader begins to perceive the text, that is, before the reader makes any conscious decisions about the meaning of the text. The implications of the reader's unconscious acts of interpretation are important for understanding Iser's relationship to postmodernism. Iser, in a postmodern fashion, makes the painfully obvious acknowledgment that the reader's unconscious acts of perception render it impossible to appeal to "the text" as the sole (or primary) basis of authority in the reading process. Any such appeal is invalidated by the obvious inaccessibility of an uninterpreted text to serve in this

²⁰See *Act of Reading*, 86-95.

²¹See especially *Act of Reading*, 122-25.

²²"Reading Process," 280.

²³"Situation," 16, emphasis added.

²⁴*Act of Reading*, 123.

authoritative capacity.²⁵ In other words, a reader cannot plausibly claim to employ a “text-centered” reading strategy because the reader can neither have access to the text apart from his or her own unconscious interpretations of the text nor even know the degree to which those unconscious interpretations are influencing the manner in which the text is being perceived.²⁶ One could employ a text-centered reading strategy only if one somehow had access to an uninterpreted text. But access to an uninterpreted text is impossible and, because of the inaccessibility of this uninterpreted text, the designation “text-centered” is little more than a naïve misnomer.

This discussion about the reality of unconscious acts of interpretation may make Iser sound like an advocate for a radically “reader-centered” reading strategy, but he has clearly distinguished himself from such radical proposals by insisting that the text does inform the reader’s unconscious acts of interpretation. In a well-publicized debate with Stanley Fish,²⁷ who is perhaps the most eloquent advocate of reader-centered reading strategies, Iser insists that the text provides readers with “givens” and that the presence of these givens ensures that the text

. . . exerts some control on what we can do with it. Professor Fish would argue that because it [the text] is never perceived in an unmediated manner, it can offer no guidance to us. I disagree.²⁸

Thus, for Iser, even though the reader cannot claim to interact consciously with the givens of the text, the reader’s response is influenced by the givens of the text. In regard to meaning, therefore, he argues that, even as it is formed on an unconscious level, meaning is the product of an interaction between the text and the reader.

Second, on a conscious level, Iser again insists that meaning is created by the interaction of a text and a reader and then he suggests that, as

²⁵See most importantly, “Talk Like Whales,” 82-87.

²⁶For Robert W. Wall’s Wesleyan advocacy of a text-centered reading strategy, see “The Future of Wesleyan Biblical Studies,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 33.2 (1998): 101-15. I would insist, however, that Dr. Wall’s appeal for “putting the ‘Wesleyan’ back into Biblical studies” reveals that, as a practical matter, Dr. Wall indirectly advocates a reading strategy which is not markedly different from the reading strategy being directly advocated in this paper.

²⁷See most importantly, Fish, “Why No One’s Afraid of Wolfgang Iser,” 68-86.

²⁸Iser, “Talk Like Whales,” 87.

a matter of practical criticism, we can analyze only the interaction which occurs between the reader and text on this conscious level.²⁹ On this conscious level, Iser suggests that readers encounter perspectives with different degrees of determinacy for the reader's consistency-building. He speaks of points of "determinacy" and points of "indeterminacy." Points of determinacy occur where the reader consciously discerns that the text is both calling for the reader's active consistency-building and guiding the reader toward specific patterns of consistency-building. Points of indeterminacy occur where the reader discerns that the text is calling for the reader's active consistency-building, but that the text is not guiding the reader toward specific patterns of consistency-building. Points of determinacy, therefore, limit the reader's interpretive freedom in the creation of meaning, while points of indeterminacy enhance the reader's interpretive freedom in the creation of meaning.³⁰

Therefore, as Iser understands the reading process, readers engage a text most actively at points where they sense the lack of determinacy, that is, at points where readers become conscious of their need to freely select among the potential meanings of a text. Iser designates these points of textual indeterminacy "gaps." At such gaps, the reader is impelled to create consistency by making conscious interpretive decisions which draw upon, and sometimes revise earlier interpretive decisions.³¹ In Iser's theory, these gaps take two different forms: blanks, points at which the diverse elements of the text fail to have clear connections to one another, and negations, points at which some element of the text seems to negate the text's existing norms without clearly formulating new replacement norms. Each type of gap calls for the reader's active consistency-building. Blanks call upon the reader to establish connections between divergent elements within the text when the reader does not clearly discern determinate patterns of connections between these divergent elements. Negations call upon the reader to formulate new norms to replace norms which the

²⁹See "Talk Like Whales," 85-87.

³⁰Iser draws heavily on Ingarden's phenomenological understanding of aesthetics in his discussion of determinacy and indeterminacy. See *Act of Reading*, 170-79.

³¹"Indeed, it is only through inevitable omissions that a story gains its dynamism. Thus whenever the flow is interrupted and we are led in unexpected directions, the opportunity is given to us to bring into play our own faculty for establishing connections—for filling in gaps left by the text itself" ("Reading Process," 280). Also see "Interaction," 113-14 and "Indeterminacy," 9.

reader has previously used for consistency-building, but which the reader senses have come to be negated by subsequent reading.³²

Iser Among Contemporary Literary Theorists

To the question which is now raging through literary and hermeneutical circles (i.e., what is the source of meaning and interpretive authority, the text or the reader?), Iser answers “both.”³³ For Iser, meaning derives neither from the text alone nor from the reader alone, but rather it derives from both as the reader interacts with the text. The text, because it provides the givens, is, in some indemonstrable way, a source of meaning, but the reader’s conscious and unconscious acts of interpretation are also, in demonstrable and indemonstrable ways, sources of meaning.

Because Iser takes the middle ground in this literary and hermeneutical debate over the source of meaning, he receives criticism from both sides of the debate. On the one hand, Iser’s insistence that the text provides the reader with “givens” has led some critics to argue that the reader is eventually overwhelmed by the text in Iser’s theory.³⁴ On the other hand, both Iser’s insistence that the reader does not have direct access to these givens themselves (that is, before the reader begins unconsciously interpreting these givens) and his insistence that texts contain indetermi-

³²On the important role of “gaps” and indeterminacy within Iser’s theory, see *Act of Reading*, 180-231.

³³Stanley Fish, “Who’s Afraid of Wolfgang Iser,” 69, has accurately summed up Iser’s position on the question of authority: “To the question informing much of contemporary literary theory—what is the source of interpretive authority, the text or the reader—Iser answers ‘both.’ He does not, however, conceive of the relationship between them as a partnership in which each brings a portion of the meaning which is then added to the portion of the meaning brought by the other; for in his theory meaning is something that is produced or built up or assembled by a *process* of interaction in which the two parties play quite different, but interdependent, roles” (emphasis Fish’s).

³⁴See, for example, Steven Mailloux, “Learning to Read,” *Studies in Literary Imagination* 12 (1979): 93-108, especially 93-95; Fish, “Why No One’s Afraid of Wolfgang Iser,” 68-86; Susan R. Suleiman, “Introduction: Varieties of Audience-Oriented Criticism,” *The Reader in the Text* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 3-45; Samuel Weber, “Caught in the Act of Reading,” *Demarcating the Disciplines* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 181-214; Stephen Moore, “Stories of Reading,” *Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), 141-59; and Stephen Moore, *Literary Criticism and the Gospels* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 101-13.

nate elements which call for the reader's active participation in the creation of meaning have lead other critics to argue that the text (the givens) ultimately gets lost in Iser's theory.³⁵

Although this is not the place to settle the ongoing debate over the source(s) of meaning, I suggest that this foray into Iser's thought yields two important insights. First, Iser's three categories for use in the analysis of the reading process are helpful: the *givens* (the uninterpreted text to which the reader has no conscious access), the *determinate* (the textual perspectives which the reader senses are directing and limiting active consistency-building), and the *indeterminate* (the textual perspectives which the reader senses are calling upon and promoting active consistency-building). Second, Iser's observation that critics can discuss only the two categories of the determinate and indeterminate is also important for discussions of meaning in a postmodern world. We cannot discuss the givens to which we have no conscious access. We can only discuss the determinate and indeterminate as we are aware of them. Although we may wish to learn the degrees to which our readings are influenced by the givens, we simply cannot know or demonstrate these degrees. However, we can and should discuss how we handle the determinate and indeterminate within our consistency-building.

From Literary Theory to Wesleyan Theology

If Iser's theory of the reading process has plausibility and if meaning is in fact the product of the conscious and unconscious interaction of a reader and a text, then, as a consequence of the reader's role in the creation of meaning, there is no pot of untainted meaning at the end of the exegetical rainbow! The traditional hermeneutical distinction between "what it meant" and "what it means" is not tenable. Like it or not, we can only talk about the meaning which we discover. We may wish to believe (or we may even be naively confident) that the meaning which we discover is, in some direct and significant way, influenced by the intention of the original author, or by some supposed meaning inherent within the text, or by the intention of the framers of the canon, or even by the God who inspired the biblical writers, but that influence simply cannot, in the

³⁵See, for example, Dagmar Barnouw, Review of *Act of Reading* and *The Implied Reader*, *Modern Language Notes* 94 (1979): 1207-14; John Paul Riquelms, "The Ambivalence of Reading," *Diacritics* 10 (1980): 66-68; and Wayne C. Booth, "For The Authors," *Novel* 11 (1977): 6-19.

absence of an uninterpreted text, be clearly demonstrated. Our readings cannot, therefore, be validated by appeals to any of these supposedly objective external standards. Because meaning exists only in the presence of a reader, we are faced with the demise of the concept of a single, unified, and unconditioned (objective) meaning for any biblical text.

In light of this demise, it would seem that we as biblical scholars and theologians are faced with three closely related tasks. First, we need to develop a reading strategy which is sufficiently complex to accommodate the demise of the concept of a single, unified, and unconditioned meaning for biblical texts. I am not calling for us to develop a new and improved set of interpretive tools which will help us discover what the Bible really, really, really means. On the contrary, I am suggesting that we must develop reading strategies which will allow us to offer our normative readings of the biblical texts even in the midst of our honest acknowledgment that our readings—and, indeed, all readings—of the Scripture are selective, conditioned and tentative.

One useful manner in which to present our readings is, I suggest, to adopt the categories of Iser's theory of the reading process. We can simply state what elements within the text we can find to be determinate and what elements within the text we find to be indeterminate. Then we can explain how we have responded to the determinacies and indeterminacies which we have found within the text and we can clarify the frames of reference within which we are reading the text. We can, without appeal to the inaccessible givens, explain and defend the literary frames of reference (e.g., Johannine irony, synoptic hyperbole, Pauline diatribe, Hebrew parallelism, etc.), the historical frames of reference (e.g., Greco-Roman patronage traditions, early Christian eschatological expectation, Israelite royal theology, etc.), and personal frames of reference (e.g., a liberationist perspective, a redactional perspective, a canonical perspective, an environmentalist perspective, etc.) which we are consciously employing in our consistency-building.

Within the contexts of the Wesleyan Theological Society and our holiness churches, colleges, and seminaries, I suggest that we should consciously and unapologetically adopt a specifically Wesleyan frame of reference, a frame of reference which begins with the assumption of God's universal prevenient grace and which has as its goal the perfection of love in individuals and communities. This approach, if accompanied by an honest acknowledgment of the conditionedness of our readings, provides

us with the best hope of offering distinctively Wesleyan readings of Scripture without engaging in anachronistic and unpersuasive efforts to present the whole of the biblical text as a document written from a Wesleyan theological perspective.

No doubt many professional theologians and biblical scholars will protest against this proposal as the thin edge of the wedge of “uncontrollable subjectivism.”³⁶ Although I am merely advocating that we publicly and consciously acknowledge what we already routinely do (that is, make decisions about the determinacy and indeterminacy of textual perspectives and make decisions about the frames of reference within which we will read these perspectives), I think that I understand the perils of standing on the slippery slope of idiosyncratic or even injurious readings. Thus, I suggest that our second task as Wesleyan theologians and biblical scholars is to develop a set of criteria by which our readings may be evaluated. Just as our integrity as scholars in the postmodern world calls us to rethink our reading strategies, our integrity as theologians in the Wesleyan tradition calls us to reflect on the criteria by which good and bad readings can be distinguished.³⁷

I suggest two criteria: credibility and appropriateness. The criterion of credibility demands that I, as a reader, am obligated to demonstrate the

³⁶Kuenzli, “Review,” 47, suggests that the fear of professional literary critics about “uncontrollable subjectivism” has been a decisive factor in the suppression of the role of readers within critical discussions of literature, reading and meaning. The same fear is undoubtedly even more prevalent among professional theologians and biblical scholars. In regard to our tendency to find what we desire to find within the Bible, C. H. Dodd once noted tongue-in-cheek: “*Hic liber est in quo quaerit sua dogmata quisque; Invenit et pariter dogmata quisque sua*. This is the book where still everyone seeks his own proper opinion; This is the book where still everyone finds what he seeks” (*The Bible Today*, Cambridge: University Press, 1952, 22).

³⁷Iser’s understanding of how the literary critic functions within the literary guild is similar to the manner in which I envisage Wesleyan biblical scholars functioning properly within their communities. Iser explains that “the critic is the same as any other reader, for through the consistencies that he establishes he tries to grasp the work as a single unit. The moment the critic offers his interpretation he is himself open to criticism, because the structure of the work can be assembled in many different ways. A hostile reaction to his interpretation will indicate that he has not been sufficiently aware of the habitual norms that have oriented his consistency-building. The hostile reader, however, will be in the same position, for his reaction is liable to be dictated by standards that are equally habitual. The difference between the two is that the critic must then seek to explain why his own consistency-building is appropriate to the work in question” (*Act of Reading*, 17).

credibility of my reading to the community. I must be able to demonstrate the plausibility of my consistency-building and to defend my selections. I must be able to convince other readers that the reading which I am offering is, in fact, an adequate construction of meaning based upon the text as they see it. The criterion of appropriateness demands that my reading be appropriate to the community. Since the biblical texts are normative for the Christian community, the community must reserve the right to reject credible readings which are inappropriate for Christian faith and practice. A reading may, in fact, be entirely credible to a community (that is, it may satisfy the community's norms for consistency-building) and still may be entirely inappropriate for the community when examined in light of the community's historic identity. The community's task is to determine a response to Scripture which is both credible in light of the text and appropriate to the contemporary church.

Finally, our third major task is to rethink the nature of revelation. If meaning is, in fact, a relational category, that is, if meaning is the product of the interaction of a reader and a text,³⁸ then, it seems to me that revelation must be a relational category. Revelation must not be strictly equated with the written Word (the Bible), nor even with the message of the written Word (the gospel), but rather it must be understood as an encounter with the Living Word (Christ). That is, revelation is the church's encounter with Christ, an encounter which occurs as a result of the church's interaction with the Bible. This understanding of revelation is, it seems to me, consistent with the insight that meaning resides neither in the text alone nor in the reader alone, but rather is created by the interaction of the text (the Scripture) and the reader (the church). We need to develop an understanding of revelation that is relational and that proceeds from the all important foundation that revelation occurs when the Spirit enables the church to encounter the Living Word. That is, we need to think of revelation not only as an event (or as a witness to an event) which happened in the past, but, more importantly, as something which has happened anytime the Spirit has enabled the church to find meaning in the Scripture. The church's discovery of meaning, even if that meaning changes substantially over time (as indeed it has!), is revelation.

³⁸As a distinguished homiletician, Fred Craddock insists, "common sense dictates that it is the interaction of the text and the reader which effects the realization of the text" ("The Gospels as Literature," *Interpretation* 49 [1988]: 24).

Let me briefly sketch out some of the implications of this relational understanding of revelation by returning to the opening paragraphs of this paper. Each time that I relearned what the Bible really (or really, really) meant, I sensed some uneasiness about the implications that my act of relearning had for my understanding of revelation. Each time I came to a new and *different* understanding of Scripture, I wondered about the revelatory status of my old understanding. I would ponder whether or not an understanding of the entire Bible, which I had previously valued, but which I had come to reject as “wrong,” was in fact ever revelatory. Was, I wondered, the Bible only revelatory when properly understood? If so, what constituted a proper understanding?

This problem is, of course, much bigger than my individual experience. The history of the church is replete with examples of the church discarding readings of Scripture which had long been treasured by large sections of the church (e.g., how many of us believe that the inn in the parable of the Good Samaritan should be understood as the church?). Simply put, if revelation is envisaged as an unified and objective message which God gave humanity (“what it meant”) and which humanity should seek to understand and appropriate as a unified and objective message (“what it means”), then the history of the church’s interpretation of the Bible becomes both a threat to the legitimacy of the historic church and an indictment against the adequacy of the idea of revelation. If, however, revelation is understood as the community’s encounter with the Living Word which occurs as a result of the community’s encounter with the written Word and which is validated by the activity (witness) of the Spirit within the community,³⁹ then the history of the interpretation of the Bible becomes a testimony of the self-revealing grace of God within the church.

For those who suspect that I have lost all regard for Wesley and his concern to make Scripture the norming norm for faith and practice, let me conclude by briefly quoting and commenting on a passage from the introduction to Wesley’s *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament*:

³⁹This understanding is, I believe, essentially in harmony with Randy Maddox’s understanding of revelation in Wesley. Maddox explains, “the definitive revelation of God may come to us through Scripture but still be immediate because the Spirit who originally addressed the spiritual sense of the writer will also open our spiritual senses to perceive and attest to the truth they expressed.” See *Responsible Grace* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, Abingdon Press, 1994), 31.

I cannot flatter myself so far (to use the words of one of the above-named writers) as to imagine that I have fallen into no mistakes, in a work of so great difficulty. But my own conscience acquits me of having designedly misrepresented any single passage of Scripture, or of having written one line with a purpose of inflaming the hearts of Christians against each other. God forbid that I should make the words of the most gentle and benevolent Jesus, a vehicle to convey such poison. Would to God that all the party names, and unscriptural phrases and forms, which have divided the Christian world, were forgot; and that we might all agree to sit down together, as humble, loving disciples, at the feet of our common Master, to hear his word, to imbibe his Spirit, and to transcribe his in our own!⁴⁰

May we, like Wesley, fight the temptation to flatter ourselves by endowing our individual readings with a normative status that can only be obtained when we “sit down together” and read in community. May we, like Wesley, realize that revelation, as it is experienced in the reading of Scripture, is a christological and pneumatological experience. And, may we, like Wesley, be willing to admit the legitimacy of having our readings consciously informed by appropriate personal commitments (like Wesley’s commitment to Christian love and unity).⁴¹

⁴⁰John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1981), preface: paragraph 9.

⁴¹On the proposal that love for one’s neighbor be used as the norming hermeneutical principle for reading all Scripture, see the discussion of the prominent Methodist New Testament scholar Robert C. Tannehill, “Freedom and Responsibility in Scripture Interpretation, with Application to Luke,” *Literary Studies in Luke-Acts* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1998), 265-78.

THE RELEVANCE OF WESLEYAN EVANGELISM IN A POSTMODERN CULTURE

by

John H. Tyson

As Euclidean Geometry has encountered the curved space of Einstein, and as Newton's laws have encountered the quantum mechanics of Max Planc, "Modernism" has run into several dead-ends.¹ Some assumptions of the Enlightenment have proven false, while others have proven unhelpful and even destructive. "Postmodernism" is the response to these terminal points of modernism. Some forms of this response are characterized as deconstructionist, while others are reconstructionist.² Either way, many persons no longer subscribe to major tenets of the Enlightenment project (Modernism). In postmodern thought, knowledge is no longer

¹Robert Neville, *The High Road Around Modernism* (New York: Suny, 1992), 18. Neville observes that "The Enlightenment concern for certainty, and Kant's transcendental philosophy appear as interesting dead ends." Indeed, the purpose of the work is to show a way around some of modernism's dead ends without succumbing to the equally abortive cycle of deconstructionism characteristic of some postmodern approaches.

²Postmodernism as a reaction to modernism seems to have begun in the late nineteenth century, but it became a popular movement in the 1960s to describe reaction to the modern in architecture, art, literature and theology. See Stanley Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), chapter 2. Postmodern philosophy includes the "deconstructionism" of Jacques Derrida, as well as the "post-structuralism" of Nietzschean disciple Michel Foucault (Grenz, 1996: chapter 6). But it also includes the reconstructionist thought of David Griffin (editor of the SUNY series in Constructive Postmodern Thought), Pope John Paul II, Diogenes Allen, Robert Neville, Howard Snyder, Thomas Oden, Clark Pinnock, David Dockery, and others.

seen as inherently good, but may be used for good or evil, as with nuclear technology and genetic engineering. Progress no longer seems inevitable, while it appears to many that world destruction by human means is. Truth is not seen as purely rational; rather, emotions, and intuition can also discern truth. Nor, very often, is truth as great a concern as utility.³ Knowledge is not merely objective; it is also personal, historical, and interactive. There is no such thing as the autonomous, dispassionate knower; rather, knowledge is seen as historically and culturally conditioned. And many no longer see truth as universal, eternal, and supracultural, but rather truth is judged to be what is perceived by a particular community at a particular time for that community.⁴

Constructive postmodernists are recognizing some of the dead ends of modernism, as well as the valuable accomplishments of the era, and are moving forward with new approaches. Whereas modernism has tended to view the world on the model of the machine, postmodern culture emphasizes the importance of relationships. Modernism has been noetic-centric; postmodern culture is interested rather in transformation. Modernism has been characterized by a rationality that strangled spirituality; postmodern culture is openly spiritual.⁵ Modernism has been reductive; postmodernism is inclusive. Modernism has seen a Christianity willing to underplay distinctive doctrines; some postmodern Christians are becoming more explicitly Christocentric.⁶

The theology of John Wesley, and the heritage of Methodism, are well positioned to give leadership in evangelism in this postmodern culture because of the nature of their location within it. John Wesley was obviously a part of the modern period and he was in many ways a son of the Enlightenment. Yet he strenuously and self-consciously resisted some of the same aspects of modernism which postmodern thought now recognizes as problematic. For example, his Christocentric theology can offer a sensitive alternative to Theocentrism without succumbing to a Christian

³For example, consider "ethics first" praxis-oriented liberation theologies. See Paul Knitter, *No Other Name* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1985), 163-4. Also Grenz, 1996, 48: "The question is no longer 'Is it true?' but 'What use is it?'"

⁴I am indebted to Stanley Grenz for this summary assessment. Grenz, 1996, 7, 8. Foucault particularly comes to mind concerning the fragmentation of truth.

⁵Note, for example, David Griffin, ed. *Spirituality and Society* (New York: SUNY, 1988). This is a collection of essays in a series on Constructive Postmodern Thought.

⁶Grenz, 1996, chapter 7, "The Gospel and the Postmodern Context."

jingoism repugnant to both modern and postmodern sensibilities. His emphasis on transformation supersedes the modern tendency toward noeticism and determinism; and his insistence on vital spirituality refreshes and balances the modern emphasis on rationality.

Wesleyan Evangelism Is Properly Spiritual

Modernism is saturated with the Cartesian rationalistic self and Hume's skeptical empiricism which focus on the human self and what can be comprehended without reference to revelation. An important and clearly stated goal of the Enlightenment project was to move away from revealed religion and belief in the supernatural toward a completely rational approach to truth. This is why the metaphor of the machine was so pervasive in Enlightenment parlance. The message was: there is nothing mysterious or supernatural here, only a complex system of discrete machines acting according to discoverable and dependable laws of nature. David Griffin observes:

The divine reality for the Middle Ages was both transcendent and immanent. Protestantism moved away from divine immanence and toward pure transcendence—for example, by reducing the number of sacraments, by moving toward a purely emblematic interpretation of the Eucharist, by rejecting icons, saints, and post-Biblical miracles, and by rejecting infused grace in favor of imputed justification. Early modern theological scientists (including Catholics such as Mersenne and Descartes as well as Protestants such as Boyle and Newton) carried this tendency to an extreme, so that God was wholly outside the world. . . . Not only was the immanence of God in nature denied, the immanence of God in the human mind was also denied, mainly through the “sensationalist” doctrine of experience, according to which nothing can be present in the mind except what enters through the physical senses. . . .

Once supernaturalism had changed from theism to deism, according to which God does not intervene after the initial creation, God could be known only by inference from the created order or through an innate, implanted idea. A divine reality was a matter of belief, not direct experience: all mysticism or “enthusiasm” was proscribed.⁷

⁷Griffin, 1988, 4-5.

Even the casual observer of Wesley will probably recognize quickly that Griffin has painted in these two paragraphs the backdrop of several of the major controversies in Wesley's ministry. One thinks of the bitter controversy in the 1760s with the Calvinistic Methodists over James Hervey and imputed righteousness, in which Wesley insisted that God's grace is not only imputed to the faithful but also imparted. But more commonly known are the established church's acrimonious and incessant accusations of "enthusiasm." The nub of the controversies was Wesley's unyielding insistence that Christianity is not merely natural but is also an experience of the supernatural grace and presence of God, both imparted and imputed to the human soul.

Wesley insisted on a role for the Holy Spirit which resisted the modern period's drive to reduce spirituality to a function of rationality. This struggle between spirituality and rationality is, perhaps, best illustrated by Wesley's struggle with certain members of the Anglican establishment of his day concerning his doctrines of assurance, the witness of the Spirit, and the perceptible inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Wesley's insistence on the reality of spiritual experience which could not be simply collapsed into a species of rationality was at the heart of the many denunciations of Wesley as a dangerous religious fanatic, or "enthusiast."

For Wesley, the Holy Spirit could be equated with "God's gracious empowering Presence restored through Christ."⁸ This empowering presence of the Holy Spirit within us is called grace, and is perceptible by those within whom the grace operates.⁹ It is perceptible indirectly by its fruits, that is, the fruits of the Spirit such as love, joy and peace. It is also perceptible directly by the Spirit's inspiration, witnessing to us that we are children of God and inspiring within us a love of God and neighbor which purifies believers and guides them into holiness of heart and life. In this sense, the work of the Holy Spirit is perceptible, but not irresistible. That is, one can resist the inspirations of the Holy Spirit and thus close oneself off from grace. On the other hand, as one responds in loving obedience to the Spirit's inspiration, the gracious activity of the Spirit increases. Maddox puts it well:

⁸Randy Maddox, *Responsible Grace* (Nashville: Kingswood, 1994), 119.

⁹See Wesley's exchange of letters with John Smith in the 1740s, especially the one dated July 10, 1747. Frank Baker, ed. *John Wesley's Works*, Bicentennial edition, 26:244. Hereafter *Works*.

For Wesley, then, the Spirit's work of sanctification was not merely a forensic declaration of how God will treat us (regardless of what we are in reality). Neither was it a matter of directly infusing virtues in Christian lives. It was a process of character-formation that is made possible by a restored participation of fallen humanity in the Divine life and power.¹⁰

Given this understanding of grace which steers an insightful course between Lutheran (imputed) and Roman (inherent) notions of grace by borrowing from both the Anglican and the Eastern Christian traditions, Wesley understood grace to operate not merely on a mechanical level but on a personal and relational level. The gracious presence of the Holy Spirit helps us increasingly to know and to do God's will as we are more and more healed and transformed in God's image. That is, we become more holy, not because God's grace is a part of the human character, but because the Holy Spirit enables the human character to be restored to true humanness in the image of God. This is very different from saying that God is within us as some sort of divine spark which becomes identified as an inherent or innate part of our humanness. Wesley's understanding of the Holy Spirit's presence and work resists the modern drift toward understanding the reality of God as subjective only and not objective also, as well as the correlated view of religious origins as psychogenic (as in the thought of Freud, Fruerbach, and Marx) or sociogenic (as in the thought of Durkheim and Malinowski) rather than transcendent.

A Perspective on "Enthusiasm"

As examples of Wesley's insistence on vital spirituality, we will look briefly at his debates with John Smith concerning the doctrines of faith and assurance. These doctrines of Wesley's are closely related in their assumptions of the perceptible inspiration of the Holy Spirit. "John Smith" was a pseudonym for an opponent in theological debate whom Wesley respected. Smith represented the concerns of many in the Anglican Church who felt uncomfortable with what they had heard of Wesley's theology. Wesley's correspondence with Smith provided Wesley with a good forum for defending his doctrines, especially those doctrines for

¹⁰See Maddox, 1994, 122. See also 121-124, 197 for connections between Wesley's idea of the Holy Spirit as therapeutic inspiration and the Eastern Orthodox notion of theosis.

which Wesley had been labeled an “enthusiast.”¹¹ Essentially, any doctrine which asserted that God could be known through direct spiritual contact was considered a dangerous form of religious fanaticism or enthusiasm. The prevailing notion in the established Church was rather that God’s movement on the human soul could be known only through the fruits of his operations, such as grace to do good works.¹²

Smith characterized Wesley’s doctrine of assurance as a frightening example of enthusiasm. In his early ministry, Wesley insisted that assurance of the present favor of God always accompanied justifying faith. He later modified this stance to say that assurance is the common privilege of every believer, but that some who lacked this assurance may still have justifying faith.¹³ Wesley’s doctrine concerned only the assurance of the present favor of God, which favor is conditioned by one’s continued cooperation with grace.¹⁴ However, since this doctrine of assurance involved the direct testimony of the Spirit of God to the individual, and was asserted to be perceived inwardly and spiritually as well as by its fruits, many leading Anglicans saw in it a clear and disturbing instance of enthusiasm.

¹¹*Works*, 26 (To John Smith; Sept. 28, 1745): 154. See also *Ibid.* (June 25, 1746): 197.

¹²Both Bishop Gibson and Bishop Warburton were careful to explain that God’s good Spirit and providence could be experienced only through a theological interpretation of empirical data, i.e., by their “fruits and effects.” Notions that God could be experienced directly and spiritually were “rank enthusiasm.” See Edmond Gibson, *The Late Bishop of London’s Five Pastoral Letters* (London, 1749), 255-283. See also William Warburton, *The Doctrine of Grace: or the Office and Operations of the Holy Spirit Vindicated from the Insults of Infidelity and the Abuses of Fanatics* (London, 1763), 1-24.

¹³See Henry Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast* (Philadelphia: Trinity, 1989), 393 ff, 425 ff. For an excellent discussion of Wesley’s doctrine of assurance, see also Kenneth J. Collins, *The Scripture Way of Salvation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), 131-152. See especially 136-144 in which Collins observes the development of this doctrine which the mature Wesley called “a common privilege of the children of God.” See also Richard P. Heitzenrater, *Mirror and Memory* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 106-149, who disentangles some of the connections between Wesley’s early doctrine of Assurance and the Moravian influence. When Heitzenrater notes on p. 107 that “the direct tie between assurance and conversion. . . he eventually dropped in his mature theology,” the emphasis is on the words “direct tie.” That is, Wesley ceased to insist that assurance must in every case accompany true saving faith, although he did insist, even in later years, that this was the normal implication of saving faith.

¹⁴J. Telford, ed. *John Wesley’s Letters* (London, 1931) (To Dr. Rutherford), V:358 ff.

John Smith did not deny the possibility of assurance that one is a child of God, but he preferred to base this assurance on logic rather than supernatural grace. He insisted that one can reason whether one is a child of God by observing whether one assents to and practices Christian truth.¹⁵ Wesley responded that he did not “despise” this logical evidence that one is a child of God, but he insisted that this is “far different from the *direct* witness of the Spirit, of which I believe St. Paul speaks.”¹⁶

The ground of Smith’s charges of enthusiasm was Wesley’s insistence that inspiration is perceptible. Wesley defined assurance in terms that assumed the reality of perceptible inspiration, and Smith objected that such notions were both irrational and mentally destabilizing. In his letter of December 30, 1745, Wesley responded to Smith’s charges that his enthusiastic teachings of perceptible inspiration were dangerous because they “unhinge” people. Wesley suggested that the crux of the issue was whether inspiration was indeed perceptible, and he insisted that it was:

Therefore the *distinguishing doctrines* on which I do insist in all my writings and in all my preaching will lie in a very narrow compass. You sum them all up in perceptible *inspiration*. For this I earnestly contend; and so do all who are called Methodist preachers. But be pleased to observe what we mean thereby. We mean that inspiration of God’s Holy Spirit whereby he fills us with righteousness, peace, and joy, with love to him and to all mankind. And we believe it cannot be, in the nature of things, that a man should be filled with this . . . without perceiving it, as clearly as he does the light of the sun. . . . This is the *substance* of what we all preach. And I will still believe, none is a *true Christian* till he experiences it; and consequently, that people at all hazards must be convinced of this; yea, though that conviction at first “unhinge” them ever so much, though it should in a manner “distract” them for a season. For it is better that they should be “perplexed” and “terrified” now than that they should sleep on and awake in hell.¹⁷

¹⁵*Works*, 26 (To John Smith Dec. 30, 1745): 178.

¹⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁷*Ibid.*: 181-2. See also Wesley’s letter to Samuel Furley in which he connects denial of a direct testimony of the Spirit with the danger of lapsing into moralism, *JWL* vol. 8.

Wesley's insistence on the supernatural assistance of God's grace through the Holy Spirit is demonstrated, not only in his doctrine of assurance, but also by a change in his definition of faith in the late 1730s.

In a letter to his mother dated July 29, 1725, the young Wesley defined faith simply as "an assent to a proposition upon rational grounds." This rationalistic approach to faith was quite normal in Anglican circles at the time, and worked smoothly within a modern world-view which doubted the probability of an objectively real God intervening in human affairs.¹⁸ However, Wesley's view of faith changed as he embraced the Moravian notion and experience of justification by faith; he adopted a view of faith which was not solely rational, but which also assumed the inter-activity of an objectively real God in human lives and affairs. After 1738, faith for Wesley was not mere intellectual assent, and unlike the Anglican Bishop Bull, Wesley no longer viewed faith as primarily an act of the human will. For instance, in 1745 he defended his supernatural view of faith in these terms:

Faith (instead of being a rational assent and moral virtue, for the attainment of which men ought to yield the utmost attention and industry) is altogether supernatural and the immediate gift of God. I believe (1) that a rational assent to the truth of the Bible is one ingredient of Christian faith; (2) that Christian faith is a moral virtue in that sense wherein hope and charity are; (3) that men ought to yield the utmost attention and industry for the attainment of it; and yet (4) that this, as every Christian grace, is properly supernatural, is an immediate gift of God, which He commonly gives in the use of such means as He hath ordained.¹⁹

Wesley's new definition of faith was markedly different from the more rationalistic and less controversial definition favored by many leading Anglicans of his day. Wesley understood faith as a supernatural, spiritual gift of God which included, but exceeded, intellectual assent. It extends

¹⁸Cannon observes that the Anglican view of faith in this period was not generally understood to be "the free gift of God implanted in the human soul. Rather, it is itself a human act and takes its place among the works of moral endeavor. . . . Both [faith and works] have their roots firmly embedded in the soul of man's nature and grow through the watering of human achievement" (William Cannon, *John Wesley's Doctrine of Justification by Faith*, New York: Abingdon, 1946, 146).

¹⁹*Works*, 26:156-57 ("To John Smith" Sept. 28, 1745).

even to a palpable conviction of God's love which Wesley usually called assurance of salvation. The June 25, 1744, Minutes of the Annual Conference link faith and assurance in a way which moves beyond rationality to emphasize spiritual reality:

Faith, in general, is a divine supernatural evidence of things not seen, i.e., of past, future, or spiritual things. 'Tis a spiritual sight of God and the things of God. Therefore, repentance is a low species of faith, i.e., a supernatural sense of an offended God. Justifying faith is a supernatural inward sense or sight of God in Christ reconciling the world unto himself. First, a sinner is convinced by the Holy Ghost: "Christ loved me and gave himself for me." This is that faith by which he is justified, or pardoned, the moment he receives it. Immediately the same Spirit bears witness, "Thou art pardoned, thou hast redemption in his blood." And this is saving faith, whereby the love of God is shed abroad in his heart.²⁰

Once again, John Smith voices the concerns of eighteenth-century rationalism, calling into question Wesley's definition of faith as "a supernatural conviction of the things of God."²¹ This is astute of Smith, for he has identified the source of a very sore point. Essentially, any doctrine which asserted that God could be known through direct spiritual contact was considered enthusiasm. The prevailing notion was rather that God's movement upon the human soul could be known only through the fruits of his operations, such as grace to do good works.²² In postulating a supernatural conviction of the things of God (faith) as the basis for justification, Wesley made what his Anglican detractors viewed as enthusiasm the starting point of "true religion."

Smith preferred a definition of faith as "a full assent to all Christian truths as is productive of all Christian practice."²³ This definition effectively limited experiential faith to a combination of rationality and moral-

²⁰T. Jackson, ed. *Works of John Wesley* (London, 1931), vol. 8, 275-76 (1744 Minutes).

²¹*Works*, 26: 169 (From John Smith; Nov. 27, 1745).

²²Both Bishop Gibson and Bishop Warburton were careful to explain that God's good Spirit and providence could be experienced only through a theological interpretation of empirical data, i.e., by their "fruits and effects." Notions that God could be experienced directly and spiritually were "rank enthusiasm." See Gibson, 1749: 255-283. See also Warburton, 1763: 1-24.

²³*Works*, 26: 169 (From John Smith; Nov. 27, 1745).

ity (within which spheres God imperceptibly works) and eliminated any necessity of spiritual or supernatural experience. This definition of faith can obviously accommodate itself more effectively within the Modern worldview than can a definition such as Wesley's. Faith for Wesley was the gift of a gracious, self-disclosing, objectively real God, a gift which gives one grace to believe the things of God which one has not seen. Although it includes rational, intellectual assent, it exceeds rationality, and insists on a spiritual, supernatural origin and an end which both transforms the present, natural experience and embraces the supernatural reality of eternal life.²⁴ In the emerging postmodern culture, the Modern denial of spiritual reality seems a severely truncated, unnecessary and unhelpful epistemological assumption. Instead, Wesley's understanding of faith as a spiritual reality of supernatural origin speaks to the postmodern interest in vital spirituality.

The supernatural aspects of faith have been particularly hard-hit by the Modern paradigm, which Wesley himself experienced in his struggles with the Church of England. In the modern period science has provided explanations for things which, in an earlier era, had only religious explanations. Newton explained the movement of the universe in a manner which seemed to leave little need for a doctrine of God other than as Creator. Two hundred years later, Charles Darwin rendered the Creator-God doctrine a staggering blow. In the twentieth century, psychiatry overtook spirituality as the primary model for mental and emotional health. In such an environment, where materialism (only the material is real) and atheism increasingly defined the reigning plausibility structures, the church has found it more and more difficult to articulate convincingly a role for spirituality. Wesley's theology is a valuable resource for the recovery of vital spirituality in the postmodern period.

Wesleyan Evangelism is Transformational

The postmodern culture is offering us a new challenge and a new opportunity which can be well met within the Wesleyan tradition. This

²⁴Wesley's retained into old age his view of faith as supernatural and relational rather than purely rational. For example, Wesley's 1788 sermon "Walking by Sight and Walking by Faith" demonstrates this clearly. The supernatural element is clearly present, as when he insists that walking by faith includes being "made alive, given new senses, spiritual senses, senses exercised to discern spiritual good and evil" (*Works*, 4:49). See also Wesley's 1791 sermon "On Faith," in which the supernatural, relational and teaching aspects are all present as usual (*Works*, 4:187).

emerging culture has a spiritual hunger and is inquisitive about spiritual things. It is willing to explore the possibility of supernatural reality. Wesleyan evangelism can address this hunger, this inquisitiveness, with a message that is informed by a respect for both reason and revelation. Wesleyan evangelism unapologetically claims that the essence of the Christian life is spiritual and supernatural; it is based on the relationship of the human person to a holy and loving God who has freely chosen self-revelation in the person and work of Jesus Christ. This healed and healing relationship between God and humanity manifests itself in holy love and loving service to God and neighbor. Closely related to Wesley's insistence on the Christian life as a genuine interaction between humanity and an objectively real and intervening God, is Wesley's insistence that the Christian life is not merely rational, formal, external, and forensic, but also transformational.

Although it would be quite wrong to suggest that determinism (the notion that human actions are not free, but are determined by an outside force), fatalism (the notion that ultimately, what happens is unavoidable), and nihilism (the denial of anything of ultimate value or meaning) are unique features of modernism, these ideas are strongly present, particularly in late modernism, and form a significant dead-end which constructive postmodern thinkers are looking for ways to overcome.²⁵

Howard Snyder's useful and thought-provoking book, *Earth Currents* examines contemporary sociological trends and asks where these trends might take us in the coming years. He discusses the problem of determinism. Determinism is at least as old as the Stoicism of ancient Greece, and is also strongly evident in the thought of Ralph Waldo Emerson. Rapidly growing interest in astrology (the stars hold your fate) today is a sign that determinism is not disappearing. Although determinism may be somehow comforting when we feel small and helpless, it denies and subverts the freedom and responsibility that we have to cooperate with God in creating the world we live in.

Wesley was no determinist. He was a transformationalist and his theology offers us a framework for transforming, in cooperation with and

²⁵Howard Snyder, *Earth Currents* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 201-212, devotes chapter 14 to a discussion of fatalism. He argues that fatalism is not new, but it is a weak and problematic worldview which operates destructively in modernity. See also John Cobb, *Grace and Responsibility* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 26-33, and Griffin, 1988: 5-7.

obedience to God, ourselves, our relationships, and the world we live in. A quick inventory of Wesley's emphases shows his consistent and powerful grasp of Christianity as transformational: Divine Transcendence vs. Divine Immanence; Divine Decrees vs. Divine Invitation; Inclusive Grace vs. Exclusive Grace; Divine Pardon (imputed righteousness) vs. Divine Power (infused righteousness); the Call to Moralism vs. the Call to Holiness; Present Salvation vs. Future Salvation; Individual Pardon vs. Social Holiness. Although we could discuss each of these dichotomies at length, here we will merely sketch their importance.

One of the reasons Wesley was constantly embroiled in controversies—and some of them were very bitter—is that in an age when most Protestants were moving to theological positions which traded on a presumption of divine transcendence, Wesley was enthralled with the reality and power of God's presence within the creation. This is not to say that Wesley's theology dissolves into mysticism, for he was actually very guarded against mysticism's excesses.²⁶ But there is a constant insistence that God is spiritually and really present with every person, and indeed within the entire creation. Part of this tension within Protestantism was an effort to differentiate itself from Roman Catholic emphases: transubstantiation, infused grace within the soul, the canonization of saints, and so on. And part of this tension was set up by the then current philosophical and scientific emphasis on natural law, mechanistic science, and a receding role for God. In any case, Wesley clashed often and forcefully within the Protestant system, partly because of his tendency to emphasize God's eminence in a world which felt more comfortable with God removed to a greater distance. We might also admit in passing that Wesley's clashes also had something to do with his temperament! Whereas naturalistic science and rational and skeptical philosophy were defining nature as a series of machines to be exploited, Wesley explicitly maintained an understanding of God's immanence in creation:

God is in all things, and . . . we are to see the Creator in the glass of every creature; . . . we should use and look upon nothing as separate from God, which indeed is a kind of practical Atheism; but with a true magnificence of thought, survey heaven and earth and all that is therein as contained by God in

²⁶See Cobb, 1995: 48-50 and Robert Tuttle, *Mysticism in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989).

the hollow of His hand, who by his intimate presence holds them all in being, who pervades and actuates the whole created frame, and is in a true sense the Soul of the universe.²⁷

Another dichotomy to consider is Divine Decrees/Divine Invitation. Within the Methodist revival of Wesley's day, Calvinism was again ascendant. Calvinism in England had been repudiated with the Restoration of Charles II, and had remained so, but with the revival Calvinism began to enjoy a revival of its own. Most of the leaders of the revival were moderate Calvinists, so they demurred somewhat at an emphasis on double predestination, but they held firmly to the notion of election, predestination, and the divine decrees. Wesley loathed the doctrine of predestination, partly because he was reared in a home where Arminius was more influential than Calvin, partly because he thought the doctrine misrepresented God's universal love, and partly because he observed that the doctrine had a tendency to vitiate the motive for holiness. Wesley believed and taught that it was the will of God that every person should and could know the reality and power of salvation. The invitation was open to absolutely everyone.

An important corollary to Wesley's Arminianism was his optimistic anthropology. He believed that the divine nature in every person had been effaced, and that every person by nature was totally depraved. However, everyone had restored by grace a measure of free will by which one could respond to grace. The grace was called preventing or prevenient grace. It can be compared with conscience, and is the first faint glimmering of realization that God is drawing us to Godself. Wesley believed that every person is given this grace, and that if one cooperates with this grace, more grace will be given, leading one to a consciousness of sin and a desire to turn from sin to loving obedience, which is justifying grace. At the moment of justification, or pardon of sins, one also experiences the new birth, which occurs at the moment the person is renewed in the image of God. As one cooperates with God's grace in loving obedience one grows in grace toward perfection in love.

This scenario of salvation is truly transformational. Whereas Wesley's Calvinistic counterparts would have limited God's grace only to certain persons, Wesley insisted that grace is universally available (but not,

²⁷John Wesley, "Upon Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, III," paragraph I.11. As quoted in Cobb, 1995: 50.

however, universally availed). Whereas Reformed doctrine emphasizes grace primarily as pardon, Wesley has an understanding of grace influenced by Eastern Orthodoxy which sees grace not only as pardon but also as power for holy living.²⁸ Wesley's conclusion is that, if grace is not transformational, then it is not active. Righteousness is not only imputed, it is imparted.

Wesley's view of genuine Christianity emphasizes not only personal transformation, but societal transformation as well. As Wesley saw it, holiness, without which no one will see the Lord, is unitary.²⁹ That is, holiness is both individual and social. For example, the rules for the Methodist classes uniformly inculcated both personal and social holiness. Methodists were instructed explicitly to do good to all:

To their bodies, of the ability which God giveth, by giving food to the hungry, by clothing the naked, by visiting or helping them that are sick, or in prison.

To their souls, by instructing, reproving, or exhorting all they have any intercourse with. . . .³⁰

Further, it was taught that Methodists were to spend money with an eye toward faithful stewardship. They were to be industrious, thrifty, and generous in giving to the relief of the poor. The famous motto was, "Make all

²⁸This concept that faith necessarily produces good works was also nourished in Wesley's study of patristics. Albert Outler, *John Wesley* (New York: Abingdon, 1964), 10, specifically connects these two influences. Randy Maddox, "John Wesley and Eastern Orthodoxy," *Asbury Theological Journal* 45:2 (1990), 30 has also noted this connection:

"Early Anglican theologians did not mediate directly between contemporary Protestantism and Catholicism. Rather, they called for a recovery of the faith and practice of the first four centuries of the Christian Church. Since this early tradition antedated the later divisions, they believed its recovery would provide a more authentic mediating position. In the process of this project they reintroduced an awareness of many early theologians, particularly Greek writers, who had been lost from Western Christian consciousness. Even a cursory reading of Wesley shows that these recovered Greek theological voices were important to him."

See also Ted Campbell, *John Wesley and Christian Antiquity* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991).

²⁹"Truth and Tradition" by Robert C. Neville in *Truth and Tradition*, Neal Fisher, ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 46-50.

³⁰T. Jackson, *WJW*. vol. 9, 72.

you can, save all you can, give all you can.” The insistence on social transformation can be seen not only in Wesley’s words and instructions but also in the effects of his ministry. His ministry was primarily to the poorer classes, both in terms of evangel and service. One thinks immediately of his work among the coalminers at Kingswood, who lived in very marginalizing conditions. One also thinks of Helevy’s hypothesis, which is not accepted uncritically, that it was the social transformation of the Methodist revival that enabled Britain to avoid the social upheavals experienced by France in the eighteenth century.

The postmodern concern for a vital spirituality which is both personally and socially transformational can be nurtured and informed by Wesley’s theology. Wesley’s approach to the Christian life provides a solid basis for the very transformation which could be particularly relevant to evangelism in the postmodern culture.

Wesleyan Evangelism Is Christocentric

Undeniably, a difficult aspect for Wesleyan evangelism in the postmodern world is its metanarrative of Christocentricity. This is difficult for many reasons. One reason is that Christianity has been the religion of the Western World. That means it has been the religion of the nations who have wielded tremendous power in world affairs during the Modern era. Christianity has been allied with government in most of these nations. Thus, Christianity has been identified with the “oppressor” nations. In rejecting imperialism and oppression, there now is the legitimate realization that Christianity too often has been allied with injustice. The understandable reaction of both the oppressed and their weary oppressors is to reject the systems which have supported the oppression. Obviously Jesus Christ is the central figure of Christianity, and some persons struggling to move forward from the injustices of the past may also desire to move away from Jesus Christ. One thinks at this point of Dorothee Solle’s description of much of christology as “christofacism” because it has allowed Christians to impose themselves, their values, and their culture on others who did not welcome it.³¹ Yet, Henry Knight counters the christofacism argument effectively when he argues that the Christological metanarrative is not a human construct but is rather a divine revelation which the church is commissioned to embody and proclaim. The church does not impose the

³¹Knitter, 1985: 164.

gospel on culture; rather, God breaks in upon the world through the Christ-event. Further, Knight points out that this metanarrative is properly one of identification and solidarity with the poor and oppressed. Since we proclaim the grace, mercy, and transforming power of the one who was crucified in order to liberate the oppressed, the gospel is a metanarrative of liberation rather than oppression and “christofacism.”³²

This also plays out in terms of feminism. Feminism is a very important issue in postmodern thinking, and will probably become only more important until something like parity between the sexes is reached. Some feel that it is all well and good to argue that Christianity has helped to improve the condition of women in relation to men, but it is also evident that it has also helped to keep women in a role subordinate to men. Moreover, Christianity has been the dominant religion in the West, and a very important power in defining our (racist and sexist) culture. This makes Christianity appear culpable as an oppressive force and blamable for shortcomings of the culture. Again, since the heart of Christianity is its christology, christology comes under scrutiny. Paul Knitter writes:

Finally, [Tom] Driver and [Rosemary] Ruether would place at least part of the blame for the racism and sexism infecting Christian behavior at the doorstep of a christology that holds that the perfection of humanity, the full and normative presence of God, has been realized only, definitively, in a white male. If the medium is the message, the whiteness and maleness of the medium share in the normativity of the message: “Nonmales and nonwhites therefore were in peril of being regarded as nonpersons by virtue of their generic difference from the Son of God.”³³

Christology is also challenged in postmodern thought because postmodernism is represented by diversity rather than unity. Many insist that there is no postmodern world-view, only many culturally and historically conditioned world-views, all equally valid because they are all equally invalid. Lyotard suggests that the world is becoming such a small place that we now know the conflicting myths and metanarratives of many cultures, so we have moved into an age which rejects metanarratives as being

³²Henry Knight, *A Future for Truth* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), 76 ff.

³³*Ibid.* One could wonder what might be the causes of racism and sexism in non-Christian cultures.

final or universally legitimate. The postmodern perspective therefore demands a “war on totality,” according to Lyotard.³⁴ Paul Knitter has suggested that Christianity give up its claims to the universality and normativity of Jesus Christ. Instead, he believes it would smooth relations considerably with people of other religions if we moved away from Christocentricity to Theocentricity. Once the problems of Jesus’ uniqueness, universality and normativity are leveled, the way would be cleared for Christians to see Jesus as simply “one” revelation of God, as “our special” revelation of God, but not as the only or final or normative revelation of God. Jesus is normative for us, but other religions have figures who are just as legitimately normative for them.³⁵

It is clear that Wesleyan evangelism has its work cut out in the post-modern world if it is to remain convincingly Christocentric. As we observe the realities of injustice and the plight of marginalized persons, it should be recognized that it is through the lens of the Judeo-Christian tradition that we have been able to see the value of all human beings, including the poor and the oppressed. Women in non-Western cultures, for example, deal with far more overt and debilitating sexist practices than in Western cultures, as was so forcefully demonstrated at the recent International Women’s Conference in Beijing. It would be precipitous to destroy the very lens through which we see more clearly our fallenness and our need for redemption and repentance. Some would suggest to theologians operating within an “ethical hermeneutics” that ultimately, if the revelation of Scripture and the tradition of the church unravel, we have no compelling authority for grounding human values which will better advance the cause of justice for marginalized persons.

Concluding that, since Christian people have historically perpetuated many forms of injustice, orthodox Christian doctrine must be a perpetuating cause of injustice seems rather like observing that since there are so many sick people in hospitals, it must be the hospitals that are making people sick. Obviously, people are sick before they enter hospitals, and people are also self-seeking and oppressive before they encounter Christianity. The noteworthy thing is that, when Christianity functions authentically, persons and societies become more loving and more just. Nevertheless, these concerns serve as an insistent reminder that if, our

³⁴Grenz, 1996, 44-45.

³⁵Knitter, 1985, “How Is Jesus Unique?” 171-204.

very lives are sacraments which reflect in outward and visible signs the inward and spiritual grace of God, our lives are also a reflection of the God we serve and worship. So it falls to Christian persons to demonstrate that oppression is not a function of our christology but of our fallenness, and further that our christology lifts and values every person because the Christ of whom it speaks lifts and values every person. It falls to Christian leaders so to attend to their personal relationships with Jesus Christ that we ourselves are Christ-centered and so have much good news to share about our risen Savior. It falls to us so to conform our lives to God's holy love that, far from being oppressed, others are uplifted; that, far from making the name of Jesus a stench in the nostrils of the oppressed, the fragrance of Christ is manifested as the sweetest on earth. How is this to be done? Obviously not easily and never perfectly. But it can be done better than it sometimes has been. I think Wesley shows us some important ways forward. Let us consider two. The first is Wesley's emphasis on love, and the second is his emphasis on toleration and inclusiveness.

The message of Jesus Christ is good news because it is a message of love. When we share the gospel, we are making that love manifest. We note and help meet the physical and social needs of persons. We offer food if it is needed, and friendship if it will be received. We love. We also share the living reality of God's love. It is good news for people to hear that they are loved and that God loves them so much that God became flesh, was born of a woman, and lived as a man to teach everyone who would like to know how to become a son or daughter of God. It is good news that Jesus Christ helps us to distinguish right from wrong. He helps us understand the purpose for our lives. And he offered his life on our behalf so that our sins can be forgiven. More than that, Jesus Christ is spiritually alive and is eager to live within us through the Holy Spirit to cleanse, comfort, and guide. This is christocentric Wesleyan evangelism which is expressed in love for the whole person, physically, socially, and spiritually.

And there is one other important aspect of Christocentric Wesleyan evangelism. It acknowledges that, although no grace is available outside the ontological fact of the atonement of Jesus Christ, because of his atonement the grace of God is universally present to all persons. This indicates that the grace of God is present not only with Christians, but with people who do not know God by any name. It indicates that God's grace is present with people who call God Allah, or Brahman, or Yahweh or any of hundreds of other names. We are practicing Wesleyan evangelism when we

recognize how God is at work in other persons and other cultures that do not exalt the name of Jesus. Those who do not know Jesus Christ by name will nevertheless find life in proportion to the extent that they follow the light which the grace of God provides them. That is not to say that others do not need Jesus Christ epistemologically as well as ontologically, for they do. It is important for persons to know about and to know Jesus Christ, because in him the fullness of God is content to dwell. Jesus Christ is life, and we want to share him with anyone who will hear. It is far easier to grow in grace when we have clear and truthful teachings to guide us. But it is a Christ-like quality consistent with Wesleyan evangelism that we honor the personhood and dignity of those with whom we share the news.

Adrian Hastings deals with this in his essay on pluralism within the university setting.³⁶ He examines the *Sitz im Leben* of John Hick's *God and the Universe of Faiths*. He notes that Hick, who had originally held a very narrow view of salvation through Jesus Christ alone, both ontologically and epistemologically, experienced a crisis of belief when he was exposed in the university setting to a number of non-Christians who seemed to have a vibrant and salvific religious life. Faced with this sort of powerful and convincing pluralism, Hick began to move away from Christocentrism to Theocentrism. Hastings points out, however, that if Hick's Christological soteriology had been less rigidly aligned with conservative Protestantism, and more open to Wesleyan as well as Catholic understandings, this crisis of pluralism could well have been addressed within the framework of Christian orthodoxy. Hastings has a very good point, and his insights underscore the value of Wesley's contribution to a Christ-centered soteriology which is broad enough to embrace both the whole biblical witness and the realities of pluralism.

This is an aspect of Wesley's theology for which we are developing a new appreciation. In his recent *Grace and Responsibility*, John Cobb articulates a Wesleyan theology which offers several possibilities for dealing with religious pluralism.³⁷ Each of them acknowledges that Wesley saw salvation as being available, through the atonement of Jesus Christ, to all persons who seek to follow and cooperate with whatever light of God they are given. Cobb cites Wesley's sermon "On Charity:"

³⁶"Pluralism: The Relationship of Theology to Religious Studies," by Adrian Hastings, in *What Should Methodists Teach?* Douglas Meeks, ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 118-130.

³⁷Cobb, 1995: chapter 7, "Openness to Difference," esp. 145-153.

How it will please God, the Judge of all, to deal with them [those to whom the gospel is not preached] we may leave to God himself. But this we know, that he is not the God of the Christians only, but the God of the heathens also; that he is “rich in mercy to all that call upon him,” “according to the light they have;” and that “in every nation he that feareth God and worketh righteousness is accepted of him.”³⁸

Cobb also cites Randy Maddox, agreeing that Wesley “clearly rejected the belief that God could and would save no one apart from explicit faith in Jesus Christ.”³⁹ For example, Maddox points out that Wesley excluded Anglican Article XVIII, “Of Obtaining Eternal Salvation Only by the Name of Christ” when preparing Articles of Religion for the American Methodists.⁴⁰ Again, Wesley insisted that there can be no salvation outside the atoning work of Jesus Christ, but through the work of the Holy Spirit, one might be presented with the light of God without an awareness of the historical Christ. These are examples of how Wesley’s firmly christological soteriology is at once orthodox and yet aware of God’s saving activity among non-Christians. This salvation is made possible only through the person and work of Jesus Christ, but salvation is not limited only to those who know Jesus Christ explicitly. In Maddox’s words, Wesley taught that

God will judge the heathens with some discrimination after all; not directly in terms of their appropriation or rejection of Christ, but in terms of how they respond to the gracious revelation (light) that they do receive.⁴¹

So the christocentricity of Wesleyan evangelism is capable of addressing helpfully and forthrightly the concerns of the postmodern culture. Western culture is more aware than ever of the oppression and injustice which has been a significant part of its identity. We are beginning to realize that we do not have a monopoly on truth or virtue. Yet it can also be affirmed that in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we find the power to address the evil and ugliness which this generation has viewed, perhaps more than it realizes, through the lens of the Christ event.

³⁸T. Jackson, *WJW*, vol. 3, 296, “On Charity.”

³⁹Cobb, 149.

⁴⁰*Ibid.* See also Clark Pinnock, *A Wideness in God’s Mercy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), esp. 157 ff. Pinnock discusses the agreement between Wesley, Vatican II, and others.

⁴¹Maddox, “Wesley and the Question of Truth,” 18. As quoted in Cobb, 1995, 149-150.

JOHN WESLEY'S CRITICAL APPROPRIATION OF TRADITION IN HIS PRACTICAL THEOLOGY

by

Kenneth J. Collins

At the 1982 Oxford Institute of Methodist Theological Studies, the late Albert Outler explored three phases of Wesley studies. The first phase, often triumphalist in tone and denominationalistic in temper, narrowly explored the intimate links between John Wesley and broader Methodism. The second phase sought to “rescue Wesley from his Methodist cocoon”¹ and to explore more deeply into some aspect of his thought and practice. Although phase two was in some respects an advance over phase one, it nevertheless contained many theological partisans of what Outler called “the current coterie-theologies” whose interest in Wesley largely devolved into employing him as “an authority for their own convictions, rooted in other traditions.”² George Croft Cell, for example, considered Wesley largely in terms of a Reformed context, the theology of Calvin in particular,³ while Franz Hildebrandt demonstrated the strong influence that the Lutheran tradition, mediated to Wesley by

¹Albert C. Outler, “A New Future for Wesley Studies: An Agenda for Phase III,” in *The Wesleyan Theological Heritage: Essays of Albert C. Outler*, ed. Thomas C. Oden and Leicester R. Longden (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1991), 125-44.

²*Ibid.*, 131.

³Cf. George C. Cell, *The Rediscovery of John Wesley* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1984), reprint of the 1935 edition.

Moravian and German Pietists alike,⁴ had on this eighteenth-century leader.

In this present essay, I will contend that several contemporary Methodist theologians and historians, because of their understanding and use of tradition, would best be categorized, not as phase three Wesley scholars who seek to understand Wesley in his own time and place and in as wide a historical context as possible, but as phase two Wesley scholars who offer yet another reading of Wesley through the lens of one privileged tradition. In other words, the central hermeneutical framework of these contemporary scholars for interpreting Wesley's thought and practice is rooted, not in eighteenth-century Anglicanism nor in the conjunction of several leading traditions with which Wesley was conversant, but in one principal tradition almost exclusively, namely Eastern Orthodoxy, a tradition which then serves as a vehicle for their own contemporary concerns or interests. The inappropriateness of this now popular reading of Wesley will become increasingly evident both as historiographical concerns are addressed throughout this essay and as the contribution of a *diversity* of communions to Wesley's thought is critically examined. Such a diversity will demonstrate Wesley's *conjunctive* and at times eclectic use of traditions, but always guided by his overarching normative appeal to Scripture.

It is not possible to treat here all of the diverse streams that fed into Wesley's creative theological *synthesis*, his practical theology. Instead, I will focus on those traditions which had the greatest influence, namely, Anglicanism, Moravianism, and the Eastern Fathers. My observations will be suggestive, not exhaustive, heuristic not definitive, goads to further reflection on the intricacy and subtlety of John Wesley's theological posture.

Anglicanism

It is hard to underestimate the enormous influence that his own Anglican tradition had on the life and thought of John Wesley. Raised in a pious home of parents who both quite intentionally, and with some pain, made their way back to the Church of England from a dissenting heritage, John Wesley was naturally more appreciative of the well wrought balance

⁴Cf. Franz Hildebrandt, *From Luther to Wesley* (London: Lutterworth, 1951).

of Anglican tradition than many of his contemporaries. Indeed, while Wesley was a lecturer in logic (1726-30) and Greek (1726-28) at Lincoln College, it was clearly Anglican authors, not Eastern Fathers, that dominated his reading. Among other works, while he was a fellow at Oxford Wesley was perusing those of Bishop George Bull, Samuel Clarke, John Norris, Bishop Thomas Ken, Jeremy Taylor, and William Law.⁵

Perhaps even more importantly, in 1725 when Wesley began to understand the goal of religion as holiness or sanctification, he did so not at the feet of Ephrem Syrus or Pseudo-Macarius, but at those of Jeremy Taylor, bishop of Down and Connor and chaplain to Archbishop Laud and King Charles I. Wesley elaborates:

In the year 1725, being in the twenty-third year of my age, I met with Bishop Taylor's *Rule and Exercises of Holy Living and Dying*. In reading several parts of this book, I was exceedingly affected; that part in particular which relates to purity of intention.⁶

Two or three years later, William Law's *Christian Perfection* and *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life* were put into Wesley's hands. "These convinced me, more than ever," Wesley writes, "of the absolute impossibility of being half a Christian; and I determined, through his grace . . . to be all-devoted to God. . . ."⁷ Indeed, so influential were these two Anglican authors (as well as the German Roman Catholic mystic Thomas a Kempis) with respect to Wesley's understanding of sanctification that, when the Methodist leader chronicled his own increasing understanding of this doctrine in his *Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, it was once again Anglican voices that predominated.⁸ And, although in

⁵See a list of Wesley's readings from 1725 to 1734 in V. H. H. Green, *The Young Mr. Wesley* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1961), 305 ff. Moreover, English "divines" are very well represented much later on in Wesley's *A Christian Library*. The continuity is striking. Cf. John Wesley, *A Christian Library, Consisting of Extracts from and Abridgements of the Choicest Pieces of Practical Divinity which have been published in the English Tongue*, 30 vols. (London: T. Blanshard, 1819-1827).

⁶Thomas Jackson, ed., *The Works of John Wesley*, 14 vols. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1978), 11:366.

⁷*Ibid.*, 11:367. Notice that Wesley's growing understanding of what it means to be holy is linked in this context with his motif of real Christianity. For more on this salient motif, cf. Kenneth J. Collins, *A Real Christian: the Life of John Wesley* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999).

⁸*Ibid.*, 11:366 ff.

1730 Wesley was reading Justin Martyr, Augustine, and Ephrem Syrus, among others, when at St. Mary's Oxford in 1733 he preached one of his most important sermons on Christian perfection, namely, "The Circumcision of the Heart," the substance of that "circumcision" was informed by what Wesley had learned largely from the Church of England. As a matter of fact, Albert Outler has even noted a possible allusion to William Law in the opening paragraph of this sermon.⁹

Several years later, in 1742, Wesley wrote *The Character of a Methodist*, no doubt, as a vehicle to convey his thoughts on Christian Perfection. Much has been made of the fact that Wesley had in mind the perfect Christian drawn by Clement of Alexandria in his *Stromateis*. This claim can be substantiated, in part, by citing from Wesley's *Plain Account of Christian Perfection* produced in 1765:

These are the very words wherein I largely declared [in *The Character of a Methodist*], for the first time, my sentiments of Christian perfection. And is it not easy to see, (1.) That this is the very point at which I aimed all along from the year 1725; and more determinately from the year 1730, when I began to be *homo unius libri*, "a man of one book," regarding none, comparatively, but the Bible.

This is a very revealing excerpt because it suggests, first of all, not only the influence of Clement of Alexandria, but also that of the Anglican priest and Caroline divine, Jeremy Taylor, especially in the reference to the pivotal year 1725. Second, this passage also reveals something of the hermeneutical and historiographical revolution that was slowly developing during 1729 and 1730 and thereafter when Wesley determined to be *homo unius libri*, a man of one book.¹⁰ Indeed, the effects of this revolution are evident in a 1767 letter to the Editor of *Lloyd's Evening Post* and demonstrate that Wesley's appeal to the traditional source of Clement of Alexandria was done quite critically and in light of the normative value of Scripture. Wesley notes:

Five or six and thirty years ago I much admired the character of a perfect Christian drawn by Clemens Alexandrinus. Five

⁹Albert C. Outler, ed., *The Works of John Wesley*, Vols. 1-4. *The Sermons* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984), 1: 401.

¹⁰Elsewhere Wesley offers a different date for this insight: "In the year 1729, I began not only to read, but to study, the Bible, as the one, the only standard of truth and the only model of pure religion." Cf. Jackson, *Wesley's Works*, 11:367.

or six and twenty years ago a thought came into my mind of drawing such a character myself, *only in a more scriptural manner, and mostly in the words of Scripture*; this I entitled *The Character of a Methodist*.¹¹

This means, of course, that Wesley did not appeal to tradition, in this instance, in terms of a dual source model where tradition was deemed on par with Scripture or as a second source of revelation, what Heiko Oberman calls "Tradition 2,"¹² nor did Wesley look merely to the broader *theological tradition* of Clement of Alexandria (the Eastern Fathers) for the salient cues to fill out this particular doctrine in what would be an implication, a subsidiary movement, of Tradition 2 reasoning.¹³ Instead, what slowly begins to emerge by 1729, with some retrograde movements along the way,¹⁴ is Wesley's valuation and use of tradition as a "hermeneutical tradition," that is, as an "interpretative community" whose principal value is assessed, not by the exigencies of the tradition itself, but by reference to its faithful explication of *Scripture*, what Oberman calls "Tradition 1." This sophisticated, well-nuanced employment of tradition invites a diversity of voices in a larger theological discussion, a diversity which is given order and coherence not from the tradition itself, but from Scripture.

From divines of the seventeenth century such as William Beveridge and Robert Nelson, Wesley learned the connection between Christian

¹¹Nehemiah Curnock, ed., *The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.*, 8 vols. (London: The Epworth Press, 1938), 5:197. Emphasis is mine.

¹²Heiko A. Oberman, "*Quo vadis, Petre?* Tradition from Irenaeus to *Humani Generis*," in *The Dawn of the Reformation: Essays in Late Medieval and Early Reformation Thought* (Edinburgh, 1986), 269-296.

¹³It is not being suggested that, when some contemporary Wesley scholars employ variations of Tradition 2 arguments, they are necessarily stating that tradition is an equal source of revelation on par with Scripture. Rather, what is being claimed is that these scholars often look to the tradition, itself, apart from Scripture (and sometimes in contrast to Scripture), for cues to fill out Wesley's theological understanding. The use of an icon at the 1999 concluding worship service of the Wesleyan Theological Society's annual meeting is indicative of this tendency.

¹⁴There is evidence to suggest that, although Wesley was a person of one book by 1729 and 1730, he nevertheless regarded Christian antiquity as a "coordinate" rather than a "subordinate" rule with Scripture. In other words, the full implications of Wesley's hermeneutical change in 1729 took time to flower more fully. Cf. Albert C. Outler, ed., *John Wesley, The Library of Protestant Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 46.

doctrine and spirituality¹⁵ and also the importance of the early Fathers as able guides to the meaning of the Bible. Moreover, the Caroline divines, such as Lancelot Andrews and Robert Sanderson, representing the best of the Anglican *via media*, steered a course between the excesses of Puritanism on the one hand and those of Roman Catholicism on the other by employing Christian antiquity, especially the Ante-Nicene Fathers, in much of their apologetics.¹⁶ Wesley found this orientation congenial to his own designs and purposes which was to recover *genuine* primitive Christianity for the work of God in his own age. What some scholars have failed to notice is that Wesley recommended the study of early Christian writers, not because he wanted to elevate any one particular tradition as *tradition*, but because he deemed these authors, once again, to be the best, the most able, commentators on Scripture. In his *Address to the Clergy* written in 1756, Wesley elaborates:

Can any who spend several years in those seats of learning, be excused if they do not add to that of the languages and sciences, the knowledge of the Fathers? The most authentic commentators on Scripture, as being both nearest the fountain, and eminently endued with that Spirit by whom all Scripture was given.¹⁷

Observe the implicit “order of authority” in this address: the Fathers are valuable not in and of themselves but because they are nearest to the fountain, the source, which is none other than Scripture. Not surprisingly, then, Wesley employed a rather Renaissance/Protestant historiography in his use of tradition, not only because he focused on hermeneutical communities nearest the source (*ad fontes*) of revelation, but also because he actually was quite critical of broader church tradition, especially aspects

¹⁵A. M. Allchin, “Our Life in Christ: John Wesley and the Eastern Fathers,” in *We Belong to One Another: Methodist, Anglican and Orthodox* (London: Epworth Press, 1965), 64. It is claimed that Wesley was referred to on occasion as “Mr. Primitive Christianity,” so important was the early church to his theological reflections.

¹⁶H. R. McAdoo has an extensive discussion of the contributions of Lancelot Andrews and Robert Sanderson to the construction of an Anglican “theological system” in the seventeenth century. Cf. H. R. McAdoo, *The Spirit of Anglicanism* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1965).

¹⁷Jackson, *Wesley’s Works*, 10:484. Wesley’s designation of the Fathers as “the most authentic commentators on Scripture” indicates that he valued them as important exegetical traditions.

of medieval theology which in his judgment had the capacity to render the gospel opaque.

So, in order to encourage Methodism to follow the "primitive church," Wesley recommended a number of ancient writers who in his mind explicated the genius of early Christianity. The usual list included writings from Clement of Rome, Ignatius, Irenaeus and Polycarp in the second century; Tertullian, Origen, Clement of Alexandria, and Cyprian in the third century; and Chrysostom, Basil, Ephraem Syrus, and Macarius the Egyptian in the fourth century.¹⁸ Such a list, Outler correctly noted, was typical of Anglican patrology in general. Indeed, in a real sense, Wesley was led to the study of patristics through the reading of key Anglican authors, as noted earlier, and David Bundy offers the suggestion that Wesley's use of the Fathers was in some sense mediated: Wesley "preferred to edit and present the works of the Caroline and continental interpreters of the ancient texts rather than to edit and present the ancient texts themselves."¹⁹ This tendency on the part of Wesley suggests that the Anglican tradition itself, not Continental Protestantism or Eastern Orthodoxy, was perhaps the most significant stream in his overall theology precisely because it led so readily to the recovery of Scriptural, primitive Christianity. In other words, in Wesley's estimation, the Anglican tradition was particularly helpful precisely because it ever pointed beyond itself to significant hermeneutical communities and most of all because it pointed to Scripture.

Moravianism

Recent trends in Wesley studies have emphasized in an almost exclusive fashion the impact of Eastern Orthodoxy on John Wesley's practical theology. Such an emphasis has tended to minimize, if not outright repudiate, and in a very *unconjunctive* way, the salient contributions of other traditions and interpretive communities. This neglect has emerged, in part,

¹⁸Cf. Outler, *Sermons*, 3:586, "On Laying the Foundation of the New Chapel." But observe that Wesley's usual listing of Irenaeus is omitted here for whatever reason.

¹⁹David Bundy, "Christian Virtue: John Wesley and the Alexandrian Tradition," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 26, no. 1 (1991): 143. Moreover, Bundy notes that "it is impossible to ascertain whether John Wesley received a given emphasis directly from his reading of the Alexandrian theologians, or through the mediation of Western mystical, ascetical traditions, or by way of primitivizing efforts of the Caroline writers." Cf. *Ibid.*, 151.

because operative among some contemporary scholars is an understanding of tradition and its employment that is different from that of Wesley. This difference arises from their own social location. However, something of Wesley's very high valuation of the Moravian church, for instance, is born out in several of his comments and observations.

First of all, en route to Georgia, Wesley witnessed undaunted Moravian courage in the face of a horrific storm (a terrible screaming began among the English while the Germans [Moravians] calmly sang on) and he later recorded the following in his journal: "This is the most glorious day which I have ever hitherto seen."²⁰ Second, on February 7, 1738, when Wesley met Peter Bohler, a Moravian leader, at the home of Mr. Weinantz, a Dutch merchant, he observed that this was "A day much to be remembered."²¹ And lastly, although Wesley's estimation of John Calvin is well known ("I think on Justification just as I have done any time these seven-and-twenty years, and just as Mr. Calvin does. In this respect I do not differ from him an hair's breadth."²²) what is less known is his very high appreciation of the Moravian community, as evidenced in his letter to Mrs. Hutton on August 22, 1744: "I love Calvin a little; Luther more; the Moravians, Mr. Law, and Mr. Whitefield far more than either."²³

Just what did the Moravian community teach Wesley for which he was so lastingly grateful? Some scholars have focused on the issue of justification by faith *alone* as evidenced in Wesley's comments on March 6 not long after meeting with Peter Bohler in 1738: "I began preaching this new doctrine though my soul started back from the work. The first person to whom I offered *salvation by faith alone* was a prisoner under sentence of death. His name was Clifford."²⁴ However, Wesley, being the good Anglican that he was, would have surely come into contact with this doc-

²⁰Reginald W. Ward and Richard P. Heitzenrater, eds., *The Works of John Wesley*, Vol. 18. *Journals and Diaries I* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1988), 143.

²¹*Ibid.*, 223. Wesley's encounter with Peter Bohler reveals the humility and "teachableness" of the Methodist leader because Peter Bohler was his junior by several years. For more on Bohler's influence on Wesley, cf. Clifford W. Towlson, *Moravian and Methodist: Relationships and Influences in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Epworth Press, 1957).

²²John Telford, ed., *The Letters of John Wesley, A.M.*, 8 vols. (London: The Epworth Press, 1931), 4:298.

²³Frank Baker, ed., *The Works of John Wesley*, Vols. 25. *The Letters* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 25.

²⁴Ward and Heitzenrater, *Journals*, 18:228.

trine, at least in a cognitive way, through his use of *The Book of Common Prayer*, *The Homilies*, as well as *The Anglican Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion*, just to name a few sources.²⁵ Perhaps, then, Bohler filled out some of the more significant existential implications of this teaching, especially that no measure of sanctification could emerge prior to justification, a truth that Wesley apparently had not realized up to this point:

I was ordained Deacon in 1725, and Priest in the year following. But it was many years after this before I was convinced of the great truths above recited. During all that time I was utterly ignorant of the nature and condition of justification. Sometimes I confounded it with sanctification; (particularly when I was in Georgia).²⁶

Beyond this important truth, Bohler's contribution to Wesley's doctrine of salvation, though seldom fully appreciated, runs along three major lines. First, this Moravian leader apparently taught Wesley the *nature* of saving faith, that it has two fruits ever accompanying it, namely, "happiness and holiness." Wesley, for example, elaborates in his journal:

I met Peter Bohler once more. I had now no objection to what he said of the nature of faith, viz., that it is (to use the words of our Church), "A sure trust and confidence which a man hath in God, that through the merits of Christ his sins are forgiven, and he reconciled to the favour of God." Neither could I deny either the happiness or holiness which he described as fruits of this living faith.²⁷

²⁵The eleventh Article of Religion, for example, states: "We are accounted righteous before God, only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ by Faith, and not for our own works or deservings. Wherefore, that we are justified by Faith only, is a most wholesome Doctrine, and very full of comfort, as more largely is expressed in the Homily of Justification." Cf. Philip Schaff, ed., *The Creeds of Christendom*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House), 3:494.

²⁶Jackson, *Wesley's Works*, 8:111. This quote is particularly troubling for the recent "debunkers" of Aldersgate who maintain that Wesley was justified and born of God while in Georgia. On the contrary, how could Wesley have evidenced these graces if he neither knew the *nature* of saving faith nor was he able to comprehend at this point that sanctification is not, and cannot be, the basis of justification? Cf. Kenneth J. Collins, "Real Christianity as Integrating Theme in Wesley's Soteriology: The Critique of a Modern Myth," *The Asbury Theological Journal* 51, no. 2 (Fall 1996): 15-45.

²⁷Ward and Heitzenrater, *Journals*, 18:233-234.

In addition, Wesley expresses these same two fruits in a slightly different way—and with more clarity—in his “narrative insert” which forms a part of his Aldersgate narrative. Wesley observes:

Again, I knew not that I was *wholly void of this faith*, but only thought *I had not enough of it*. So that when Peter Bohler, whom God prepared for me as soon as I came to London, affirmed of true faith in Christ (which is but one) that it had those two fruits inseparably attending it, “dominion over sin, and constant peace from a sense of forgiveness,” I was quite amazed, and looked upon it as a new gospel. If this was so, it was clear I had not faith.²⁸

Observe in these comments that Wesley appeals not to a *degree* of faith, an increment (as he will appeal later on in his distinctions concerning “the faith of a servant”), but to a *qualitative* difference of faith. Put another way, Wesley states not that he was devoid of all faith—as he is sometimes mistakenly interpreted—but that he lacked *saving* faith because his life did not yet evidence the two fruits which necessarily accompany such faith, namely, “dominion over sin, and constant peace from a sense of forgiveness,” fruits which draw together the doctrines of regeneration (“dominion over sin”) and justification (“constant peace from a sense of forgiveness”).

Bohler’s second contribution to Wesley’s practical theology concerned the temporal elements which pertain to the actualization or realization of saving grace. To illustrate, the Moravian leader taught Wesley that saving faith, along with its fruits, is realized *instantaneously* in the life of believers. At first, Wesley balked at this teaching, but after he searched the Scriptures, the touchstone of his faith, he concluded in his journal:

But I could not comprehend what he [Bohler] spoke of an instantaneous work. I could not understand how this faith should be given in a moment. . . . I searched the Scriptures again touching this very thing, particularly the Acts of the Apostles: but to my utter astonishment found scarce any instances there of other than *instantaneous* conversions—scarce any other so slow as that of St. Paul, who was three days in the pangs of the new birth.²⁹

²⁸Ibid., 18:247-48. For a view which critiques the recent “debunking” of Aldersgate, cf. Kenneth J. Collins, “Other Thoughts on Aldersgate: Has the Conversionist Paradigm Collapsed?,” *Methodist History* 30, no. 1 (October 1991): 10-25.

²⁹Ibid., 18: 234.

Though the term “instantaneous” in this context clearly has chronological, temporal dimensions, Wesley tended to employ it in his practical theology for its soteriological implications. In other words, the language of “instantaneousness” is descriptive of soteriological roles: it reveals who is acting in the process of redemption. For example, on the question of entire sanctification, a related issue, Wesley reasons:

And by this token may you surely know whether you seek it by faith or by works. If by works, you want something to be done first, before you are sanctified. You think, “I must first be or do thus or thus.” Then you are seeking it by works unto this day. If you seek it by faith, you may expect it as you are: and if as you are, then expect it *now*.³⁰

The instantaneous elements, then, of Wesley’s *via salutis* are his principal vehicles for underscoring the crucial truth that it is God, not humanity, who both forgives sins and who makes holy. Again, these elements became one of Wesley’s principal ways of underscoring the sheer gratuity of grace, the undeserved favor and power of God lavished upon both sinners and saints.

The last major contribution of Peter Bohler to Wesley’s practical theology is largely indirect but no less significant. To illustrate, the Moravian leader helped Wesley to appreciate the utter graciousness of God in a clearer and more existential way, that justification by faith alone is a sheer undeserved gift to the sinner, and that no form of sanctification could, therefore, appear before this work of grace. With this insight in place, Wesley then went beyond Bohler and applied this understanding, in a very creative way, to sanctification (both initial and entire) and thereby continued the Reformation’s clarion call of *sola gratia* by proclaiming: “Exactly as we are justified by faith, so are we sanctified by faith. Faith is the condition, and the *only* condition of sanctification, exactly as it is of justification.”³¹ In other words, the Moravian-Lutheran idea of the sheer gratuity of grace, held in place in Wesley’s theology by the notion of “instantaneousness” where God acts decisively, alone, and in the face of human

³⁰Outler, *Sermons*, 2:169. Indicating that the “instantaneous” motif was important to his understanding of Christian perfection, Wesley corrected Thomas Maxfield in the following way: “You have over and over denied instantaneous sanctification to me; but I have known and taught it (and so has my brother, as our writings show) above these twenty years.” Cf. Ward and Heitzenrater, *Journals and Diaries*, 21:394.

³¹Ibid., 2:163.

impotence, is descriptive not simply of juridical themes such as justification, as Maddox contends,³² but is descriptive of participatory ones as well, even sanctification, both initial and entire. Indeed, Wesley affirms: “We allow, it is the work of God *alone* to justify, to sanctify, and to glorify; which three comprehend the whole of salvation.”³³

Accordingly, interpretations of Wesley’s doctrine of salvation that identify the juridical aspects of redemption (justification and forgiveness) as instantaneous, and the therapeutic aspects (sanctification) as processive are wide of the mark. Here the interpreter is perhaps looking to the exigencies of a particular tradition (Eastern Orthodoxy for example) as a guide to comprehending Wesley’s sophisticated views on sanctification, not realizing that such views are *also* informed by a diversity of exegetical traditions where Moravianism (and the Lutheran tradition which it represents) makes a crucial contribution as well.

Moreover, although Maddox and others no doubt believe that the synergistic image of a dance affords the proper roles to God and humanity in the process of redemption, probably because a role is included for each (divine initiative and human response), the orientation of Wesley’s theology is perhaps more aptly described by a much larger, more inclusive, *conjunction* which incorporates all of the insights of Maddox’s synergistic model, but which then *adds* to it key elements drawn largely from Protestantism, a tradition which has highlighted not only the sheer gratuity of grace, but also the sovereignty and decisiveness of divine action. However, privileging one particular tradition to the relative neglect of others in grappling with Wesley’s doctrinal formulations misses the subtlety, the carefully crafted nuances, of the Wesleyan synthesis.

Eastern Orthodoxy (The Eastern Fathers)

Although recent scholarship in Wesley studies suggests a strong causal relationship between Eastern Orthodoxy and the theological ruminations of John Wesley,³⁴ the specific claim is actually based on an

³²Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley’s Practical Theology* (Nashville, Tennessee: Kingswood Books, 1994), cf. 151 ff.

³³Jackson, *Wesley’s Works*, 10:230. Emphasis is mine.

³⁴Cf. Randy L. Maddox, “John Wesley and Eastern Orthodoxy: Influences, Convergences and Differences,” *The Asbury Theological Journal* 45, no. 2 (Fall 1990): 29-53; and Brian Frost, “Orthodoxy and Methodism,” *London Quarterly & Holborn Review* 189 (1964): 13-22.

anachronistic reading of history and a confused employment of tradition. First, in Wesley's usual list of the early church Fathers, seen for example in his sermon "On Laying the Foundation of the New Chapel, near City Road, London," Wesley does not specifically single out Eastern Fathers for any special attention, but rather gives a general listing which includes both Latin and Greek authors:

This is the religion of the primitive Church, of the whole Church in the purest ages. It is clearly expressed, even in the small remains of Clemens Romanus, Ignatius, and Polycarp. It is seen more at large in the writings of Tertullian, Origen, Clemens Alexandrinus, and Cyprian. And even in the fourth century it was found in the works of Chrysostom, Basil, Ephrem Syrus, and Macarius.³⁵

Second, it is anachronistic, and therefore inappropriate, to refer to early Eastern Fathers such as Origen (185-254), Clement of Alexandria (150-215), Chrysostom (374-407), Basil (329-379), Ephrem Syrus (306-373), and Pseudo-Macarius of Egypt (380-430) as constituting Eastern Orthodoxy, a tradition which is actually a later historical development. To be sure, the second, third, and fourth centuries of Christianity are best described not as the period of "Eastern Orthodoxy" or of the "Roman Catholic Church" for that matter [although both traditions are often incorrectly read back to the first century] but as the period of "The Ancient Catholic Church" out of which the great theological traditions were yet to emerge. In this early period, then, a catholic or universal church arose which distinguished itself from Gnostic and other heresies. The fragmentation of Christendom into discreet theological traditions, then, did not actually begin until the fifth and sixth centuries when the Nestorian Church of Persia and the five Monophysite churches of Armenia, Syria, Egypt, Ethiopia, and India divided from the main universal (catholic) body of Christianity. Simply put, for the sake of accuracy, a distinction must be made between the *tradition* of Eastern Orthodoxy and the early Eastern Fathers.

Third, with this distinction in place, it can be affirmed that Wesley did indeed appeal—in Oberman's sense of tradition 1—to the writings of Eastern Fathers such as Clement of Alexandria and Ephrem Syrus, but it

³⁵Outler, *Sermons*, 3:586. Notice the omission of Irenaeus, a name which is found in other lists. Cf. Wesley's letter to Dr. Middleton on January 24, 1748/9 in Jackson, *Wesley's Works*, 10:79.

is equally clear that Wesley did not, as is mistakenly supposed, appeal to Eastern Orthodoxy in a “traditions reading” approach (a subset of tradition 2) in the sense that the tradition *itself* provided the salient cues for his theological understanding. In fact, whenever Wesley considered the Greek tradition as a discreet *tradition*, his observations were most often *negative*. For example, in his treatise *The Doctrine of Original Sin*, produced in 1756, Wesley notes:

The gross, barbarous ignorance, the deep, stupid superstition, the blind and bitter zeal, and the endless thirst after vain jangling and strife of words, which have reigned for many ages in the Greek Church, and well-nigh banished true religion from among them, make these scarce worthy of the Christian name, and lay an insuperable stumbling-block before the Mahometans.³⁶

Moreover, in his sermon “The General Spread of the Gospel,” produced in 1783, Wesley criticized those churches under the jurisdiction of the Patriarch of Moscow, as having little knowledge of true religion. “The western churches,” Wesley maintains, “seem to have the pre-eminence over all these in many respects. They have abundantly more knowledge; they have more scriptural and more rational modes of worship.”³⁷ And a few years later, in 1789, Wesley once again found much in the Eastern church troubling: “What do the Christians, so called, of the Eastern Church, dispersed throughout the Turkish dominions, know of genuine Christianity? Those of the Morea, of Circassia, Mingrelia, Georgia? Are they not the very dregs of mankind?”³⁸ Beyond this, there is little evidence to suggest that Wesley had much contact with eighteenth-century Eastern Orthodoxy, other than the fiasco of having the Greek bishop Erasmus [who knew little English and who wanted much money] ordain one of Wesley’s lay preachers. Such limited contact between Wesley and the Eastern Orthodoxy of his own age is surely a troubling fact for those Wesley scholars who would like to maintain that the Methodist leader looked quite favorably upon this tradition. Wesley had traveled to Herrnhut, so to speak; he never went to Constantinople (Istanbul).

³⁶Jackson, *Wesley’s Works*, 9:217.

³⁷Outler, *Sermons*, 2:487.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 4:88. For more negative observations on Greek Orthodoxy, cf. Outler, *Sermons*, 2:580-581; Jackson, *Wesley’s Works*, 9:216-217; and John Wesley, *A Concise Ecclesiastical History*.

Given the paradigm shift that has taken place in Wesley studies in the twentieth century through the work of Outler and Maddox, where "Eastern Orthodoxy" has been deemed perhaps the most important theological tradition upon which Wesley drew in his own theology, one is actually surprised to learn of the relative paucity of references to the Eastern Fathers in a very large Wesleyan corpus, though numerous citations and allusions to Scripture can be found throughout. To illustrate, the references to Eastern authors found in Wesley's published works have been carefully gathered and listed by Ted Campbell (in an appendix) in his book, *John Wesley and Christian Antiquity*.³⁹ I have painstakingly checked each reference in the Wesleyan corpus, considered it against the larger stream of traditional sources (Anglican, Moravian, Lutheran) that fed into Wesley's theology, and I can only conclude that the recent paradigm shift in Wesley studies, especially when it ignores the contributions of other significant traditions, is without sufficient warrant and foundation. Some of the more important references to Eastern writers will be considered here, namely, those to Clement of Alexandria, Ephrem Syrus, Gregory of Nyssa, and Pseudo-Macarius.

First, as noted earlier, in his work *The Character of a Methodist*, produced in 1742, Wesley was dependent on Clement of Alexandria's description of the "perfect Christian" as found in the *Stromateis*. However, what is less known is that in an important letter written several years later in 1774, Wesley is sharply critical of how the Christian character was depicted by Clement in some of his writings. Wesley elaborates:

Many years ago I might have said, but I do not now,
 "Give me a woman made of stone,
 A widow of Pygmalion"

And just such a Christian, one of the Fathers, Clemens Alexandrinus, describes: But I do not admire that description now as I did formerly. I now see a Stoic and a Christian are different characters; and at the some times I have been a good deal disgusted at Miss J___'s apathy.⁴⁰

Second, there are several entries in Wesley's diary to indicate that he was reading Ephrem Syrus, an Eastern Father, while in Georgia.⁴¹

³⁹Ted A. Campbell, *John Wesley and Christian Antiquity: Religious Vision and Cultural Changes* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1991), 125-134.

⁴⁰Jackson, *Wesley's Works*, 12:297-98.

⁴¹Ward and Heitzenrater, *Journals*, 18:424-449.

Curnock notes that “The reading of Ephrem Syrus was his [Wesley’s] preparation for preaching, and at intervals through[out] the day he returned to the same writer, of whom he thought highly.”⁴² The only problem with this evidence is that there is considerable doubt among scholars, as Maddox himself points out, that Wesley was reading the actual Ephraem while he was in Georgia.⁴³ Nevertheless, on March 4, 1747, Wesley recorded in his journal: “I spent some hours in reading *The Exhortations of Ephrem Syrus*. Surely never did any man, since David, give us such a picture of a broken and contrite heart.”⁴⁴

Third, few can doubt that Gregory of Nyssa, Cappadocian Father and younger brother of Basil of Caesarea, was a significant voice among the early Eastern Fathers, especially in terms of his exploration of the holy life. And yet, surprisingly enough, there is actually little evidence to suggest that Wesley ever read Gregory or that he was influenced by this Cappadocian’s thought. Outler has made the claim, speculative as it is, that Wesley came into contact with Gregory through the writings of Pseudo-Macarius,⁴⁵ but other scholars are much more doubtful.⁴⁶ And so the larger question still remains: If Wesley were focusing on the Eastern tradition as a distinct *tradition*, why then did he not give evidence in his own writings of one of its most important and articulate authors?

Fourth, Wesley so appreciated the work of Pseudo-Macarius, a monk who perhaps lived in Syria or Asia Minor from 380-430 (whom Wesley, by the way, thought to be Macarius the Great, an Egyptian monk) that he published twenty-two Macarian homilies in *A Christian Library*. Wesley had

⁴²Curnock, *Journals*, 1:279; notes on Sunday October 10th. Bracketed material is mine.

⁴³Randy L. Maddox, “John Wesley and Eastern Orthodoxy: Influences, Convergences and Differences,” *The Asbury Theological Journal* 45, no. 2 (Fall 1990): note # 19; page 45.

⁴⁴Curnock, *Journals*, 3:284. For a later reference to Ephrem Syrus on May 21, 1761, cf. 4:457-459.

⁴⁵Outler writes: “What matters most in connection with Wesley is that in the writings of what he thought was ‘Macarius the Egyptian,’ he was actually in touch with Gregory of Nyssa, the greatest of all the Eastern Christian teachers of the quest for perfection.” Cf. Albert C. Outler, ed., *John Wesley, The Library of Protestant Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 9, note # 26.

⁴⁶Even Ted Campbell is apparently somewhat suspicious of Outler’s claim in his observation that “John Wesley’s doctrine of sanctification *might* have roots in the work of Gregory of Nyssa and the Cappadocian writers of the fourth century by way of the so-called ‘Macarian homilies.’” Cf. Campbell, *Christian Antiquity*, p. x. Emphasis is mine.

probably been introduced to this literature, interestingly enough, by some of his pietist friends (in a German translation!) while he was in Georgia. However, not only are the references to this literature in Wesley's own writings scarce, but also the Methodist leader's principal citation of the Macarian literature is not even on the much-discussed contemporary topic of *theosis*, but on that of *sin*. In other words, the Macarian homilies served to substantiate, for Wesley, the important truth, affirmed by the church from the earliest of times, that sin remains in the believer, that the carnal nature yet plagues a son or daughter of God. To illustrate, in his sermon, "The Scripture Way of Salvation," produced in 1765, Wesley states:

How exactly did Macarius, fourteen hundred years ago, describe the present experience of the children of God! The unskillful (or inexperienced), when grace operates, presently imagine they have no more sin. Whereas they that have discretion cannot deny that even we who have the grace of God may be molested again. . . .⁴⁷

This is not to deny, of course, that Wesley most probably valued the Macarian homilies for their clear presentation of the holy life, and several modern scholars have made this claim, Albert Outler being chief among them. In at least one place in this literature, for instance, Pseudo-Macarius employs the image of the "circumcision of the heart" as one which adequately depicts the work of perfection in the soul.⁴⁸ But it must also be borne in mind that Wesley's editing of the Macarian homilies was done both carefully and intentionally, no doubt reflecting some of his own eighteenth-century Anglican judgments. Accordingly, Wesley painstakingly removed each reference to the ascetic life in the homilies and whenever he encountered the term "*theosis*" (divinization), he simply removed it and substituted his more easily understood term "*sanctification*."⁴⁹ Add

⁴⁷Outler, *Sermons*, 2:159. For more on Wesley and Macarius, cf. John C. English, "The Path to Perfection in Pseudo-Macarius and John Wesley," *Pacifica*, Vol. 11, no. 1 (February 1998): 54-62.

⁴⁸For an interesting study on Wesley's employment of the work of Pseudo-Macarius, cf. Howard A. Snyder, "John Wesley and Macarius the Egyptian," *The Asbury Theological Journal* 45, no. 2 (Fall 1990): 55-60.

⁴⁹Compare Macarius, *Primitive Morality: or, the Spiritual Homilies of St. Macarius the Egyptian* (London: W. Taylor and J. Innys, 1721) with John Wesley, *A Christian Library, Consisting of Extracts from and Abridgements of the Choicest Pieces of Practical Divinity which have been published in the English Tongue*, 30 vols. (London: T. Blanshard, 1819-1827): 1:72 ff.

to this Kurowski's recent article, which has underscored several key theological differences between Pseudo-Macarius and Wesley (especially in the areas of grace, the image of God, and human freedom)⁵⁰ and the picture which is beginning to emerge is that, although Wesley clearly appreciated some of the insights of Pseudo-Macarius, especially in the area of hamartiology, he nevertheless remained quite critical of some aspects of this Syrian monk's theology. Here then was a critical appropriation, one which was informed not only by a larger theological vision, a real concert of voices, where Anglican, Moravian, and Lutheran notions were in the mix, but one that was also in its criticism ever attentive to a biblical idiom.

Contemporary Modulations and Conclusion

Operating in some sense out of a traditions reading of Wesley, where Eastern Orthodoxy is unduly privileged, Maddox makes the claim that "what is most characteristic of and common between Wesley and Orthodoxy is their conviction that Christ-likeness is not simply infused in believers instantaneously."⁵¹ Indeed, Maddox contends elsewhere, in a way which upsets the delicate balance of a *conjunctive* reading of Wesley, that "human salvation—viewed in Wesley's terms—would be fundamentally *gradual* in process."⁵² Indeed, this contemporary scholar marshals the evidence of Wesley's 1774 clarifying footnotes in his journal and actually believes that they substantiate his own *gradualist* reading of Wesley's theology, that they support, in other words, his own modern construction. Maddox states:

In the 1774 clarifying footnotes to this initial interpretation I believe that Wesley was gravitating toward a "gradualist" reading of his own spiritual journey. He now viewed the transitions in his spiritual life as more incremental in nature, and

⁵⁰Mark T. Kurowski, "The First Step Toward Grace: John Wesley's Use of the Spiritual Homilies of Macarius the Great," *Methodist History* Vol. 36, No. 2 (January 1998): 113-124.

⁵¹Maddox, *Eastern Orthodoxy*, 39. Maddox also makes the claim that "The crucial point for our discussion is that, for Wesley, God does not typically infuse holy tempers instantaneously." Cf. Randy Maddox, "Reconnecting the Means to the End: A Wesleyan Prescription for the Holiness Movement," *The Wesleyan Theological Journal* 33, no. 2 (Fall 1998), 41.

⁵²Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 152. Emphasis is mine.

God's justifying acceptance as present prior to Aldersgate (he was already a "servant of God").⁵³

On the contrary, Wesley's theology is most aptly described not in terms of gradualism but in terms of a larger conjunction which is informed by a diversity of theological traditions. That is, the processive, cooperant aspects of redemption (Eastern Fathers) must be seen against the backdrop of the instantaneous "moments" (Moravian/Lutheran) which mark that process and which highlight not only the sheer gratuity of grace, both justifying *and* sanctifying, but which also underscore the divine role in redemption. Again, the instantaneous motif holds in place the crucial truth that sinners can neither justify themselves *nor* make themselves holy. These are the works of God *alone*.⁵⁴ To pursue a traditions reading unswervingly and neglect or repudiate outright the instantaneous motif in Wesley's theology remains problematic for two key reasons. First, *all* actualizations of grace in time/space will necessarily have a first moment of their instantiation (if they are indeed *realized* in time/space), whether that "moment" is recognized or not. This is precisely why Wesley employed the conjunctive images of birth and death to describe the new birth and entire sanctification, respectively. That is, the images of birth and death are indicative not only of process but also suggest a crucial point of actualization in time.

Second, without the instantaneous motif in place (which functions in a soteriological way for Wesley, revealing the sheer gratuity of divine action), Maddox's interpretation, in its failure to take into account multifarious theological communities, runs the risk of moralism—if not at his hands, then at those who are less gifted, theologically speaking, than he.

⁵³Randy L. Maddox, "Continuing the Conversation," *Methodist History* 30, no. 4 (July 1992): 240. Though not fully appreciated by those who approach Wesley largely from secondary accounts, Maddox's implicit claim here is that the "faith of a servant" is justifying faith in each and every instance. This is quite problematic in light of Wesley's tendency to link the faith of a servant, on occasion, with the "spirit of bondage," and with being under "the dominion of sin." Cf. Kenneth J. Collins, "Real Christianity as Integrating Theme in Wesley's Soteriology: The Critique of a Modern Myth," *The Asbury Theological Journal* 51, no. 2 (Fall 1996): 15-45.

⁵⁴Wesley also held the notion of *sola gratia* in place by an appeal to a subtle but no less important distinction in his theology concerning the role of works: "not in the same sense, not in the same degree." For more on this distinction and its use, cf. Kenneth J. Collins, *The Scripture Way of Salvation: The Heart of John Wesley's Theology* (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1997), 64-68.

Indeed, implicit in Maddox's model of "responsible grace" is the notion that, once divine initiative is assumed, the onus, the burden, is on human response and action. Maddox no doubt takes comfort in the notion that such grace is "enabling" (and therefore does not smack of "merit"), but without also underscoring the truth that even this cooperant, enabling grace is a sheer gift of God (what Peter Bohler had taught Wesley), the specter of moralism remains.

Moreover, if a gradualist reading of Wesley's soteriology is drawn too tightly, neglecting the insights of Protestantism, then the divine freedom, itself, will at least be misunderstood and possibly eclipsed. In this reckoning, once the initial or prevenient action of the Most High occurs, God will then be limited to responding merely to human *response*. And this dynamic is precisely what Maddox suggests as he quotes Wesley in support of a "tight" synergism: "God does not continue to act upon the soul, *unless* the soul reacts upon God."⁵⁵ However, Wesley actually filled out his thought elsewhere and broke out of this type of restrictive synergism by underscoring divine freedom, graciousness, and mercy. Wesley, for example, reasons as follows in his sermon "The Great Privilege of Those Who are Born of God":

But if we do not then love him who first loved us; if we will not hearken to his voice; if we turn our eye away from him, and will not attend to the light which he pours upon us: his Spirit will not always strive; he will gradually withdraw, and leave us to the darkness of our own hearts.⁵⁶

Notice that the grace of God is not limited by human response in this context. To be sure, in the absence of such a response, God gradually (and no doubt reluctantly) withdraws indicating, quite clearly, that the Most High

⁵⁵Cf. Randy L. Maddox, "Responsible Grace: The Systematic Perspective of Wesleyan Theology," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 19, no. 2 (Fall 1984): 13. Emphasis is mine. It is actually quite ironic that, with his deprecation of the "instantaneous motif" and his failure to consider Protestant understandings of grace (and their consequences) with respect to such therapeutic themes as regeneration and entire sanctification, Maddox actually believes his gradualist reading is one of "balance." He writes: "The most balanced reading of Wesley's mature thought would put the emphasis on a slow process of growth toward entire sanctification" (cf. p. 218). For more on the implications of Maddox's gradualism, cf. Kenneth J. Collins, "Recent Trends in Wesley Studies and Wesleyan Holiness Scholarship," *The Wesleyan Theological Journal* Vol. 35, No. 1 (Spring 2000).

⁵⁶Outler, *Sermons*, 1:442.

continues to act, repeatedly woos the rebellious soul, at least for a time, though there is *no* human response at all. This is a truth that the Moravians, Lutherans, and Wesley himself understood quite well: God is remarkably gracious, and at times acts alone—sometimes in the face of human impotence; at other times in the face of human rebellion.

Two other consequences of a traditions reading of Wesley are equally disturbing. First, other scholars are now interpreting Wesley almost exclusively through the lens of Eastern Orthodoxy and to the relative neglect, if not outright repudiation of Western contributions. Typical of this trend is Hoo-Jung Lee who, like Maddox, virtually ignores Anglican, Moravian, and Lutheran streams in Wesley's theology as well as the significance of the "instantaneous motif." What emerges in Lee's work is a full-blown gradualism which is not only one-sided and historically inaccurate (for Wesley's theological synthesis included far more than Lee is apparently willing to allow), but it is also not actually a species of historical theology at all, but rather a contemporary imaginative construct.⁵⁷ Unfortunately, this trend, the confusion of historical and constructive theology, the anachronistic reading of contemporary judgments and interests back into the eighteenth century is likely to continue.

Second, Maddox himself, in his most recent work, has not only reinterpreted John Wesley's theology by means of a gradualist, incrementalist methodology which leaves little room for the power and decisiveness of the instantaneous motif championed in Protestant, Pietist circles, but he has also applied this same methodology to the theology of North American Methodism in general and to the Holiness Movement in particular. For example, in his piece "Holiness of Heart and Life: Lessons from North American Methodism," Maddox draws a distinction between an "affectional moral psychology" and "an intellectualist" one. The first psychology, which is characteristic of Wesley, identifies the will with the affections—affections which thrive in response "to our experience of God's gracious love for us." The second psychology, which is intellectualist, is supposedly descriptive not only of the Holiness Movement, but of nineteenth-century

⁵⁷Hoo-Jung Lee, "Experiencing the Spirit in Wesley and Macarius," in *Rethinking Wesley's Theology for Contemporary Methodism*, ed. Randy L. Maddox (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999), 197-212. Moreover, Lee has an East/West polemic in this piece which was not characteristic of Wesley. He writes, for instance: "I believe Asian Christians will be drawn more and more to something like Macarius' mode of spirituality as they find the inherited Western models inadequate." Cf. p. 212.

American Methodism as well. This intellectualist psychology separates the will from the affections in favor of “rational control of the passions or affections.” Observe that in this second psychology, the will is essentially identified with the power of rational self-determination, that is, self-governing reason supposedly brings about the great changes of the Christian life, even if it is aided in these changes by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Interestingly enough, whenever Maddox discerns that an author, past or present, has given significant attention to the instantaneous aspects of redemption, he immediately claims him or her for his intellectualist psychology, the one supposedly so different from that of Wesley. Thus, the teachings of John Fletcher, Asa Mahan, and Phoebe Palmer are all subsumed under the intellectualist model by Maddox.⁵⁸ Viewed another way, Maddox extensively critiques key leaders of the Holiness Movement by means of his own questionable methodology, which in its privileging of one theological tradition and in its gradualist approach can only conclude that a theology is deficient if it incorporates a “Protestant” instantaneous motif.

Unfortunately, Maddox (and others) will no doubt continue this debunking process of rich nineteenth-century traditions, traditions that ironically led numerous people, young and old, rich and poor, into the gracious liberty of the gospel. But in the end Maddox and others, perhaps, will have revealed to the scholarly community much more about their own methodology, their own historiography, than about North American Methodism in general or the Holiness Movement in particular. But would it not be better to be attentive to a constellation of interpretive communities as Wesley’s own theology (and that of subsequent Wesleyan traditions) is assessed, where Anglicans, Moravians, and Lutherans can add their own rich voices and keen insights to the undoubted genius of the Eastern Fathers? A balanced view, then, sensitive to the many nuances of Wesley’s theology, suggests that no one tradition, not even Anglicanism or Eastern Orthodoxy, is able to give a full account of the remarkable and intricate synthesis that Wesley achieved in his practical theology, a theology that may most suitably be described not as the Eastern way or the Western way, but as the Scripture way of salvation.

⁵⁸Randy L. Maddox, “Holiness of Heart and Life: Lessons from North American Methodism,” *The Asbury Theological Journal* 50, no. 2 (Fall 1995): 158 ff. At the beginning of this article, Maddox once again designates as “partisan” all those in the nineteenth century who maintained that entire sanctification could be entered into instantaneously. Cf. p. 151.

ISAIAH OF SCETIS AND JOHN WESLEY: THE PRACTICAL WAY OF HOLINESS

by

John Chryssavgis

Eastern Christian mystics have normally been more reticent than their Western counterparts to reveal the essence of God in their personal experiences. Eastern theologians have also generally been more reserved about exhausting the inner life of God in their teachings. However, the representatives of the Eastern ascetic tradition have always sought to live out the depth of divine life in the rigor of daily life, and to reach out to the uncharted depth of divine truth through their personal discipline. Whether in early fifth-century Palestine where Abba Isaiah of Scetis lived in ascetic simplicity and spiritual struggle, or in eighteenth-century England where John Wesley underwent a spiritual conversion to a more disciplined “method” or ascetic life-style, the practical way of holiness offered the possibility of and accessibility to the reality of the heavenly kingdom from this world and this age.

This paper will explore the *Ascetic Discourses* of Abba Isaiah and identify parallel insights in the writings of John Wesley. We shall expose certain points of correspondence and comparison between the asceticism of the early spiritual master of Egypt and Palestine and the “methodism” of the more recent evangelistic leader of the Wesleyan movement. In brief, we shall consider the practical way of holiness as it emerges in the life and work of two very different representatives of two distinct traditions, the Eastern Orthodox communion of churches and the Methodist movement in the West.

During the last few decades, great strides have been taken to investigate and translate the hitherto unavailable early ascetic literature: the *Sayings* of the Desert Fathers, the *Correspondence* of Barsanuphius and John, and the material contained in the *Philokalia*. One of the latest texts to be translated into modern European languages are the *Ascetic Discourses* of Abba Isaiah of Scetis.¹ This writing would not immediately have appealed to John Wesley, or to his brother Charles, and in many ways to this day there exists a gap between the intellectual appreciation of the ascetic teaching of these early texts and their integration into everyday Christian practice.

People often judge that ascetic feats are too rigid or extreme. They sometimes are mistaken. Abba Isaiah is an example of a monastic elder who holds the human body in the highest regard:

Take care of your body; it is the temple of God . . . [A.D. 15].

Taking care of the body in godly fear is a good thing. Adorning the body destroys the soul (A.D. 16).

People also often object to the austerity of ascetic discipline, claiming that it is far removed from the Gospel reality of love. To the contrary, Basil the Great defines the monastic way as none other than the communal “life according to the Gospel.”² And John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, one of Protestantism’s most influential evangelistic renewal movements, also believed that ascetic spirituality applied to the whole of life which is intrinsically communal:

Christianity is essentially a social religion, and to turn it into a solitary religion is indeed to destroy it.³

In the spiritual life there is no sharp distinction between monastics and non-monastics; the external circumstances may vary but the path is essentially one.

¹For the French translation, see Abbé Isaïe, *Recueil ascétique—Introduction et traduction française par les moines de Solesmes*, Collection Spiritualité Orientale, no. 7, Abbaye de Bellefontaine 49, Bégrolles, 1970. In this paper, we shall be referring to the *Ascetic Discourses* in parentheses (A.D.) throughout the main body of the text.

²See *Epistle* 207, 2 PG 32: 761.

³See T. Jackson, *The Works of the Rev. John Wesley* (Wesleyan Conference Office: London, 1829-1831), vol. V, *Sermon on the Mount IV*, 296. Cited in ed. Frank Whaling, *John and Charles Wesley: Selected Prayers, Hymns, Journal Notes, Sermons, Letters, and Treatises* (Classics of Western Spirituality: Paulist Press, New York, 1981), 58.

Still others are uncertain about the connection or indeed the relevance of early ascetic customs to our contemporary society and culture. Perhaps such customs are seen as a source of embarrassment; yet Abba Isaiah regards monasticism as a social event, not a selfish practice: "Perform your handiwork, so that you may feed the poor" (A.D. 16). This "charitable" dimension of Abba Isaiah's ascetic spirituality would be appealing to the "societary" aspect of Wesleyan pietistic thought, according to which there is "no holiness but social holiness,"⁴ precisely perhaps because of its Scriptural foundation. Like the Wesleys, Abba Isaiah was inspired by the exhortation of St. Paul:

Share in suffering for the gospel in the power of God, who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not in virtue of our works but in virtue of His own purpose and the grace which He gave us in Christ Jesus ages ago, and now has manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. For this gospel I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher (2 Tim. 1:8-11).

In similar fashion, Wesleyan Methodism heeded the "holy calling" to perfection through public proclamation, itinerant instruction, and scriptural interpretation. Isaian spirituality, on the other hand, preferred the way of practical asceticism, spiritual direction, and personal application. Where John Wesley was a preacher, Abba Isaiah was a practitioner. Where John Wesley proclaimed the power of the Word, Abba Isaiah underlined "the power of the cell" (A.D. 4). Isaiah is described by his biographer as a *praktikos*, and this term appropriately defines the character of this hermit and of his *Discourses*. They constitute a practical guide for the monk on the life of *ascesis*, the way of perfection, the discipline of work, the fulfillment of the commandments, and the attainment of accordance with the nature of Jesus.

The *Discourses* is not a systematic exposition of monastic thought or Christian spirituality. The work does indeed have a sense of unity in its basic structure and theme, but—in contrast to the more methodical system of religious observance articulated by the Wesleys—the writing of Abba Isaiah does not contain any explicitly methodical articulation of practice

⁴See eds. C. Jones, G. Wainwright, and E. Yarnold, *The Study of Spirituality* (SPCK: London, 1986), 450-459 and 603-605.

or doctrinal elaboration of principles. Naturally, John Wesley too did not provide an exhaustive systematic exposition of the Christian articles of faith. Like the trend of Pietism in more recent centuries, at times Isaiah's writing is expressly hostile towards any intellectualism (see *A.D.* 6), more so than Wesleyan Methodism ever is. In the tradition of the *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*—whose teachings Abba Isaiah espouses and extends into fifth-century Palestine and a legacy to which Abba Isaiah contributed—the chapter headings of the *Ascetic Discourses* reveal the text as a loose collection of counsels and commands, of didactic propositions in the form of a spiritual “constitution” for monks choosing to follow the way of perfection under the supervision and guidance of Abba Isaiah (cf. *A.D.* 3). These rules and regulations indicate the subtle yet profound perception that the mystery of divine grace speaks a language that may be absorbed primarily through “being” rather than by doing, thinking, or teaching.

Kingdom of God: End, Way, and Struggle

1. The End As Criterion. For Abba Isaiah, the way of perfection and holiness is properly and clearly approached only from an eschatological perspective. Each moment is an expectation of that Last Day. The 1780 Methodist *Hymnbook* prayed:

Jesus, my strength, my hope,
On thee I cast my care
...
Give me on thee to wait.⁵

Every virtue that we acquire, just as every vice that we avoid, prepares us for that moment “when He [Christ] comes to meet us on the day of judgment,” a phrase repeated several times in *Discourse* 16 alone. The light of the heavenly kingdom illumines every detail of our earthly life as we “press on toward our goal” (Phil. 3:14). In the way of the Psalmist (cf. Ps. 16:8) then, “we are to hold God before our eyes in everything that we do” (*A.D.* 5).

The kingdom of God is not simply “inherited through obedience” (*A.D.* 4) or even merely “acquired through virtue” (*A.D.* 4). It is in fact “expected in hope” (*A.D.* 17; see also 8) and “desired with passion” (*A.D.* 16):

⁵See Whaling, *op. cit.*, 51. See also the hymn by Charles Wesley on Christ's Kingdom in Whaling, *op. cit.*, 287 and 289: “On thee we humbly wait. / . . . We long to see thy kingdom now. / Hasten that kingdom of thy grace.”

Love the faithful, so that you may find mercy in them. Desire the saints, so that their zeal may consume you. Remember the heavenly kingdom, so that its passion may very gradually attract you (A.D. 16).

Further, this heavenly kingdom is more than “a new reality of the future age” (A.D. 13); it is “the spiritual pledge of the present life” (A.D. 19; see also 16):

Truly you have become the bride [of Christ], and the Holy Spirit has made you its heir, even while you are still in the body (A.D. 19).

The grace of the Paraclete at once refreshes (lit., “gives rest”: see A.D. 4) and revitalizes (lit., “gives breath”: A.D. 7). Although in this age the fullness of “divine glory is not yet revealed” (A.D. 7), nevertheless “the flame of divine grace is already alight” (*ibid.*). On that final day:

. . . each of us will be shown up by the very torch that is in our hand (A.D. 16).

Therefore, the ascetic is called to “struggle with violence” until the last breath, to the moment of death (A.D. 5, 8, and 16), because:

. . . alas, our body, which is susceptible of the eternal light, is likewise vulnerable to the eternal darkness (A.D. 29).

For John Wesley too, we are to “gladly urge our way to heaven.”⁶ And Charles Wesley writes of “the kingdom of an inward heaven.”⁷ Yet the attainment of perfection, even if limited in this life, is an ongoing process of growth and movement toward the end of all things and of all times. The “last times” imply not so much an escapist attitude to the world, as they do in fact teach about the “last-ness” and the “lasting-ness” of all things. Eschatology is not the teaching about the end, the last—perhaps unnecessary, sometimes unintelligible—chapter in a manual of Christian doctrine; rather, it is the vision about the relationship of everyone and everything to the end of all. Christian perfection is possible through Christ’s Incarna-

⁶See *Hymns on the Lord’s Supper* by John Wesley and Charles Wesley (Charles Wesley Society: Madison, NJ, 1995), Hymn XLVI, 34. In his *Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, John Wesley writes: “Bring thy heavenly kingdom in.” Cf. Whaling, *op. cit.*, 325.

⁷See Whaling, *op. cit.*, 190.

tion, writes Charles Wesley: "For God is manifest below."⁸ Eschatology signifies the appreciation of the earth below in relation to the heavens above. It is the Omega which gives meaning to the Alpha, the heavenly sacrament of the Eucharist which is the only true perception of the present. For John Wesley, believers are already sharers of that final banquet:

By Faith and Hope already there
Ev'n now the Marriage-Feast we share,
Ev'n now we by the Lamb are fed,
Our Lord's celestial Joy we prove,
While . . .
[He] lulls us in his Arms to rest!
This the Pledge the Earnest This
. . .
Here He gives our Souls a Taste,
Heaven into our Hearts He pours.
Walking in all thy Ways we find
Our Heaven on Earth begun.⁹

2. The Way As Movement. Abba Isaiah likens the Christian spiritual way to traveling on a journey:

There are [he writes] two roads, one leading to life and the other to death. Someone traveling on one road cannot also follow the other. Indeed, the person who walks both ways is reckoned as walking neither—whether that leading to the kingdom, or that leading to hell (*A.D.* 21; see also 25).¹⁰

If there are two characteristics of the practical way of perfection, they are ongoing struggle and never-ending progress:

On the way of virtues are . . . change, variation . . . measure . . . heartache . . . progress and violence. For it is a journey, and you must travel this route until you attain rest (*anapausis*) (*A.D.* 24).

⁸See Whaling, *op. cit.*, 49.

⁹See *Hymns on the Lord's Supper* XCIII [82], CIII [89], and XCVI [83]. Cf. also Whaling, *op. cit.*, 264-265: "A drop of heaven o'erflows our hearts / . . . Sure pledge of ecstasies unknown."

¹⁰See also the *Didache*, or the *Teaching of the Apostles*, ch. 1, in ed. J. B. Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1956), 123.

In his *Brief Thoughts on Christian Perfection*, John Wesley also relates perfection to the attainment of “the promised rest” which he identifies with “the Canaan of [God’s] perfect love.”¹¹ The desire for perfection is equally intense in both of the Wesley brothers:

Eager for thee I ask and pant,
So strong the principle divine,
Carries me out with sweet constraint,
Till all my hallow’d soul be thine;
Plunged in my Godhead’s deepest sea,
And lost in thine immensity.¹²

Abba Isaiah addresses the subject of spiritual perfection in two of his twenty-nine *Discourses* (13 and 23), claiming that the way of perfection is discerned and discovered amid two spiritual poles: the recognition of one’s human limitations (A.D. 23) and the imitation of Christ’s divine measure (A.D. 13). The stages along the way of holiness begin from *ascesis* against the passions and lead to *ascent* upon the Cross: “For the Cross of Jesus is abstinence from every passion, until it is cut off” (A.D. 16).

Below we shall develop the stages of the way of the cross, but here it is important to emphasize the way itself, which always remains an orientation toward the age which is to come, a constant expectation of the last things. Perfection is therefore perpetual progress. The soul constantly moves forward, opening up to “grace upon grace” (John 1:16), “forgetting those things which are behind, and stretching forward to those things which are ahead” (Phil. 3:13). The process of growth is infinite, quite simply because God is limitless; this is the classical teaching developed by Gregory of Nyssa on mystical “epectasis.”¹³ In his Sermon 40, *On Christian Perfection*, John Wesley observes:

Christian perfection, therefore, does not imply (as some men seem to have imagined) an exemption either from ignorance, or mistake, or infirmities, or temptations. Indeed, it is only another term for holiness. They are two names for the same thing. Thus, every one that is holy is, in the Scripture sense, perfect. Yet we may, lastly, observe, that neither in this respect

¹¹See T. Jackson, *Works* vol. 11, 385-386.

¹²From a hymn by Charles Wesley, quoted by John in *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*; cited in Samuel J. Rogal, *John and Charles Wesley* (Twayne Publications: Boston, 1983), 91.

¹³*Homily on Perfection* PG 46: 285.

is there any absolute perfection on earth. There is no “perfection of degrees,” as it is termed; none which does not admit of a continual increase.¹⁴

To this Abba Isaiah might add that the levels of intensity in the spiritual way are ever deepening, precisely because there is no comfortable way of sitting on the cross!

3. The Struggle With Nature. When Abba Isaiah speaks of discomfort on the spiritual journey, he recalls the forcefulness required to enter the kingdom (cf. Matt. 11:12). When he speaks of violence in the struggle toward perfection, it is to describe the forceful attraction of the heavenly kingdom. However, whenever he speaks of sin as the barrier along this way, he prefers to adopt medical rather than juridical imagery:

We are all as if in surgery. One feels pain in the eye, another in the head, yet another in the veins, or whatever other diseases may exist. . . . Some wounds are already healed, but then one eats something harmful, and they return once more. . . . (A.D. 8).

Truly blessed then is the person who deals with one’s own sins (A.D. 10).

“Sin results from denial of one’s proper limits” (A.D. 17), and virtue from knowing oneself (see A.D. 19 and 23). Dispassion, or the overcoming of sin, is identified with love (A.D. 21), and passion with an “eclipse of the heart’s proper desire” (A.D. 22). The wise Palestinian elder will present his monks with the traditional view of sin as being *unnatural or destructive forces to be eradicated* (A.D. 4 and 8); Abba Isaiah even offers a list of the numerous branches of evil (A.D. 28 and 29).¹⁵ Nevertheless, he also understands passions as *natural or misguided forces to be redirected* (see esp. A.D. 2). It is a matter of spiritual preference, a question of “where our treasure lies” (Luke 12:34):

When we love the desires of our heart more than we love God, then we do not have as much love for God as we do for the passions (A.D. 5).

¹⁴Cited in Job, *op. cit.* below, 210. See also John Wesley’s *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, found in Whaling, *op. cit.*, 329.

¹⁵In *Discourse 4*, for instance, Abba Isaiah refers to the “seven passions”; and in *Discourse 17*, he connects these to the “seven demons” (cf. also Luke 8:2).

Virtue or vice depends on the direction of the heart (*A.D.* 16). The natural commitment, the innate priority of our love is toward God:

. . . everything that is contrary to nature is called faithlessness or prostitution (*A.D.* 25).

In the beginning, when God created Adam, God placed him in paradise with healthy, natural senses. Later, when Adam listened to the one who deceived him, all the senses were twisted toward that which is contrary to nature. . . . (*A.D.* 2; see also 16).

Abba Isaiah adopts the terms “twisting” or “turning” (ultimately, it is a matter of “perversion” or “madness” [*A.D.* 29]) and “transformation” or “conversion” (even of “saneness” [*A.D.* 25]). The ascetic must be turned and surrendered to God totally and passionately, never partially (*A.D.* 25):

For sin is not particular, but it is the entire human person, the “old person,” that is called sin (*A.D.* 21).

Yet human nature has been hardened and is not easily changed unless one is unconditionally submitted to the will of God. This is the incarnation teaching and example of Jesus Christ. Thus great emphasis is placed in ascetic literature on the power of human will:

Every person either binds oneself for hell, or else becomes free for heaven. For there is nothing harder than the human will, whether it is directed towards death or towards life (*A.D.* 18).

Certainly this concept of the “hardening” of human nature comes closer to the manner in which John Wesley perceives the doctrine about the origin of sin. In his work published in 1757 and entitled *The Doctrine of Original Sin, According to Scripture, Reason, and Experience*, Wesley writes:

Adam, by his sin, became not only guilty but corrupt; and so transmits guilt and corruption to his posterity. By this sin he stripped himself of his original righteousness and corrupted himself. [p. 458]

. . . our nature is deeply corrupted, inclined to evil, and disinclined to all that is spiritually good; so that, without supernatural grace, we can neither will nor do what is pleasing to God. [p. 273]¹⁶

¹⁶See S. Rogal, 88-89.

For the Wesleys, this understanding of human nature was not merely theological information learned from their reading of Calvinist manuals of doctrine. It was their own very formation learned from their mother, who remained John Wesley's counselor until her death in 1742. In a letter to her son John, written on July 24, 1732, Susanna Wesley described the way in which she maintained order in her family within an unstable world. Her thesis would today receive much attention in terms of child development, inasmuch as it focused on pure obedience, but it constituted the structure within which John Wesley understood the notion of free will:

I insist upon conquering the will of children . . . because this is the only strong and rational foundation of a religious education, without which both precept and example will be ineffectual. But when this is thoroughly done, then a child is capable of being governed by the reason and piety of its parents, till its own understanding comes to maturity and the principles of religion have taken root in the mind.¹⁷

Certainly one may encounter in early monastic texts similar teachings about the human will in relation to the struggle against evil. In the way of perfection, demons are normally cited far more frequently than angels. This is true of the ascetic literature of the desert and of the pietistic tradition of the Methodists. Struggling against the deceitful wiles and unruly ways of the demons is the source of spiritual understanding and authority. Yet Abba Isaiah appears also to be aware of the subtle truth that the ladder of divine ascent, where we are called to struggle against the evil spiritual forces, may easily be transformed into the ladder of Jacob, where we realize that we are wrestling with God. There is a sense in which our demons may also reveal our angels. Our life is filled with moments that either attract us toward God or estrange us from God. There is no vice that is unrelated to virtue, no darkness that is bereft of light, and no brokenness that cannot lead to wholeness. Charles Wesley prays in one of his hymns:

Shine on thy work, disperse the gloom;
Light in thy light I then shall see.¹⁸

¹⁷This educational philosophy would be harshly criticized today, and it is surely not unrelated to Wesley's own difficult relationship with his wife, whom he reprimanded in a letter of 1760, echoing his maternal upbringing: "Every act of disobedience is an act of rebellion against God and the King, as well as against your affectionate Husband." See his *Letters*, vol. 4; quoted in S. Rogal, 44.

¹⁸See Whaling, *op. cit.*, 191.

Every aspect of human nature is, by divine intention and by natural inclination, filled with a heavenly spark. This is a reality that Abba Isaiah would have learned from his experience in the desert of Egypt, where Anthony the Great taught:

Whoever has not experienced temptation cannot enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. . . . Without temptations, no-one can be saved.¹⁹

The Way of the Cross: The Inner Kingdom and the Imitation of Christ

1. The Grace of the Sacraments. Like the Wesleyan revival, the spirituality of Abba Isaiah is not only radically evangelical but also surprisingly sacramental. However, while Abba Isaiah respects the sacraments of the Church—he writes, for instance, on baptism (A.D. 8, 13, 16, 22, and esp. 25), the eucharist (A.D. 3, 4, 8, 26, 29, and esp. 4), marriage (A.D. 25), and ordination (A.D. 5)—he strives to develop an inspirational model based on the sacramental life. Isaiah wants his monks to be more than merely “Christians by name” (A.D. 21 and 22). John Wesley likewise speaks of those who, “though they are called Christians, the name does not imply the thing: They are as far from this as hell from heaven.”²⁰ Therefore, Abba Isaiah invites his readers to a rebirth through repentance, which alone will allow entrance to the kingdom of God. In *Discourse 25*, for example, he explores the Lord’s saying in Matthew 18:3—“Unless you repent and become like little children, you will not enter into the kingdom of heaven.”

Together with faith and holiness, John Wesley placed much practical emphasis on repentance; these three comprised the “main doctrines” of Methodism.²¹ So the aim of the way of holiness is, paradoxically perhaps, *not spiritual maturity but in fact sacred infancy*, not education but “regeneration,” not formation at all but actually recreation. Says Abba Isaiah: “. . . arriving at the measure of a child . . . and attaining to the measure of sacred infancy” (A.D. 25).

The Wesleyan revival preached this “new birth” through the Holy Spirit (cf. Rom. 8:15), which was the beginning of Christian transforma-

¹⁹*Apophthegmata*, saying no. 5. See ed. B. Ward, *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers* (Cistercian Publications: Kalamazoo, 1975), 2.

²⁰Sermon 61: *The Mystery of Iniquity*. Cited in Reuben Job, *A Wesleyan Spiritual Reader* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), 41.

²¹Cf. T. Jackson, *op. cit.*, vol. 8, 1984, 472.

tion and personal sanctification, a moral restoration to the image of God revealed in Jesus Christ. Spiritual regeneration was the assurance of divine favor and pious fervor (cf. 2 Pet. 1:4) alike. John Wesley wrote that:

. . . justification implies only a relative, the new birth a real, change. God in justifying us does something for us; in begetting us again, He does the work in us. . . . The one restores us to the favor, the other to the image, of God.²²

For Abba Isaiah, this assurance is achieved by means of Holy Communion, the sacrament of thanksgiving that colors every detail of this new life as a gift from God:

The gift of thanksgiving comes from God. For it is God who gives us the grace to render thanks to Him in all things (A.D. 22).

Finally, Abba Isaiah underlines the royal priesthood of all believers:

Rather, become in purity an altar of God, having the inner priest always offering sacrifices, both in the morning and in the evening, so that the altar is never left without sacrifice (A.D. 5).

Therefore, examine yourself . . . for you have been baptized into Christ and into His death (A.D. 22).

This manner of thinking would no doubt have appealed to John Wesley, who also prayed: “Erect thy Tabernacle here, The New Jerusalem send down.”²³

Although deliberately distancing himself from specific Roman Catholic doctrines on Holy Communion, John Wesley’s sacramentalism was firmly centered on the Eucharist:²⁴

Affix the Sacramental Seal,
And stamp us for thine own.

²²*Sermon XIX on the Great Privilege of those that are Born of God*, in his *Works*, vol. V, cited in Whaling, *op. cit.*, 48. See also John Wesley’s *Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, in Whaling, *ibid.*, 312: “. . . he is a child of God, and if he abide in him, an heir of all the promises.”

²³See *Hymn CLXVI* (141).

²⁴See G. Wainwright, introduction to *Hymns on the Lord’s Supper*, v-xiv.

Return, and with thy servants sit,
 Lord of the Sacramental Feast
 And satiate us with the heavenly Meat,
 And make the World thy happy Guest.²⁵

2. Commonality Between Abba Isaiah, Thomas à Kempis, and John Wesley. One aspect of Abba Isaiah's thought, that is perhaps indicative also of his Monophysite inheritance, is his emphasis on the imitation of Jesus Christ and on the intimacy of the monk's relationship with the Lord Jesus. Although not entirely absent from Eastern Byzantine thought and spirituality, such an emphasis is certainly afforded a centrality by Isaiah not frequently found in spiritual and mystical writers of the East. Perhaps it is further evidence of the open-mindedness of Isaiah's work that in reading, for example, *Ascetic Discourse* 16, one can almost imagine that one is reading the *Imitation of Christ* by Thomas à Kempis. However, this is more likely to be a reflection of the practical nature of the Isaian corpus.

References to the "tenderness" and "sweetness" of Jesus are typical of a simple piety and practical spirituality. Yet, much more than this, it is also a sign of Isaiah's own very delicate nature and of his sensitivity to details in the interpersonal relations among the members of his monastic community (cf. *A.D.* 4). Isaiah believes that we ought to "follow in the steps" of Jesus (*A.D.* 25 and 22) and, in Pauline terms (cf. Gal. 3:27), be "dressed with Jesus" (*A.D.* 21 and 2) through the power of the sacraments. It should be noted briefly that, like the author of the *Macarian Homilies*, Isaiah is also one of the few early ascetic authors to stress the importance of the Holy Spirit (see esp. *A.D.* 19).

We know that John Wesley came across Thomas à Kempis' *Imitation of Christ* for the first time as early as 1725 in a 17th-century translation by George Stanhope. After reading at the tender age of twenty-one this mid-15th century Augustinian treatise on the progress of the soul to perfection and union, initially Wesley was "very angry with Kempis for being too strict." Yet he decided to: "watch against all sin, whether in word or deed. [He] began to aim at, and pray for, inward holiness."²⁶

For Abba Isaiah, in the sacraments the Christian enjoys communion with the Son of God, with the Lord Jesus Christ (*A.D.* 8 and 22). Jesus

²⁵Cf. *Hymns* XXX (23) and CLXVI (141).

²⁶See ed. N. Curnock, *The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley*, vol. 1 (Charles Kelly: London, 1909), 466-467.

Christ “reveals to us the will of the Father” (A.D. 23). Although the comparison with Christ appears awesome, yet the parallel is critical:

He is sinless, and offered us an example [*typos*] in everything. . . . He endured abuse, whereas we do not in the least. He did not return evil for evil, whereas we cannot do likewise. He was not angered in suffering, while you are angry whenever in pain. . . . He gave Himself for the life of those who sinned against Him, until He redeemed them, while you cannot do similarly even for those who love you. . . . Know Him through His deeds; and know yourself through your own deeds (A.D. 22).

In his 27th *Ascetic Discourse*, Abba Isaiah twice draws attention to the power of Christ’s redeeming blood:

Attend diligently, knowing that the Lord, though rich, became poor for our sake and died. In dying for us, He bought us with His own blood, in order that you also may consider living no longer for yourself but for the Lord, being His perfect slave in everything, living always before God like a very gentle animal who does not answer back but is submissive to his master . . . and not having a will or desire of his own but aspiring only to do the work of God.

Attend diligently, believing firmly that our Lord Jesus Christ, who is God, who possesses glory and ineffable majesty, has made Himself a model [*typos*] for us in order to follow His footsteps. . . .

Writes Charles Wesley: “The invitation is to all. . . . Let every soul be Jesus’ guest,” for whom “Christ and heaven are one.”²⁷ In *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, John Wesley notes that “Thy [Christ’s] presence is the perfect day.”²⁸ For Abba Isaiah, to “follow in His footsteps” is to “look for His traces” (A.D. 25); Charles Wesley writes in one hymn: “Jesus, we follow thee / In all thy footsteps tread,”²⁹ which in turn means—through the sacraments of baptism and repentance—to “reach the measure of Christ” (cf. Eph. 4:13). In the final analysis, in the words of

²⁷Cf. Whaling, *op. cit.*, 179 and 182. See also p. 183: “‘Tis heaven to see our Jesu’s face.”

²⁸See Whaling, *op. cit.*, 324.

²⁹See Whaling, *op. cit.*, 32.

Abba Isaiah, this implies turning toward and fixing our gaze upon the crucified Christ:

. . . try hard to fix your eyes on the bronze serpent which Moses made according to God's command. He placed this on the wood at the top of the mountain in order that anyone bitten by a serpent may gaze upon it and immediately recover. Our Lord Jesus on the cross resembled the bronze serpent. . . . Our Lord Jesus assumed this model [typos] in order to extinguish the venom that Adam had eaten from the serpent's mouth and in order to bring back nature—which had become contrary to nature—to conform once again to nature (A.D. 25).

On the cross, everything that Christ endured—the gall, the spitting, the crown of thorns, the beating, the nakedness, the suffering, the isolation, the entombment [this is the order in which these are presented by Abba Isaiah]—was in order to offer us a model; “it is an example for us,” as Abba Isaiah observes sixteen times in just a single paragraph of *Discourse* 13.

3. The “Stages” of the Cross. Abba Isaiah's indebtedness to St. Paul is particularly evident in *Ascetic Discourse* 13, where he develops his favorite notion of “ascending the cross of Jesus.” It is a passionate devotion to and contemplation of the Cross (see also A.D. 21, 25, and 27). The cross therefore becomes the key to the way of perfection: “The cross is the abolition of all sins, and engenders love. For without love there is no cross” (A.D. 21). Similarly, Wesley's prayer to Christ is none other than to “lead [him] to [His] holy hill” of the cross, which is tantamount to the ascent to heaven.³⁰ Charles Wesley states this reality clearly in his hymns:

We in thy birth are born,
Sustain thy grief and loss,
Share in thy want, and shame, and scorn,
And die upon thy cross.

Made like him, like him we rise,
Ours the cross, the grave, the skies.³¹

While adhering to the Pauline model of holiness as being crucified with Christ (cf. Gal. 2:20), Abba Isaiah introduces a new distinction in the

³⁰See Whaling, *op. cit.*, 17 and 33.

³¹See Whaling, *op. cit.*, 267-268, and 285.

way of the cross. Beyond the distinction between Martha and Mary, who symbolize “practical endurance” and “the state of mourning,” and even beyond Lazarus bound and the risen Lazarus, who symbolizes “the intellect fettered” and “the intellect carefree” (cf. *A.D.* 21), there is a further perceptive distinction. It is between “*beholding* the cross” (cf. *A.D.* 25), “*bearing* the cross” (*A.D.* 21), and simply “*being on* the cross.” The latter implies a higher stage of silence, while the former signifies the preparatory stage of struggle (cf. also *A.D.* 8). The follower of Christ is called to “accompany the Lord to the cross” (*A.D.* 16) and to “ascend the cross” (*A.D.* 17): “. . . we are to *climb on the cross* and to *stay on the cross*” (*A.D.* 13). Indeed these two stages are distinct, and “to wish to stay on the cross prematurely is to attract the wrath of God” (*A.D.* 8 and 13). Nonetheless, the natural home, the *topos* of the soul, is the cross. In similar fashion, Charles Wesley speaks of the crucified Christ in heaven as preparing our natural place of rest:

Near himself prepares our place
harbinger of human race.³²

We are therefore called, writes Abba Isaiah, to render thanks to the Lord for enabling us to endure the cross (*A.D.* 17), and to renounce those who wish us to descend from the cross (*A.D.* 26).

Blessed therefore is the person who is crucified, dead, buried, and risen in newness, when he sees himself in the natural condition of Jesus, following His holy footsteps which were made when He was incarnated for the sake of His holy saints. Thus it is to Him that belong [the virtues of] humility, baseness, poverty, detachment, forgiveness, peace, enduring reproach, not caring for the body, not fearing the conspiracies of evil people, and—the greatest of these—knowing everything before it occurs, and treating people with kindness. So one who has reached these and eliminated the condition that is contrary to nature, shows that he is truly from Christ, and is the Son of God and brother of Jesus” (*A.D.* 18).

The Life of the Community: Prayer, Love, Doctrine

____**1. The power of prayer.** The way of the cross is realized and remembered through prayer, “much prayer” (*A.D.* 13 and 9): “. . . contin-

³²See Whaling, *op. cit.*, 286.

ual prayer. . . . Overlooking prayer even slightly gives rise to forgetfulness of this truth” (A.D. 16). The way of the cross is the way into the heart (cf. A.D. 2), which is illumined through prayer (cf. A.D. 4 and 16). Abba Isaiah understands prayer as communion with God, or as compassion deriving from God, rather than as some communication for the sake of petition:

Do not ask for this or that in prayer, but simply say, “. . . Have compassion on your creature. . . . I have no other refuge but you, Lord” (A.D. 4; see also 26).

Otherwise prayer is neither cathartic nor authentic:

[Such a person is] not praying genuinely with the intellect, but ignorantly with the lips. . . . One is deceived, because no one listens to such prayer. For it is not the intellect that is in prayer, but only the habit of regular discipline (A.D. 18; see also 25).

John Wesley was careful to underline the importance of prayer for the Christian who chooses to be in the way of perfection:

For indeed he *prays without ceasing*; at all times the language of his heart is this: *Unto you is my mouth, though without a voice; and my silence speaks unto you*. His heart is lifted up to God at all times, and in all places. In this he is never hindered, much less interrupted, by any person or thing. In retirement or company, in leisure, business, or conversation, his heart is ever with the Lord. Whether he lie down or rise up, *God is in all his thoughts*; He *walks with God* continually; having the loving eye of his soul fixed on him, and everywhere *seeing him that is invisible*.³³

2. The Grace of Love. Not only are we to “*love praying ceaselessly*,” but Abba Isaiah notes that “we are to *love to love*” (A.D. 16). Love is the purpose [*telos*: cf. A.D. 16], the climax [*oros*] of all virtue, while “the end of all passion is self-justification” (A.D. 7). Nothing is more detestable and dangerous in the spiritual life, for Isaiah, than insensitivity towards others and towards God (A.D. 5, 16, 26, and 18). When we are not sensitive to others, when we do not love, “when we bear hatred towards even a single person, then our prayer is unacceptable” (A.D. 16). Love is identified with life (cf. A.D. 21; see also 1 John 3: 13-14); it is the

³³See Whaling, *op. cit.*, 304.

other side of the same coin known as “dispassion” (A.D. 21 and 26), and characterized as “blessed” (A.D. 29). Love is “the seal of the soul” (A.D. 7), “the image of Christ within us” (A.D. 25). In his hymn *Hark the Herald Angels Sing*, Charles Wesley adopts the same image:

Adam’s likeness now efface,
Stamp thine image in its place:
Second Adam from above,
Reinstate us in thy love.³⁴

Paradoxically, love is the highest expression of passion, as John Wesley writes in *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*:

Thy soul break out in strong desire
The perfect bliss to prove!
Thy longing heart be all on fire
To be dissolv’d in love!³⁵

Often we reduce the concept of love to outward actions. Yet love may also involve the more “visible” dimensions of charity or counseling, as well as the “invisible” aspects of support and silence. Conversely, being silent when we are supposed to speak “can be the cause of our spiritual death”; at the same time, a word out of place “can also be the death of our soul” (A.D. 5). The context within which Abba Isaiah perceives the virtue of love is the Pauline image of the body, wherein the least significant members deserve the greatest attention, and the most vulnerable are invaluable, indeed indispensable (1 Cor. 12:12). Said Abba Isaiah:

Again he said: if it comes to you, while you are sitting in your cell, to judge your neighbor, consider how more numerous your own sins are than your neighbor’s. If you believe that you are doing righteous things, do not think that these will please God. Every one of the body’s stronger limbs takes care of the weaker members in order to attend and care for them. But the cruel person who busies himself, asking: “What have I to do with the weak?” does not belong to the body of Christ, because the strong sympathize with the weak until the latter are healed; and they say: “I am the weak one” (A.D. 26).

³⁴See Whaling, *op. cit.*, 49. Cf. also *ibid.*, 216: “We bear the character divine / The stamp of perfect love.”

³⁵See Whaling, *op. cit.*, 336.

The path to perfection in Methodist spirituality is also connected to the fulfillment of the two great commandments: love of God and love of neighbor. Wholeness of heart is identified with oneness of soul by John Wesley in his letters. In 1738, he wrote:

Their faith hath made them whole. And these are of one heart and of one soul. They all love one another, and are knit together in one body and one spirit, as in one faith and one hope of their calling.³⁶

This is the way of love that we have learned directly from the Incarnate Son of God. John Wesley states this succinctly: "Where there is no love of God, there is no holiness, and there is no love of God but from a sense of his loving us."³⁷ And, in his hymn *Wrestling Jacob*, Charles Wesley repeats seven times:

Thy nature, and thy name, is LOVE.³⁸

God has nurtured us, and then gradually weaned us, through the vulnerability of childhood to the maturity of sainthood. The image of the providential love of God is colorfully depicted by Abba Isaiah in his 25th *Ascetic Discourse*:

While the young infant is still in its mother's bosom, she guards it at all times from every evil. When it cries, she offers it her breast. Gradually, she gives it breath with all her strength, helping it to learn fear . . . in order that its heart is not filled with boldness. But when it cries, she is moved to pity, for it is born of her entrails. She consoles, embraces, and comforts it again, by giving it her breast. If it is greedy for gold, silver, or precious stones, nevertheless it overlooks these while being in the mother's bosom. It scorns everything in order to take the breast. Meanwhile, the father does not scold it for not working, or for not warring against the enemy, since it is yet small and weak. It may have healthy feet, but it cannot stand up. It may have hands, but it cannot hold weapons. The mother treats it with condescension until gradually it grows.

³⁶Dedication of the book by Samuel J. Rogal, *John and Charles Wesley* (Twayne Publications: Boston, 1983). Cf. also ed. J. Telford, *The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley*, 8 volumes (Epworth Press: London, 1931).

³⁷Sermon 5: *On Justification by Faith*. Cited in Job, *op. cit.*, 205.

³⁸See Whaling, *op. cit.*, 192-194.

When it has grown a little and wishes to fight someone who is stronger, its father is not angry, knowing that it is only a child. When it has finally matured, its zeal is apparent. . . . It confides in its father because it always remains his son.

Love is the very milk on which we are raised, the “great mystery” that reveals us to be “members of Christ’s body, of His flesh and of His bones” (says Abba Isaiah, paraphrasing Paul in Eph. 5:30), and “members one of another.” Instead of the image of the mother and child, John Wesley prefers to speak of our constant dependence on Christ’s grace:

In every state we need Christ in the following respects.

(1) Whatever grace we receive, it is a free gift from him. (2) We receive it as his purchase, merely in consideration of the price he paid. (3) We have this grace, not only from Christ, but in him. For our perfection is not like that of a tree, which flourisheth by the sap derived from its own root, but . . . like that of a branch which, united to the vine, bears fruit; but, severed from it, is dried up and withered. (4) All our blessings, temporal, spiritual, and eternal, depend on his intercession for us, which is one branch of his priestly office, whereof therefore we have always equal need. (5) The best of men still need Christ in his priestly office, to atone for their omissions, their short-comings, as some not improperly speak, their mistakes in judgment and practice, and their defects of various kinds.³⁹

In a short essay of eight paragraphs entitled “A Thought on the Manner of Educating Children,” which is essentially a broad statement of his own educational philosophy, John Wesley proposes an education:

. . . in holy tempers; in the love of God and our neighbour; in humility, gentleness, patience, long-suffering, contentedness in every condition . . . in the image of God, in the mind that was in Christ.

His definition of religious education—or, we might say, of spiritual formation—is simple:

. . . to turn the bias from self-will, pride, anger, revenge, and the love of the world, to resignation, lowliness, meekness, and the love of God.⁴⁰

³⁹See *The Works of John Wesley* in ed. T. Jackson, *op. cit.*, vol. 11, 395-396.

⁴⁰*Arminian Magazine*, 1783.

In his 76th Sermon, *On Perfection*, John Wesley states:

What is then the perfection of which man is capable while he dwells in a corruptible body? It is the complying with that kind command, “My son, give me thy heart.” It is the “loving the Lord his God with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his mind.” This is the sum of Christian perfection: It is all comprised in that one word, Love. The first branch of it is the love of God: And as he that loves God loves his brother also, it is inseparably connected with the second: “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.” Thou shalt love every man as thy own soul, as Christ loved us. “On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.” These contain the whole of Christian perfection.⁴¹

3. The Ecumenical Imperative. It is this sensitive nature and evangelical conviction that guide Abba Isaiah in his relations with others, both personal and confessional, as a monk and as a Christian alike. His outlook is always balanced, never extreme. Abba Isaiah appreciates how an untold number of variables interact on and influence the dance that we call life. More than we perhaps often realize, our lives hinge on little things: on a word, a gesture, a nod, a smile, a glance. And so his gentle approach extends to “the slight and trivial” (*A.D.* 15) details of daily routine: from how one greets another to how one holds a vessel given by another; from how one stands in prayer to how one behaves in the privacy of the cell; from how one notices a person of the opposite sex to how one walks with a friend of the same sex; from how one carries out the shopping to how one converses in public; from discussions about Scripture to disputes about theology (cf. *A.D.* 3-5). These details are personal, yet so general; they are particular, yet so universal.

Our words and deeds have profound impact on our neighbor and the world. Even minor actions have significant spiritual consequences. John Wesley defines Christian perfection as being no more and no less than:

. . . the humble, gentle, patient love of God, and our neighbor,
[and] ruling our tempers, words, and actions.⁴²

Whether considering Scriptural interpretations or doctrinal aberrations, Isaiah always recommends humility, discernment, and compassion (cf. *A.D.* 4-

⁴¹Cited in Job, *op. cit.*, 209-210.

⁴²See T. Jackson, *op. cit.*, 446.

5). The purpose is not “the desire to prove your faith right” (A.D. 4) or “the enjoyment of futile diatribe” (A.D. 6), but the “personal education from God” (A.D. 8) and “the spiritual encouragement of the heart” (A.D. 25).

An anecdote from the life of Abba Isaiah reveals an openness and kindness, as well as a gentle ecumenical conviction toward Christians of different persuasions. When two monks once approached the renowned Monophysite elder to ask whether they should remain firm in their adherence to the Chalcedonian definition as formulated in the Great Council of 451, Abba Isaiah’s closest disciple Peter conveyed to them the words of the wise spiritual elder:

The Old Man says: “There is no harm in the Church, you are well as you are, you believe well.”⁴³

Although Peter clearly did not share the opinion of his spiritual father—he hastened to add his own commentary: “But I tell you that the Old Man lives in heaven, and does not know the ills that were done in that council”—it was Isaiah’s sensitivity that gained the respect of Chalcedonians, Monophysites, and Nestorians alike in the centuries that followed.

Wesley maintained the similar ecumenical principle of “we think and let think” in “opinions that do not strike at the root of Christianity.”⁴⁴ In his plea for mutual respect and tolerance, Wesley did not recognize matters of ecclesiastical governance to be church-dividing.⁴⁵

Conclusion

Like most of us today, Wesleyans and Orthodox alike, the Wesleys were more familiar with Isaiah the prophet⁴⁶ than with Isaiah the hermit;⁴⁷ they were clearly more comfortable with the message of Scripture

⁴³See *Patrologia Orientalis* VIII, 164.

⁴⁴Cf. T. Jackson, *op. cit.*, vol. 8, 1984, 340.

⁴⁵See ed. A. McGrath, *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Modern Christian Thought* (Blackwell: Oxford, 1993), 373-376.

⁴⁶See especially Charles Wesley, for instance his hymn entitled *Adoration and Return to God*, in Whaling, *op. cit.*, 177-178. Charles Wesley wrote 225 poetic paraphrases of the Old Testament prophet Isaiah, capturing the latter’s personality and prophesy in the form of 18th-century congregational song, and emphasizing particularly the special relationship between Israel and their God (cf. Isa. 1: 3), as well as the “new heaven and new earth” (cf. Isa. 65: 17 and 66: 22).

⁴⁷Hitherto unavailable in an English translation, the twenty-nine *Ascetic Discourses* of Abba Isaiah of Scetis will soon appear in Cistercian Publications (Kalamazoo, MI), with introduction and notes by John Chryssavgis and Robert Penkett.

than with the monasticism of Scetis. Had the work of Abba Isaiah been readily available to John Wesley, the latter may well have recognized similar qualities in the fifth-century Egyptian and Palestinian ascetic literature of the desert to those writers which he admired in the contemporaneous Syrian tradition, whether in the person of Ephrem or in the *Homilies* of Macarius. For Wesley's was both an inward and an outward form of spirituality, a way of perfection and a holiness of practice.

The practical way of holiness as developed by these two writers, from so diverse theological and cultural backgrounds and in so different periods and circumstances of church history, allows their readers to sense a commonality of purpose. In 1756, John Wesley expressly stated that his aim was: ". . . to provide, so far as I am able, vital, practical religion; and by the grace of God to beget, preserve, and increase the life of God in the souls of men."⁴⁸ This is precisely the ascetic intent of Abba Isaiah. At the same time, the sensitivity of these two spiritual leaders, in their understanding of the "method" of Christian living, reveals in their writings a sense of openness in personal relations and of breadth in confessional tolerance.

Is it any wonder that the heirs of their spiritual legacy—Orthodox Christians of the East and Methodist adherents of the West—have strongly participated in the multilateral ecumenism of the World Council of Churches, as well as in bilateral dialogues among the Christian communions? Is it also any wonder that the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the World Methodist Council have already taken significant steps toward official theological discussions?

⁴⁸From his *Works*, vol. XIII, cited in Whaling, *op. cit.*, 44.

THE ENTHUSIASM OF THE REV. JOHN WESLEY

by

Mathias J. Kürschner

The Pentecostals and the Charismatic movement are familiar phenomena in recent church history. Experientially oriented, the question of how to deal with emotional features such as “charismatic outbreaks” as well as the evaluation of immediate revelation are of central importance. The necessity of self-definition with respect to the word-centered denominations is not only a contemporary issue, but can be traced as far back as the left wing of the Reformation and even to the mystics of the late Middle Ages. Somewhere along the way we find John Wesley, the famous founder of Methodism, who can also rightly be called at least a grandfather of Pentecostalism. One would expect to find exhaustive research on charismatic phenomena in his Methodist movement. This, however, is not the case. Of the hundreds of articles that have been published on Wesley, only a handful give even general insight into the subject matter.

My intention is to inform the reader concerning the charismatic phenomena dealt with by Wesley during the course of his ministry. I will try to define the regularities of their emergence, describe the whole range of occurrences, and deal with the peculiarities. In a second step, I will analyze the way in which John Wesley, from his own theological viewpoint, interpreted and dealt with these phenomena, point out possible changes in his thinking, and investigate how Wesley’s position as the leader of the Methodist movement in this specific time and context may have affected his course of action. Finally, I present Wesley’s contemporaries, their interaction with Wesley, and their evaluation of these phenomena.

Charismatic Phenomena in Wesley's Ministry

On the Procedure of Evaluation. A historical reconstruction of the events of interest requires a self-conscious approach to the evaluation of sources. The quality of our outcome is largely dependent on a right assessment of a source's reliability. For example, it is no secret in current scholarship that Wesley's Journals are no private diary, but documents which were expressly intended for publication in order to serve apologetic purposes. This does not mean that the Journals are altogether untrustworthy. Instead, we should adopt an attitude of sympathetic skepticism toward Wesley and reckon with a generally honest description of the events at hand. On the other hand, we should also expect omissions of occurrences which did not serve Wesley's own interest. These blanks need to be supplemented with information external to Wesley's own attestations.

The greatest weight will be given here to the voices of individuals with a critical, but sympathetic distance to Wesley, e.g., John Cennick, for some time one of the closest co-workers of John Wesley and George Whitefield, the head of the Calvinist branch of Methodism. Wesley's brothers Charles and Samuel are also important sources for a reliable reconstruction and evaluation of the charismatic phenomena in John Wesley's environment. The declared enemies of Wesley, Methodism, and the revival will be reviewed only with suspicious restraint.

Historical Development. Charismatic phenomena, convulsions, and other claimed manifestations of the Spirit occurred throughout the life of John Wesley. The attempt to restrict them to the early period of the Methodist movement is misleading and probably the result personal embarrassment of certain authors with such phenomena.¹ In fact, Wesley was interested in and supportive of various charismatic phenomena,² and they happened wherever new ground was broken,³ wherever the revival seized new people.

The starting point is marked by a "love-feast" in the Moravian Fetter-lane society in London on January 1, 1739, where various revival and Methodist leaders (among them Whitefield, Ingham, Charles and John Wesley) were present. Wesley's *Journal* describes this incident, which is widely known as the Fetter-lane Pentecost:

¹Henry D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast: John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism* (London: Epworth Press, 1992), 195.

²R. A. Knox, *Enthusiasm: A Chapter in the History of Religion: With Special Reference to the XVII and XVIII Centuries* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1950), 535.

³*Ibid.*, 529f.

About three in the morning, as we were continuing instant in prayer, the power of God came mightily upon us, inasmuch that many cried out for exceeding joy, and many fell to the ground. As soon as we were recovered a little from that awe and amazement at the presence of his Majesty, we broke out with one voice, "We praise thee, O God; we acknowledge thee to be the Lord."⁴

This gathering inaugurated a line of "charismatic" events which from then on continually brought forth new incidents all through Wesley's life, continuing even after his death. Imagining the phenomena on a time line, we can see a rather slow accumulation of events from the love-feast until March, 1739, followed by a concentration of phenomena, with three peaks between April, 1739, and May, 1740. Thereafter, charismatic action fades, with occasional outbreaks here and there in the course of Wesley's ministry, including two additional high points: the Everton and the Weardale revivals in 1759 and 1771.⁵

Each of the three peaks within the concentrated period is characterized by a distinctive feature. The first period, peaking between April 16 and May 16,⁶ is marked by an emergence of trembling, roaring, sinking down, and paroxysms. To distinguish it from the following events, we may call it the "period of convulsions."⁷ After that there is silence for more than a month. Wesley begins a controversial correspondence with

⁴John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*. Edited by Thomas Jackson. Vol. 1 (London: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1872. Zondervan Reprint), 170; in the following, quoted as "Wesley, Journal Vol. 1."

⁵Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, 195.

⁶Here almost every Journal entry (averaging every three days) reports new phenomena. The seeming exactness of the periods results from the dates of the Journal entries and preserved letters which make the given periods appear artificially sharpened.

⁷A typical example was delivered on April 17 (Wesley, *Journal*, Vol. 1, 187): "We then called upon God to confirm his word. Immediately one that stood by . . . cried out aloud, with the utmost vehemence, even in the agonies of death. But we continued in prayer, till 'a new song was put in her mouth, a thanksgiving unto our God.' Soon after, two other persons . . . were seized with strong pain, and constrained to 'roar for the disquietness of their heart.' But it was not long before they likewise burst forth into praise to God their Savior." Also May 1 (Ibid., 190): "A Quaker . . . was biting his lips and knitting his brows, when he dropped down as thunderstruck. The agony he was in was even terrible to behold. We besought God not to lay folly to his charge. And he soon lifted up his head, and cried aloud, 'Now I know thou art a prophet of the Lord.' "

various people, in an effort to understand and evaluate what has happened. His *Journal* entries during this time are mainly apologetical. When the phenomena start to set in again, Wesley's *Journal* (then recorded with less frequency) continues to describe convulsive action until October.

The second period features a change in the characteristics of the phenomena. The convulsions since July gradually increase to a new level of intensity⁸ and start to zero in on a mode which strongly alludes to New Testament possession scenes. It lasts from October 12 until November 28. People are said to be "tormented in an unaccountable manner"⁹ and "strangely torn by the devil"¹⁰; interaction with the devil himself is even described.¹¹ A woman cries out: "I am the devil's now. I have given myself to him. His I am. . . ."¹² The period of demon-possession is followed by a four-month break.

The last period, restricted to May, 1740, is characterized by uncontrollable laughter among the affected, regardless of whether they are experiencing grief or happiness at the time. On May 21, Wesley relates an incident of a woman who sometimes "laughed till almost strangled; then broke out into cursing and blaspheming; then stamped and struggled with incredible strength, so that four or five could scarce hold her. . . ."¹³

After May, 1740, the phenomena decreased significantly. Wesley resumes: "Outward trials indeed were now removed, and peace was in all our borders."¹⁴ But this peace was interrupted occasionally. Knox documents steady convulsive action between 1755 and 1788,¹⁵ although one must not forget to ask how involved (and therefore responsible) Wesley was in the particular incident. During the Everton revival in 1758, a time

⁸Wesley, *Journal*, Vol. I, 213 (July 30, 1739): "In that moment she was struck through, as with a sword, and fell trembling to the ground. She then cried aloud. . . . In this pain she continued twelve or fourteen hours. . . ." Cf. also a few weeks later when a woman "screamed out, as in the pangs of death" (*Ibid.*, 223, Sept. 3, 1739).

⁹Wesley, *Journal*, Vol. I, 230 (Oct. 12, 1739).

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 231 (Oct. 12, 1739).

¹¹*Ibid.*, 236 (Oct. 25, 1739). Before this, the woman is "gnashing her teeth" and "roared aloud."

¹²*Ibid.*, 235 (Oct. 23, 1739).

¹³*Ibid.*, 272 (May 21, 1740).

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 272 (May 17, 1740).

¹⁵Knox, *Enthusiasm*, 530-532. Entries are registered in the years 1755, '57, '60, '62, '64, '65, '69, '72, '74, '84, '86, and '88.

of major convulsions mainly directed by the “eccentric Evangelical”¹⁶ John Berridge, Wesley’s role is merely that of an observer and occasional guest-preacher. He is too passive to be considered particularly responsible for these events. In Weardale 1771/2 the picture is similar. Wesley does not share his own impressions but relates other people’s eye witness reports.¹⁷ It is not “his” revival; the convulsions are not stirred up by his very person.¹⁸ In 1784, however, we find Wesley once again in a more active role, when he preaches to an “earnest congregation” at Coleford: “[W]hen I began to pray the flame broke out: many cried aloud; many sunk down to the ground; many trembled exceedingly.”¹⁹ Similarly, when Wesley preached his anti-slavery sermon in Bristol in 1788, the “terror and confusion was inexpressible.”²⁰

Unparalleled Phenomena. Although in the eyes of some, the dreams, visions, healing and demon possessions seemed to herald the return of the apostolic era (only tongues were missing),²¹ the charismatic phenomena were accompanied by some incidents which scarcely find parallels in the biblical accounts. There are some obscure reports, for example, of the “roof jumpers” in the parish of Brechin “who would jump, twenty times or more, then run from 200 to 500 yards, climb on the roofs, and at last fall down as if dead.”²² There is the account of John Brown “who, after being full of love, peace, and joy the week before, came riding through town, holloaing [sic] and shouting . . . , telling them that God had told him he should be king, and should tread all his enemies under his feet.”²³ Many more stories of this sort (like Methodist societies which engaged in group sex²⁴ or a man “who lately rejoiced in the love of God” and shortly thereafter killed his own child by “a blow upon the

¹⁶Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, 195.

¹⁷Steve Beard, *Thunderstruck: John Wesley and the “Toronto Blessing”* (Published on the Internet: <http://www.thunderstruck.org>), 12.

¹⁸It is almost unfortunate to quote these incidents in order to refute the claim that “physical manifestations only accompanied Wesley at the beginning of his ministry” (Beard, *Thunderstruck*, 12). In fact, in this case we have to say, on the contrary, that “Wesley accompanied the phenomena!”

¹⁹Wesley, *Journal*, Vol. IV, 288 (Sept. 8, 1784).

²⁰Wesley, *Journal* (March 3, 1788), quoted in Knox, *Enthusiasm*, 532f.

²¹Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, 195.

²²Knox, *Enthusiasm*, 534.

²³*Ibid.*, 543f.

²⁴*Ibid.*, 544.

head”²⁵) could be told. Also without biblical parallel are those remarkable *Journal* entries in which Wesley describes people who, after being skeptical or even strongly opposed to the whole convulsive activity, are seized and overwhelmed by the phenomena.²⁶ At the very least, this is an unusual concept of “irresistible grace”!²⁷

The Significance of Bristol. It is interesting to note that the most severe cases of convulsions happened almost exclusively in Bristol²⁸ and its immediate surroundings (Kingswood).²⁹ As soon as Wesley left the Bristol area, the phenomena ceased and everything went back to normal.³⁰ It is remarkable that guest preachers who came to this area had to deal with the same circumstances. Paul Cennick and George Whitefield, neither of whom appreciated charismatic manifestations (cf. below), encountered such things during their visits.³¹ The problem seemed to be locally fixed.

In an attempt to explain these phenomena, Dallimore tries to argue psychologically by identifying the peculiarities in Wesley’s personality structure. According to him, Wesley’s self-control did not allow the listeners of his sermons to express their pent-up emotions. Eventually this pressure found release in the convulsive outbreaks.³² Another explanation detects the source of the convulsions in Wesley’s dramatic call to repent-

²⁵Wesley, *Journal*, Vol. II, 398 (Apr. 16, 1757).

²⁶Ibid., Vol. I, 175: One who is “above measure enraged about the new way, and zealous in opposing it” falls “into an extreme agony . . . and soon after cried out”; Ibid., 190: A weaver “was zealous for the church” and regarded the fits as “delusions of the devil.” While reading the sermon “Salvation by Faith” by Wesley, he fell “raving mad”; Ibid., 273: Two women who doubt the genuineness of the uncontrollable laughter are seized by this laughter and continue to laugh for two days “almost without ceasing.”

²⁷Even the conversion of Paul does not happen in such a coercive pattern. Paul is blinded by the light when he encounters Christ. The rearrangement of his life then happens according to the commands that God gives him. But it is still Paul’s will (now graciously adjusted) which agrees to God’s plan.

²⁸Few and always singular cases were detected in London and Newcastle. See Luke Tyerman, *The Life and Times of the Rev. John Wesley, M.A., Founder of the Methodists*. Vols. I & II (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1880), Vol. I, 263.

²⁹Ibid., 263.

³⁰Arnold Dallimore, *George Whitefield: The Life and Times of the Great Evangelist of the Eighteenth-Century Revival*. Vols. I & II (Westchester, Illinois: Cornerstone Books, 1979), Vol. I, 330.

³¹Tyerman, *Wesley*, Vol. I, 259, 263.

³²Dallimore, *Whitefield*, Vol. I, 325.

ance.³³ This seems more credible since it takes into account Wesley's experientialist nature and presents a more realistic view of the mining population of this area. They would hardly have altered their straightforward nature to accommodate a preacher's particular personality.

Although Wesley's experientialist tendencies are certainly an important factor, this does not explain why the convulsions were restricted almost completely to the Bristol area. Here the historic background of Bristol should be considered. In 1654, two Quakers had come to preach in this city. Their followers multiplied over the decades. During Wesley's time, Bristol already had a "large Quaker population."³⁴ In addition, recent encounters with French prophets³⁵ may have prepared the crowd psychologically for Wesley's preaching. The population thus may have had opportunity to practice the preferred response for at least a century. To assume this kind of imitation helps at least partially to explain what Wesley experienced. Whitefield and Cennick then simply served the well-trained crowd as masters of ceremonies. Their particular preaching was not overly important anymore; the people could entertain themselves.

Wesley's Understanding of the Phenomena

Eighteenth-Century Enthusiasm. When we deal with the field of "enthusiasm" in the context of eighteenth-century England, we must not commit the anachronistic mistake of projecting postmodern and sometimes voyeuristic curiosity on people who encountered the phenomena in those days. The period of the Interregnum with its chaotic upheavals was still vivid in the collective memory. It stirred up fears of social instability when Whitefield or Wesley seemingly revived those times by their preaching activity.³⁶ It did not even take spectacular convulsions or exorcisms; the claim of an internal testimony of the Spirit alone carried the connotation of sectarian inspiration which was thought to threaten the public order, the religious accomplishments of Enlightenment society, and the morals derived from them.³⁷ Religion and theology were then still the

³³Bernhard Holland, quoted in Steven W. Gunter, *The Limits of "Love Divine."* *John Wesley's Response to Antinomianism and Enthusiasm* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, Abingdon Press, 1989), 151.

³⁴Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, 197.

³⁵Knox, *Enthusiasm*, 521.

³⁶Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, 197.

³⁷Brecht, *Pietismus*, 629.

most important factors of integration and identification in society. Those who threatened or merely questioned these fundamental pillars could easily be viewed as a potential public enemy.

It is fascinating to see how this fearful experience of the Interregnum finds expression even in the common dictionaries of the post-Puritan era. In the 18th century, the term "enthusiasm/enthusiast" gained a distinctively existential connotation: enthusiasm "means a prophetick [sic] or poetical rage or fury, which transports the mind, raises and inflames the imagination . . ." (*Universal Etymological Dictionary* from 1721). Enthusiast "means a person poisoned with the notion of being divinely inspired, when he is not" (*New General English Dictionary* of 1744).³⁸ The standard of "proper" and publicly accredited enthusiasm was dictated by John Locke. Creating a dichotomy between reason and revelation³⁹ and denying especially immediate, personal revelation, he condemned all species of enthusiasm which were "founded neither on reason nor divine revelation but rise . . . from the conceits of a warm or overweening brain."⁴⁰

Wesley fundamentally shared Locke's view of enthusiasm, at least publicly. In his *Journal* and other writings, he rejects people who wrongly consider themselves inspired and hope to gain knowledge of God by private visions, dreams, or sudden impressions.⁴¹ He emphasizes over and over again that the will of God is only knowable by "law and testimony."⁴² Even here, however, Wesley differs from Locke in his espousal of instantaneous conversion, the direct witness of the Spirit, and an experiential proof of conversion.⁴³

³⁸Susie Tucker, quoted in Gunter, *The Limits of "Love Divine,"* 119.

³⁹Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, 276.

⁴⁰John Locke, quoted in Gunter, *The Limits of "Love Divine,"* 134.

⁴¹Wesley, *Journal*, Vol. I, 172 (Jan. 17, 1739); Wesley, "The Nature of Enthusiasm," Vol. V, 478.

⁴²For instance, on June 22, 1739 (Wesley, *Journal*, Vol. I, 205) he writes in rejection of the French Prophets: "Avoid, as fire, all who do not speak according 'to the Law and testimony.'" Wesley probably alludes to two passages in Isaiah as stated in the KJV (Isaiah 8:16: "Bind up the testimony, seal the law among my disciples"; and Isaiah 8:20: "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, [it is] because [there is] no light in them."). The phrase probably designates Scripture, maybe distinguished in its formal (revelation) and material (the Torah) dimensions. Wesley applies this hermeneutical principle almost forty times in the course of his writings (cf. Vol. I, pages 13, 76, 89, 172, 206, 244, 282).

⁴³Gunter, *The Limits of "Love Divine,"* 136.

Wesley as Experientialist, Folk Theologian and Politician. These distinguishing marks manifest a side of Wesley characterized by sympathy for experiential religion. Some scholars suggest that one major driving force in Wesley was always to “substantiate the validity of his claim that human experience was a form of proof for divine activity.”⁴⁴ And in fact he does untiringly examine remarkable instances of human experience; he interviews people who had had them,⁴⁵ visits the French prophets⁴⁶ or pulls out his notebook at the climax of some chaotic convulsive activity in a society meeting, “ready to publish an account of this curious manifestation in his Journal.”⁴⁷ But beyond that, Wesley was also said to encourage the phenomena, asking God for “tokens and signs” as divine confirmation (Cennick).⁴⁸ On the other hand, we do have accounts by Wesley in which he advises the members in his societies not to “believe every spirit, but to try the spirits, whether they were of God.”⁴⁹ He also points out the ultimate importance and authority of “law and testimony” and tells disapprovingly of a woman who claims to have private revelations which she holds to be as authoritative as Scripture.⁵⁰

In order to reconcile these two sides of Wesley, it is necessary to recall that he was not only a private person with experientialist inclinations but also the leader of a fast-growing movement. This requires an integrative, sometimes even strategic character. Integration needs to hap-

⁴⁴Ibid., 150.

⁴⁵Wesley, *Journal*, Vol. I, 396f. (Sept. 6, 1742). Wesley conducted interviews with those who experienced manifestations. He approved of their experience, if “agreeable to the written word.” Candidates who felt “the blood of Christ running upon their arms” could thus only expect restricted approval (“some of these circumstances might be from God”).

⁴⁶Glen Obrien, “John Wesley and the Toronto Blessing,” 10 (presented at the joint conference of the Society for Pentecostal Studies and the Wesleyan Theological Society, at the Church of God Theological Seminary in Cleveland, Tenn., from March 12-14, 1998, unpublished). In general Wesley “opposed this group as rank enthusiasts.” He reported in his *Journal* that their claim of inspiration was “in no wise clear to me” (Wesley’s *Journal*, 173, Feb. 25, 1739).

⁴⁷Knox, *Enthusiasm*, 452.

⁴⁸John Cennick, quoted in Beard, *Thunderstruck*, 6. This statement seems reliable since Wesley himself describes in a letter to James Hutton (Apr. 30, 1739) how he asked to “confirm” the truth of his teaching “by signs following” (Wesley, *Letters*, 639f.).

⁴⁹Wesley, *Journal*, Vol. I, 203 (June 13, 1739); Cf. also Ibid., 206 (June 22, 1739).

⁵⁰Wesley, *Journal*, Vol. I, 286 (Sept. 3, 1739).

pen in a twofold sense. First of all, within the movement itself, he had to satisfy the experiential needs of the Methodist members. On the other hand, he had to represent and restrict (if necessary) the course of his movement before the officials of the Anglican church (of which Wesley always considered the Methodists a part) and the public. They both anxiously watched any step that might have suggested enthusiasm.

According to Henry Rack's view, Wesley "played down the more extraordinary supernatural claims of his followers such as dreams, visions, healings and revelations. . . . Wesley himself allowed far more credit to them than he admitted in apologetic contexts."⁵¹ One striking example of this is the Maxfield/Bell affair where Wesley expelled two of his preachers for engaging in extreme, public-enraging, enthusiast activity. After long hesitation and observation of Maxfield's activities, Wesley writes to him: "I dislike something that has the appearance of enthusiasm, overvaluing feelings and inward impressions; mistaking the mere work of imagination for the voice of the Spirit."⁵² Gunter is correct to remark that, ironically, "occurrences that Wesley said were divine when they accompanied his preaching, he later denounced when they accompanied the preaching of Maxfield."⁵³

This is interesting, especially when one takes into consideration that Wesley could not bring himself to deny that one might receive mental impressions which should serve as guidance in practical affairs, and he quotes with approval some "great man" who observed "that there is a threefold leading of the Spirit, [one of which is realized] . . . by impressions."⁵⁴ Accordingly, Wesley once "duly speculated" concerning his own imminent death after one of his society members who "was convinced that she heard many things from an angel" predicted his death within a year.⁵⁵

Generations of scholars have wrestled with the obvious twofoldness of Wesley's handling of inward impressions, i.e., immediate revelations. Wesley could get excited about the "strong impressions" of Sarah Mallet. He could encourage her to call sinners to repentance and urge her to fol-

⁵¹Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, 276.

⁵²John Wesley, quoted in Gunter, *The Limits of "Love Divine,"* 130.

⁵³Gunter, *The Limits of "Love Divine,"* 151.

⁵⁴Umphrey Lee, *The Historical Backgrounds of Early Methodist Enthusiasm* (New York: Ams Press, 1967), 142.

⁵⁵Knox, *Enthusiasm*, 536.

low her impressions despite her own hesitation.⁵⁶ His ultimate assurance for a right course in the predestination controversy with Whitefield was accomplished by requesting “signs” from heaven and by the casting of a lot.⁵⁷ He was “fully convinced . . . that the Montanists in the second and third centuries were real, scriptural Christians.”⁵⁸ He read Montgeron, and “instinctively rallies to the side of the convulsionaries.”⁵⁹ On the other side, he points to the hermeneutical importance of Scripture alone (“law and testimony”) and rejects claims of an inner light, arguing that human nature is corrupt and can produce of itself no good thing.⁶⁰

The wrestling with the available material usually ends with the conclusion that Wesley’s theology was simply “inconsistent,”⁶¹ with some scholars also trying to construct a chronological development with differing views at various stages of his life.⁶² In my understanding, these explanations at least partially miss the point. They view Wesley as a professional theologian with a stringent set of concepts from which he is able to evaluate and deal with the phenomena in his ministry. This, however, is to impose categories on Wesley which he simply does not have. Albert Outler and Henry Rack are correct in divesting Wesley research of this myth when they call him a “folk theologian.” He is somebody who presents the Christian message in “plain words for plain people,” but has “no place in the select corpus of systematic theologians.”⁶³

Another thing needs to be seen very clearly about Wesley: he is also a politician whose motives are not always directed by theological discernment, but by the pragmatic necessity of the current situation. When Lee observes that Wesley “regulated this enthusiasm by doctrinal and organizational safeguards,”⁶⁴ he is on the right track. Wesley’s course in dealing with charismatic phenomena may be properly described as an “institution-

⁵⁶Wesley, *Journal* (Dec. 4, 1786), quoted in Knox, *Enthusiasm*, 536.

⁵⁷Wesley’s biographer Dallimore writes (Dallimore, *Whitefield*, Vol. I, 309): “We do well, therefore, to notice that the emotional experiences and the casting of a lot constituted the only authorization by which he took it upon himself to thrust this divisive subject into the revival movement.”

⁵⁸Wesley, *Journal*, Vol. II, 146 (Aug. 15, 1750).

⁵⁹Knox, *Enthusiasm*, 451.

⁶⁰Lee, *Historical Backgrounds of Early Methodist Enthusiasm*, 139.

⁶¹*Ibid.*, 147.

⁶²Knox, *Enthusiasm*, 451f.

⁶³Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, 408.

⁶⁴Lee, *Historical Backgrounds of Early Methodist Enthusiasm*, 147.

ally restricted enthusiasm." The character of Methodism as a movement with an emerging institutional organization must not be underestimated.

Wesley and the Gifts. Before turning to Wesley's approach to the phenomena themselves, a very brief look at Wesley's understanding of spiritual gifts will be helpful, especially in view of its relevance in recent church history. Wesley did not believe in a general cessation of the gifts with the end of the apostolic age, but considered them to have been intermittent since the age of Constantine because of the bad "shape" of the church. Some "dry, formal, orthodox men began . . . to ridicule whatever gifts they had not themselves."⁶⁵ All this happened in an atmosphere of "general corruption of faith and morals."⁶⁶

From that point on, the gifts were active only in "certain pockets of 'true Christianity,'"⁶⁷ for instance in the Methodist revival, in which context Wesley subsumed phenomena such as visions and dreams under the category of "gifts."⁶⁸ Tongue speaking, which Wesley understood as the "instantaneous knowledge of a tongue [language!] till then unknown,"⁶⁹ never occurred in the Methodist movement during Wesley's life. It was common, however, among his contemporaries, the French prophets, and Wesley reserved the possibility that God may give the gift of tongues to whomever he wants to if he pleases today.⁷⁰ As he understood it, "tongues" are the gift of a foreign language. God would scarcely give it where a church is "of one mind and all speak the same language."⁷¹ If someone spoke in tongues, nevertheless, they ought not to be "uttered in a congregation" but only in "private devotions."⁷² The chief end of all gifts is not to be found in themselves, but in promoting the "ordinary" gifts like

⁶⁵Robert G. Tuttle, Jr., "John Wesley and the Gifts of the Holy Spirit" (published on the Internet at <http://www.thunderstruck.org>), 1.

⁶⁶Wesley, *Journal*, Vol. X, 1f.; cf. also the sermon "The More Excellent Way" (Ibid., Vol. VII, 27).

⁶⁷Ted A. Campbell, "John Wesley and Conyers Middleton on Divine Intervention in History" (in *Church History*, Vol. 55, 39-49, March 1986, 47).

⁶⁸Tuttle, "John Wesley and the Gifts," 1.

⁶⁹John Wesley, quoted in Howard A. Snyder, *The Radical Wesley & Patterns for Church Renewal* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1980), 96.

⁷⁰Tuttle, "John Wesley and the Gifts," 3.

⁷¹John Wesley, quoted in Snyder, *The Radical Wesley*, 97.

⁷²Ibid., 97.

love, patience, kindness, etc.⁷³ Wesley's view on the gifts is quite remarkable when one considers that in the rare cases where tongue speaking occurred, it was a "recognized symptom in cases of alleged diabolic possession." Only with the dawn of the eighteenth century was it "at least on a large scale . . . [interpreted] as a symptom of divine inspiration."⁷⁴

Finally, there is an interesting sidelight. There are two incidents which suggest that Wesley himself had a prophetic gift: in one situation he spontaneously predicts a man's name to his face who is apparently completely strange to him.⁷⁵ The other time, during a society meeting in 1772, he (because of an impression) all of a sudden inquires about the presence of a certain man, "an eminent backslider" who immediately dropped down "like a stone."⁷⁶

Wesley's Interpretation of the Phenomena. The description which Wesley delivers of a woman in a letter to Whitefield on March 16, 1739, presents a typical example of convulsive action: in Oxford a woman is found being in pain and "crying aloud in the streets." Another woman is affected and falls "into strange agony both of body and mind. Her teeth gnashed together, her knees smote each other, and her whole body trembled exceedingly." After prayer she calmed down and had remissions of sins, "knowing that her Redeemer liveth."⁷⁷

When we analyze Wesley's style of reporting the events in his diary, they follow a certain pattern. First the convulsions appear, then healing, peace, and relief settle in. In this case Wesley apparently regarded the phenomena as demonic and perceived the concluding improvement as God's intervention. Even unsympathetic people are caught by the convulsions and they end up surrendering to God, which they express by some kind of outcry. The phenomena are not restricted to individuals, but seem to affect whoever is present. Like a magnetic field, they seize people regardless of personal will or individuality. Finally, the descriptions of recovery allude to exorcism, although in some scenes the term "allusion"

⁷³Ibid., 97.

⁷⁴Knox, *Enthusiasm*, 551.

⁷⁵Wesley, *Journal*, Vol. I, 198f. (June 5, 1739).

⁷⁶Wesley, *Journal*, Vol. III, 468 (June 5, 1772).

⁷⁷John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley. Letters I: 1721-1739*. Edited by Frank Baker. Vol. 25 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), 606f. (Mar. 16, 1739). In the following, quoted as: Wesley, *Letters*).

is an understatement.⁷⁸ Those cases do show an interesting resemblance to the biblical possession scenes, but differ from them in a significant way: nowhere in Scripture is a case attested where demonic possession culminates in the conversion of the person. It is also peculiar that people become demoniacs while listening to Wesley, while in the New Testament Jesus found them already in this state.⁷⁹

Wesley's *Journal* and especially his extensive correspondence reveal clearly that he himself was for a long time very uncertain as to how to evaluate these curious incidents. Especially since he was subjected to considerable criticism by people who were close to him (e.g., Whitefield and Wesley's own brothers Samuel and Charles), he consulted other revivalists (Erskine,⁸⁰ Read⁸¹) about their interpretation of the phenomena. His reserved attitude is further apparent in a few sermons he gave in various society meetings in June of 1739. At Fetter-Lane he "warned . . . women . . . not to believe every spirit, but to try the spirits, whether they were of God."⁸² Similar advice was given to another society not even ten days later.⁸³ Wesley's early reluctance towards the convulsive outbreaks is apparent also from his retrospective comment on the time after the phenomena had ceased in Bristol in 1740. Wesley resumes: "Outward trials indeed were now removed, and peace was in all our borders."⁸⁴ The negative character which is expressed by "trials" is also supported by a sermon two weeks later where he reminds the congregation that they are not "wrestling against flesh and blood but against principalities, and powers, and spiritual wickedness in high places."⁸⁵ At this point Wesley obviously does not sympathize with the occurrences but locates their origin in the demonic sphere.

⁷⁸"[A] young woman . . . two or three persons holding her. . . . She screamed out, "I am damned, damned; lost forever! . . . I am the devil's now, I have given myself to him: his I am, him I must serve. . . . She then fixed her eyes on the corner of the ceiling, and said, "There he is. Come, good devil, come. You said you would dash my brains out: come, do it quickly. I am yours, I will be yours" (Wesley, *Journal*, Vol. I, 235, Oct. 23, 1740).

⁷⁹Tyerman, *Wesley*, Vol. I, 266.

⁸⁰Wesley, *Letters*, 680 (Aug. 24, 1739).

⁸¹*Ibid.*, 682ff. (Sept. 11, 1739).

⁸²Wesley, *Journal*, Vol. I, 203 (June 12, 1739).

⁸³*Ibid.*, 206 (June 22, 1739).

⁸⁴*Ibid.*, 272 (May 17, 1740).

⁸⁵*Ibid.*, 273 (June 1, 1739).

Against critics like his brother Samuel Wesley, however, Wesley can defend the occurrences as a “work of God”⁸⁶ or consider it “blasphemy” to evaluate them as a “delusion of the devil.”⁸⁷ It seems reasonable to identify these comments as apologetic, intending to preserve the good reputation of the young Methodist movement. In general, until the mid-forties Wesley spoke mainly negatively about the phenomena, assessing that “Satan tears the convulsed.”⁸⁸

In later years, however, Wesley’s explanation of the occurrences becomes more sophisticated, gradually incorporating both the negativity of the convulsions and the positive working of the Spirit. The incidents in Everton give rise to a more or less systematic formulation of how demonic power, human emotions, and the activity of the Spirit work together.

God suddenly and strongly convinced many they were lost sinners, the natural consequence whereof were sudden outcries and bodily convulsions; 2. To strengthen and encourage . . . [God wrought] divine dreams, often with visions; 3. In some of these instances, after a time, nature mixed with grace; 4. Satan likewise mimicked this work of God, in order to discredit the whole. . . . At first it was doubtless, wholly from God. It is partly so at this day.⁸⁹

It is remarkable here how eclectically he makes use of other people’s opinions on the subject, e.g., the letters of Erskine and Read. This explanation is also typical of Wesley’s immense “ability” to create a theological framework in which his sometimes contradictory assessments on a specific subject are integrated and arranged in such a way that his action of the past eventually seems to be conclusive.⁹⁰

Wesley’s interpretation of the relation between the devil and the Spirit is sometimes even more sophisticated: since the devils know that they cannot win the battle with the Holy Spirit who has started to work in

⁸⁶Wesley, *Letters*, 693ff. (Oct. 27, 1739).

⁸⁷Wesley, *Journal*, Vol. I, 204 (June 16, 1739).

⁸⁸Lee, *Historical Backgrounds of Early Methodist Enthusiasm*, 137.

⁸⁹Wesley, *Journal*, Vol. II, 519 (Nov. 25, 1759).

⁹⁰During his ministry similar processes can be detected in Wesley’s summary articulation of the issues of perfection, ordination, and the nature of the church.

people, they want to at least torment them as long as they can.⁹¹ Thus the demonic outbursts are visible as the *opus alienum* of the revival. Wherever the Spirit is active and works the *opus proprium* of seizing a person, the devil comes, too. This may be illustrated by effects of light and shadow which both appear when the sun shines. It is the *opus proprium* of the sun to generate light. But secondarily this light causes zones of shadow. One could hence say that it is the *opus alienum* of the sun to cause shadow.

Hence Wesley can retain his old assessment (that the phenomena are demonic) and at the same time pay tribute to his longing for experiential religion and continue to encourage convulsions.⁹² And his explanation gave him flexibility to alternatively decide whether a certain incident was wrought by the Holy Spirit, "animal spirits," or the "delusion of the devil."⁹³ Whenever Wesley had the impression that certain phenomena threatened to discredit the revival or when the situation was tense for the Methodist movement in any way, he did not hesitate to put the whole thing down as demonic.⁹⁴

In this light it is surprising, however, that Wesley could instrumentalize these phenomena, which he optionally perceived as demonic, as a sign of divine approval for correct dogmatic-theological decisions.⁹⁵ Along these lines he even went so far as to claim an "extraordinary" call from God (additional to his ordinary call of ordination) which is supposed to be visible in the signs and wonders which God works through him.⁹⁶

Wesley's assessment is unambiguous on a phenomenon which he calls "the spirit of laughter." In May, 1740, he relates various accounts of

⁹¹Tyerman, *Wesley*, Vol. I, 267f.

⁹²Knox, *Enthusiasm*, 535.

⁹³O'Brien, "Wesley and the Toronto Blessing," 4.

⁹⁴Knox, *Enthusiasm*, 533.

⁹⁵Wesley, *Letters*, 639f. To James Hutton and the Fetter Lane Society, Apr. 30, 1739: "I was led, I know not how, to speak strongly and explicitly of predestination, and then pray that if I spake not the truth of God he would stay his hand and work no more among us. [Cynics might see this self-imputed curse immediately be fulfilled by God taking away his Spirit and exposing Wesley and his heresy to the demonic forces who announce their taking over by convulsive outbursts]; if this was his truth, he would 'not delay to confirm it by signs following' [allusion to Mark 16:20]. Immediately the power of God fell upon us. One, and another, sunk to the earth. You might see them dropping on all sides as thunderstruck. One cried aloud. . . . A young woman was seized with such pangs as I never saw before."

⁹⁶Wesley, *Letters*, 660 (June 23, 1739).

people laughing continuously, two women even for a period of two days.⁹⁷ He describes somebody who was laughing “until almost strangled; then broke out into cursing and blaspheming.” Five could barely hold her. Eventually she called for Christ and the pangs ceased.⁹⁸ Unlike modern Charismatics and Pentecostals, Wesley does not speak of “Holy laughter,” but categorically names Satan as the source of these occurrences.⁹⁹

Reaction of His Contemporaries

Wesley and his affinity for experiential religion did not, of course, fail to elicit a response from his environment. The comments are legion. Representative of the general opinion of Wesley’s enemies is a sermon of the Rev. Charles Wheatly on October 14, 1739, in which he describes the Methodists as “rapturous enthusiasts, preaching up unaccountable sensations, violent emotions and sudden changes. . . .”¹⁰⁰ We will ignore any more of these extreme statements and instead turn to the well-meaning but critical contemporaries of Wesley. After regarding the emotional displays as signs of divine manifestations in his younger years, John Wesley’s brother Charles later changed his mind and interpreted the physical demonstrations as “signs of struggle against the Adversary” who was doing all in his evil power to discredit Methodism and disrupt the work of God.¹⁰¹ He writes in his Journal: “I am more and more convinced, the fits were a device of Satan to stop the course of the gospel.”¹⁰² Unlike his brother John, he did “his utmost” to discourage these phenomena,¹⁰³ which he either determined to be caused by the devil¹⁰⁴ or detected as imitations of people who wished to be spiritually accredited by their surrounding.¹⁰⁵

⁹⁷Wesley, *Journal*, Vol. I, 273 (May 23, 1740).

⁹⁸*Ibid.*, 272 (May 21, 1740).

⁹⁹*Ibid.*, 272.; cf. also Tyerman, *Wesley*, Vol. I, 294.

¹⁰⁰Wesley’s *Standard Sermons*, Vol. II (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Francis Asbury Press), 84, quoted in Beard, “Thunderstruck,” 2.

¹⁰¹Gunter, *The Limits of “Love Divine,”* 152.

¹⁰²Charles Wesley, *Journal*, Vol. I, 314-316, quoted in Tyerman, *Wesley*, Vol. I, 264.

¹⁰³Tyerman, *Wesley*, Vol. I, 264.

¹⁰⁴O’Brien, “Wesley and the Toronto Blessing,” 7.

¹⁰⁵Charles Wesley writes (*Journal*, Aug. 5, 1740; quoted in Dallimore, *Whitefield*, Vol. I, 326): “To-day, one . . . was pleased to fall into a fit for my entertainment, and beat himself heartily.” He also describes a girl who, after falling into violent fits which took away the use of her limbs, as soon as she walked out the door “found her legs, and walked off.”

John Wesley's brother Samuel shared Charles' opinion and in his correspondence with John questioned his brother radically. The discussion of the issue ignites as early as November, 1738, when John postulates that the Holy Spirit gives witness to our spirit when we are children of God. Samuel regards this idea as "delusive and dangerous."¹⁰⁶ Later he admonishes John that rolling and singing are "fallacious" fruits of the new birth. He asks John to interfere and banish extemporaneous prayers and expositions in the meetings.¹⁰⁷ In another letter, Samuel reminds his brother that "You yourself doubted at first, and inquired, and examined, about the ecstasies"; Samuel has doubts about the "exceeding clearness of divine interposition there." He injects that these phenomena never happened while Wesley was still preaching in "consecrated walls" (before he started his field-preaching career), and before preaching his ("your") new birth. Samuel also doubted the integrity of the people involved and asked (rhetorically) if these people were "good sort of people" or "loose and immoral."¹⁰⁸

John Wesley's close friend (with a few interruptions) and leader of the Calvinist branch of Methodism, George Whitefield, differed strongly with him in the sense that he had a clear and coherent theological understanding of the charismatic phenomena and discouraged them wherever they threatened to emerge. He was of the understanding that "Reformation which is brought about by a coercive power, will be only outward and superficial; but that which is done by the power of God's word will be inward and lasting."¹⁰⁹ It is apparent that Whitefield, in Calvinist-Reformed tradition, binds himself to the Word in order to avoid Enthusiasm, which he (and the Reformation) defined as the illusion "to be guided by the Spirit without the written word." He emphasizes the necessity to

¹⁰⁶Wesley, *Letters*, 594 (Nov. 30, 1738).

¹⁰⁷*Ibid.*, 634 (Apr. 16, 1739).

¹⁰⁸*Ibid.*, 681f. (Sept. 3, 1739). In his response on October 27, 1739 (which Samuel probably never received since he died only ten days later), John replies that some of the convulsions happened in consecrated buildings while he was preaching how Christ died to save sinners. His audience was comprised of "gross sinners, whoremongers, drunkards, common swearers, till that hour, but not afterwards." But there were also many "unblemished" people who were "blameless" as far as the outward law was concerned. Wesley affirms that he regarded it as God's work. He rejects and psychologizes his brother's criticism as "fear" which prevents him from acknowledging the power of God (Wesley, *Letters*, 693-695).

¹⁰⁹Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, 193.

conjoin both Word and Spirit and apply this concept to the manifestations and impressions as well: “And if they are not found to be agreeable to that, reject them as diabolic and delusive!”¹¹⁰

Other than Wesley, who not one single time in his ministry discouraged ongoing convulsions in his societies, Whitefield wrought through his intervention that the “disorders entirely ceased.”¹¹¹ In a letter he also warns Wesley not “to give so much encouragement to those convulsions. . . .”¹¹² He argues that nobody is able to evaluate the fruits of sanctification after one night. He sees the French Prophets’ position strengthened by Wesley’s conduct and people being drawn away from the written Word. Some time later, Whitefield preached in Wesley’s society in Bristol and the convulsions happened during his own sermon. In his *Journal*, Wesley reports this incident with triumphant joy, concluding: “From this time, I trust, we shall all suffer God to carry on his own work in the way that pleaseth Him.”¹¹³ Wesley’s hagiographer¹¹⁴ Tyerman rejoices: “Whitefield’s objections were silenced. He came, he saw, and he was conquered.”¹¹⁵

¹¹⁰Iain H. Murray, *Jonathan Edwards: A New Biography* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1987), 248.

¹¹¹One day as Whitefield was preaching, many “became so perfectly frantic—jumping, dancing, singing and praying—that he was forced to exclaim ‘with a voice of thunder,’ ‘What means all this tumult and disorder?’ Instantly there was silence . . . but some of them quickly remarked that they were so much delighted to see and hear their spiritual father, and were so filled with the Spirit, that they could not forbear their demonstrations of joy. Whitefield replied to them, ‘My dear children, you are like partridges, just hatched from the egg. You run about with egg shells covering your eyes, and cannot see and know where you are going.’ The effect of his gentle expostulation was that the disorder entirely ceased” (*Annals of the American Pulpit*, W. B. Sprague I, 325, quoted in Murray, *Edwards*, 219).

¹¹²Wesley, *Letters*, 661f. (June 25, 1739).

¹¹³Wesley, *Journal*, Vol. I, 210 (July 7, 1739).

¹¹⁴The biographies of Tyerman (about whom Henry Rack writes in *Reasonable Enthusiast*, introduction XII by saying that his “prejudices are too obvious to be very misleading”) should in fact be handled with care. Besides the fact that Tyerman does not worry to disprove himself within little more than fifty pages (cf. Tyerman, *Wesley*, 264, where he tells the astonished reader that “no such results [convulsions, demon possessions] attended Whitefield’s ministry, and Whitefield regarded them with suspicion and dislike”) he is also able to adjust his historiography to the favor of the person towards whom his current interest is directed. A good example is Tyerman’s evaluation of Whitefield’s conduct in the “free grace” controversy. In his Wesley-biography he writes about Whitefield as an “intolerant, excessive fanatic” whose letters eventually destroyed their long friendship (Tyerman, quoted in Benedikt Peters, *George Whitefield: Der*

This reconstruction of history, however, does not do justice to the given facts, which make the situation much more ambiguous. It is by no means proven that Whitefield changes his opinion on the convulsions. We have no reason to believe that Whitefield's conviction of the convulsions as being wrought by the devil is no longer existent.¹¹⁶ For one thing, Whitefield's letter of June 25 is not completely disproved by the phenomena. Proven wrong is a claim that these phenomena only happen upon immediate¹¹⁷ encouragement. That sanctification can only be assessed on a long-term basis is still as valid as before. Secondly, the fact that Whitefield advises Wesley¹¹⁸ to write a letter to Erskine to inquire as to the nature of these strange occurrences suggests that Whitefield is still not particularly happy about them, and that Wesley is not all that sure either. The allegedly key character of Whitefield's Bristol visit is hard to see. Whitefield continues to despise convulsions, Wesley celebrates assurance only for his Journal readers (and those scholars who allow themselves to be convinced by this), while his extensive correspondence reveals his inner uncertainty. Furthermore, it is interesting that Wesley inserts the September 28 response from Erskine into his Journal right after the debate around June 25. It must be assumed that he did that for apologetic reasons, which implies that the situation is not as clear as Tyerman and Wesley himself like to make it look.

John Cennick, a fellow revivalist and formerly one of Wesley's closest associates, became estranged and eventually split from the Methodists because of Wesley's dealing with the convulsive phenomena. He reports:

Erwecker Englands und Amerikas [Bielefeld, Germany: CLV, 1997, 470]). In his work on Whitefield (Luke Tyerman, *The Life of the Rev. George Whitefield, B.A., of Pembroke College, Oxford*. Vol. I., London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1890, 2nd edition, 471), Tyerman characterizes Whitefield's decisive letter very differently: "The spirit breathing in this letter is beautiful. The opinions of Whitefield and Wesley were wide apart; but their heartfelt affection for each other was undiminished."

¹¹⁵Tyerman, *Wesley*, Vol. I, 259.

¹¹⁶Peters, *Whitefield*, 220.

¹¹⁷"Immediate" because the encouragement may nevertheless be there. The crowds in Bristol were familiar with the phenomena in general; they may have been trained to act in this manner. The mere presence of Wesley and the habit of doing it could be sufficient to excite the phenomena (cf. Dallimore, *Whitefield*, Vol. I, 325: "people had learned to induce this kind of thing [e.g., extreme effects] under the ministry of others. . . .")

¹¹⁸Wesley, *Letters*, 680 (Aug. 24, 1739).

[S]ome were offended and left the Societies entirely when they saw Mr. Wesley encourage it. . . . And frequently when none were agitated in the meetings, he prayed, Lord! where are thy tokens and signs, and I don't remember ever to have seen it otherwise than that on his so praying several were seized and screamed out.¹¹⁹

After Cennick encounters these convulsions in his own ministry, his faith undergoes a crisis in which he stumbles for quite some time. After his recovery he determines "henceforth to preach nothing but Him [Christ] and His righteousness."¹²⁰ This resolve estranged Cennick from the ministry of Wesley and eventually resulted in his joining with the Moravian church. There his resentment of Wesley is understood and shared by the Moravian minister Philip Henry Molther, who himself had encountered Wesley's influences. When he had gotten to know the Fetter Lane society in October 1739 (which at that time was under the care of the two Wesleys), he was "almost terror stricken at their sighing and groaning, their whining and howling, which strange proceeding they called the demonstration of the Spirit of power."¹²¹

Jonathan Edwards, the great analyst of the revival in New England, was of the conviction that people "should endeavor to refrain from such outward manifestations . . . to their utmost, at the time of their solemn worship."¹²² Edwards knew that "excitement as such, is not necessarily a blessing from heaven."¹²³ Emotional effects are in themselves ambiguous. The phenomena Edwards encountered were usually caused by the joy of salvation which followed the experience of conversion. He reports that "some persons had such longing desires after Christ . . . as to take away their natural strength."¹²⁴

It is interesting to notice that the manifestations which Edwards describes and which resemble those of Whitefield are of an entirely different nature than Wesley's agonies of death, shrieking, and convulsions

¹¹⁹John Cennick, "An Account of the Most Remarkable Occurrences in the Awakenings at Bristol and Kingswood," *The Moravian Messenger*, Vol. 16; quoted in Dallimore, *Whitefield*, Vol. 1, 326.

¹²⁰*Ibid.*, 328.

¹²¹Tyerman, *Wesley*, Vol. I, 297.

¹²²Jonathan Edwards, quoted in Murray, *Edwards*, 218.

¹²³Murray, *Edwards*, 218.

¹²⁴Jonathan Edwards, *A Narrative of Surprising Conversions* (Banner of Truth: London, 1965), 45.

of pain. The former type of convulsion finds considerable parallel in the mystic tradition of the late Middle Ages,¹²⁵ while Wesley's experiences remain somewhat more singular in the history of the church.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the following points should once more be emphasized. Wesley encounters charismatic phenomena during his whole life, although there are periods of more intense convulsive activity than others (1739-1740, 1757/8, 1771/2). Some of these phenomena do not show any scriptural parallels, such as the accounts of emotional over-activity/excesses ("roof-jumpers," "sex-societies"), the sudden overwhelming seizures of people who are not willing to open up to them, or the descriptions of conversion upon demonic convulsion. The significance of Bristol as the center of charismatic phenomena is partly located in the city's history with its long tradition of convulsive training, partly also in Wesley's experiential nature. The latter is an important feature of his personality structure which, together with his political and integrative functions as the Methodist leader, results in an "institutionally restricted enthusiasm."

After being somewhat shocked by and evaluating the charismatic phenomena rather critically in the beginning of his career, Wesley's experiential nature gains power over him, resulting in his gradually more sympathetic assessment. His evaluations of the convulsive occurrences become more and more sophisticated, and he eventually compensates his former indecision through an integrative theory which characterizes the person's seizure by the Holy Spirit as the *opus proprium* of the revival. The demonic and convulsive outbursts, on the other hand, are explained as the inevitable *opus alienum*, which is wrought by the devil.

It is not merely the horrific memories of the Interregnum that cause Wesley's contemporaries to be very critical and disapproving of the occurrences in his ministry. None of the other revivalists has to deal with phenomena of similar intensity. Where they did occur, Wesley's contemporaries tend to restrain them and attribute them to the devil, as these phenomena simply scare them, revive the fears of enthusiasm, and are lacking a scriptural basis. Through the emergence of the Charismatic and Pentecostal movements, our present time is confronted with similar, although not usually as extreme phenomena. Thus, caution remains appropriate.

¹²⁵Cf. Gerhard Tersteegen, *Leben Heiliger Seelen*. Bd.1. (Lahr-Dinglingen, Germany: Verlag der Johannis-Druckerei, 1953), 195.

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THE RADICAL UNITED BRETHREN SECESSION OF 1889: GERMAN-AMERICAN CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE SEARCH FOR AMERICAN EVANGELICALISM

by

J. Steven O'Malley

Our task is to explore the division that occurred within the United Brethren in Christ (UB) in 1889, including some comparisons with the parallel split within the Evangelical Association (EA) in 1891. The goal is to understand the significance of these events for the larger discussion of the nature of American evangelicalism.

It is commendable that the prevailing and one-sided tendency to read American church history from the perspective of the New England Puritans has recently been challenged by a call for due recognition of the dominant (in influence and numbers) role of Methodism in nineteenth-century America.¹ Perhaps this redirection will allow due recognition to be given to those impulses of Christian renewal commonly known as continental Pietism, that both antedated Methodism and exercised formative influence upon it.² The leaven of Pietism not only impacted the major continental confessional bodies, the Lutherans and the Reformed

¹See Nathan O. Hatch, "The Puzzle of American Methodism," *Church History* (June, 1994), 175-189.

²Despite the important interpretative work of F. E. Stoeffler, Peter Erb, J. James Stein and others, the bulk of Pietist source material has not yet received English translation. A recent contribution to this field is the author's *Early German-American Evangelicalism: Influential Pietist Sources in Discipleship and Sanctification* (Lanham, Md: Scarecrow, 1995).

Churches, that were transplanted to North America. It also contributed directly to the formation of new, indigenous German-American church bodies that blended the older Pietist ethos with elements of Wesleyan doctrine and church structure. The major institutional results of this interaction were the Otterbein-Boehm movement, which gave rise to the Church of the United Brethren in Christ, and the Evangelical Association (after 1921, the Evangelical Church of North America), founded by Jacob Albright.³

These denominations, along with several smaller bodies that have shared a common ethos,⁴ have typically been given slight notice by recent students of American evangelicalism, including those who have called for more recognition of Methodism and the Holiness Movement.⁵ They also are usually passed over by continental Pietist scholars since they are viewed as American groups and as variants of Methodistic “Freikirchen.”⁶ As a consequence, they are bypassed by scholars of evangelicalism on both sides of the Atlantic, even though they represented the major revival movement among America’s largest ethnic group in the nineteenth century.⁷ The Evangelical United Brethren—the new denomination that resulted from the union of the Evangelical Church with the United Brethren in 1946—approached 750,000 members by the time of their union, and as a strong regional denomination, they were among the six

³See Bruce Behney and Paul Eller, *History of the Evangelical United Brethren Church* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1979).

⁴These bodies include the United Brethren in Christ (Old Constitution), the Evangelical Congregational Church, the Brethren in Christ, the Missionary Church, the Church of God (Winebrennarian), the United Christian Church, the Evangelical Church of North America, and the Evangelical Covenant Church, the Church of the Brethren, and segments of the Mennonites (General Conference).

⁵Melvin Dieter gives brief attention to the impact of the Holiness Movement on Evangelicals and U.B. in his *Holiness Movement of the Nineteenth Century* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1974).

⁶An exception is the British Methodist scholar W. Reginald Ward who, in his recent study of the continental evangelical revival, has identified Otterbein as the pioneer of an “undenominational revival” that fulfilled the hopes of old-world revivalists who had worked among Mennonite groups in Switzerland and Holland (*The Protestant Evangelical Awakening*, Cambridge, 1992, 247).

⁷A total of 6,906,465 German immigrants arrived in the United States between 1820 and 1969. See Sidney Ahlstrom *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven: Yale, 1973), 750.

largest denominations in two states.⁸ Their neglect by historians is all the more remarkable in view of the fact that the UB was the first indigenous denomination organized within the United States, and the EA was the first church body to adopt the term “Evangelical” as its denominational name.⁹ As used by this body, the term had a different meaning than the confessional, “landeskirchliche” usage of the Lutherans, whereby the term is equated with “Protestant.” It also predates the recent descriptive use of the term to refer to nineteenth-century “mainline” Protestantism,¹⁰ which Donald Dayton has called “classical evangelicalism,” as well as the post-fundamentalist designation “neo-evangelical.”¹¹ As used by the Albright brethren of 1803, “Evangelisch” denoted a distinctive pietistic-revivalist usage that might succinctly be translated as “awakened.”

By the middle of the nineteenth century, these bodies were breaking out of their ethnic identity and were becoming participants in the Protestant evangelical currents. Hence, Evangelicals¹² were second only to the Methodists in the number of their clergy present for the Vineland (NJ) and Manheim (PA) national holiness camp meetings.¹³ They also contributed leaders to the wider evangelical movements, such as the Wesleyan holiness theologian H. Orton Wiley, who affiliated with the Nazarenes, and Daniel Poling, editor of the *Christian Herald*.¹⁴ Moving

⁸These states were Pennsylvania (with 202,000 members) and West Virginia; they were also the leading denomination in parts of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, and the Plains states. See *Yearbook EUB* (Dayton, 1965), 56-57. In addition, they had almost reached parity with Methodism in their work on the European continent. See Karl Steckel, *Geschichte der Evangelisch-methodistische Kirche* (Stuttgart: Christliches Verlagshaus, 1982), 149-212.

⁹While the UB traces its origin to 1767 (the Pentecostal “Long’s Barn Meeting” of Otterbein and Boehm), formal organization took place in 1800.

¹⁰Such as Sidney Ahlstrom’s “American Evangelical Protestantism,” *The Religious History of the American People*, 403-454.

¹¹Germans have developed the word *Evangelikal* to denote the latter.

¹²When this term is capitalized in this paper, we refer to the Evangelical Association (EA).

¹³The National Camp Meeting Association for the Promotion of Holiness was organized at Vineland, N.J., in 1867 under the leadership of Methodist John Inskip.

¹⁴Stan Ingersoll, archivist for the Church of the Nazarene, reported to the EUB Heritage Center: “Among the prominent Nazarenes who were raised in the EUB tradition are systematic theologian H. Orton Wiley. . . Theodore and Minnie Ludwig, popular evangelists, and their son S. T. Ludwig, who became general secretary of the denomination in 1948, C. W. Ruta, a key figure in the mergers

quickly into the ecumenical scene, Evangelicals also contributed one president of the Federal Council of Churches and one president of its successor, the National Council of Churches in the postwar era.¹⁵ The UB, which earlier assimilated into the Anglo-American culture in part because of its rapid shift from the German language, made relatively larger contributions to the wider public life of the nation. As examples, Francis Scott Key was a UB song leader in Baltimore when he composed the song that became the American national anthem; the Dwight Eisenhowers were married in a Kansas UB congregation—Mamie’s home church; and, more significant, the Wright brothers were actively involved in UB church controversies in support of their father, Bishop Milton Wright.¹⁶

However, our concern here is not to document the larger contributions of these bodies to their culture, but rather to examine the extent to which they exemplify aspects of the recent discussion¹⁷ concerning how American evangelicalism is to be understood, as well as the ways in which that evangelicalism has been nourished by them. Our particular focus on the division that occurred in the UB in 1889 (with some comparisons with the EA split of 1891) will attempt to examine this data afresh. Previous interpreters¹⁸ have attempted to read these events against the conservative/liberal grid, with regard to the positions taken on such classical doctrinal issues as the authority of Scripture and attitudes toward new theological tendencies. Such analysis is informative but deficient in providing explanatory reasons for those divisions. It will be argued here that the grid proposed by Dayton is more adequate, in that these splits highlight the polarity between bourgeois-liberal and radical-sectarian tendencies in each group. At the same time, the presence of Pietist motifs offers

that created the Church of the Nazarene, and B. Edgar Johnson, general secretary from 1964 to 1990. From *The Telescope Messenger* (Summer, 1994), 5, and Raymond W. Albright, *History of the Evangelical Church* (Harrisburg, PA: Evangelical Press, 1942), 384.

¹⁵Bishop John S. Stamm served as president of the FCC in the 1940s and Bishop Reuben H. Mueller served as president of the NCC in the 1960s.

¹⁶For discussions of these events, see Bruce Behney and Paul Eller, *History of the Evangelical United Brethren Church* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1979).

¹⁷See Donald W. Dayton, “The Search for the Historical Evangelicalism”: George Marsden’s History of Fuller Seminary as a Case Study in *Christian Scholars Review* (23-1), (September, 1993), 12-33.

¹⁸See especially the voluminous study of William Naumann, *Theology and German-American Evangelicalism: The Role of Theology in the Evangelical United Brethren Church* (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1966).

a different context for distinguishing these splits from similar occurrences in Anglo-based traditions.

The Constitutional Crisis of the United Brethren in Christ (1889)

Any attempt to read the UB split of 1889 as a harbinger of the later modernist/fundamentalist controversies of the 1920s¹⁹ must immediately come to terms with the fact that the parties to this conflict described themselves by the labels “liberal” and “radical.” While the latter, minority party became influenced by fundamentalist and, more recently, by neo-evangelical polemics, these twentieth-century movements also made their inroads into the descendants of the liberal majority of 1889.²⁰ What distinguished the “radical” UB of the 1880s from their “liberal” colleagues was their appeal to the primitive “root” (the base meaning of radical!) of their church tradition, as represented in the original Confession of Faith that originated with Otterbein’s Baltimore ministry in 1889, and the original church constitution of 1841. On the other hand, the liberals coalesced at the General Conference of 1885 to prepare and promote the adoption of a revised Confession of Faith and Constitution that would make room for the growing “bourgeoisification” of the denomination, especially at the point of dropping the older prohibition against membership in secret societies. This proposal was forthcoming in view of the fact that freemasonry was growing in its appeal among the post-Civil War generations of UB laity and clergy.²¹

Opposition to secret societies was also prevalent among holiness bodies that were separating from Methodism in the nineteenth century.²²

¹⁹Naumann (214) hints in this direction with his reference to “progressivist” elements on the liberal side, which leaves the impression that their opponents argued the converse side; see also Behney and Eller, 228.

²⁰E.g., I. L. Kephart, “What Should Preachers Do with the Higher Criticism?” *Religious Telescope*, 7(1894), 145; and E. F. Burr, “Concerning ‘the Destructive Higher Criticism,’” *Religious Telescope* (May 22, 1907), 5.

²¹Between 1850 and 1880 the reorganized Masons grew from 66,000 to 550,000 members, and it inspired a host of imitators, such as the Old Fellows, Red Men, Knights of Pythias, and many others. See Daryl M. Elliott, *Bishop Milton Wright and the Quest for a Christian America* (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Drew University, 1992), 168.

²²This anti-secrecy-society tendency was evident among the Wesley and Free Methodists (1840s and 1860, respectively) and among new “come outer” bodies to be formed in the 1890s or thereafter—including the Nazarenes, Pilgrims, and others. See Melvin Dieter, *The Holiness Revival of the Nineteenth Century*.

However, the radical UB were at least implicitly motivated by the radical Pietist ecclesiological legacy that was clearly reflected in the minutes of the early protocol of the UB, as well as in their constitutional name. When they adopted the title "The United Brotherhood in Christ Jesus" at the organizational conference of 1800, the minutes reiterate the point that, unlike the confessional state church traditions of Europe, they were to be an open or unpartisan ("unpartiische") fellowship, "untrammled by sect or opinion."²³

This "unpartisan" ecclesial theme was first explicated by the radical Pietist church historian, Gottfried Arnold, in his seminal work *Die Unparteiische Kirche und Ketzer Historie* (1699).²⁴ Arnold contended that the authentic witnesses to apostolic Christian faith had always been found among the repressed and persecuted minorities, including the Montanists, Donatists, Cathari, Waldensians, spiritual Franciscans, Lollards and Hussites, Anabaptists, and radical Pietists. He had proposed that church history be rewritten from their perspective, rather than that of the dominating confessional parties, which to him represented a perverse collusion of throne and altar. Writing in the aftermath of the Thirty Years' War (1618-1648), that perversity had appeared all the more malignant to him. In one sense, this was an updating and enlargement of the Anabaptist two-world theodicy that now reflected the travail of the seventeenth century and the emerging "Aufklärung." For Arnold, the key to identifying the authentic witness to the gospel was not to be found in the sectarian protocol and baptismal ritual of the older Anabaptists. Instead, it was to be the witness of the Spirit in the reborn, who were being identified and called out in the midst of the competing confessional "parties" in anticipation of the hastening day of the Lord.

In the early eighteenth century, major aspects of this outlook were being covertly integrated into the "church" piety of leading German Reformed Pietists, particularly the practical dogmatician Friedrich Adolph Lampe (1683-1729) and, to a lesser extent, the celebrated hymnist and devotional writer, Gerhard Tersteegen (1697-1769). The major Ger-

²³"Protocol of the United Brethren in Christ," (September 23, 1801), in Arthur Core, *Philip William Otterbein: Pastor, Ecumenist* (Dayton: U.B. Publishing House, 1968), 121, (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1980), 204-295.

²⁴See Peter Erb, *Pietists, Protestants and Mysticism: The Use of Late Medieval Spiritual Texts in the Work of Gottfried Arnold* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1989).

man Reformed confessional standard, the Heidelberg Catechism (the most irenic of all Reformation symbols), was susceptible to being interpreted in Arnold-like fashion. The Catechism spoke of the church as that community which God was gathering unto Himself from all generations (and locales!) into a living relationship with the reigning Christ, and in anticipation of His final eschatological victory.²⁵

The connecting point for our discussion of the radical UB is that Lampe's work²⁶ was the principal textbook under which Otterbein was educated. He and his colleagues²⁷ were also conversant with the work of Tersteegen and Arnold. Otterbein fashioned the confessional statement and protocol for the early UB in the context of his service as a German Reformed missionary to Baltimore and its environs (1784-1813), where his ministry broke out of its parochial boundaries to impact the "awakened" among other German traditions (especially the Mennonites of Martin Boehm's persuasion). There was also linkage between the emerging "unpartisan" church of the reborn and his implicit eschatological focus. In a letter written to a colleague, Otterbein embraced the postmillennial outlook of his mentor (Lampe), anticipating that there is to be "a more glorious state of the church on earth."²⁸

It was not the effect of the later Holiness Movement, but rather it was this radical Pietist ecclesial outlook of the early UB, with its ecumenical and eschatological foci, that helped to position them early on to oppose disparities of race and gender within their ranks. As early as 1821, they forbade slave ownership among their members—many of whom lived in Maryland and Virginia, and the institution of slavery was condemned in the *Discipline* as being inconsistent with the reign of Christ on earth. In addition, women were admitted to the ranks of the UB clergy

²⁵*The Heidelberg Catechism* (1563), (Philadelphia: United Church edition, 1963), Questions 52-54. This eschatological focus in the *Catechism* was fueled by the fact that the German Reformed were in a precarious political situation, being lodged between dominating Lutheran and Roman Catholic power centers in the Empire, so their hope was nourished by a transcendent perspective of divine intervention. I have developed this position in my *Pilgrimage of Faith: The Legacy of the Otterbeins* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1973), 2-43.

²⁶F. A. Lampe, *Gehemmis des Gnadenbundes* (Bremen, 1712-1721).

²⁷Otterbein was visited in his parish at York, PA, by a student of Tersteegen, Johann Christian Stahlschmidt, who recorded his visit in a journal entitled *A Pilgrimage by Sea and Land* (tr. by Samuel Jackson) (London, 1837), 242-246.

²⁸P. W. Otterbein, Letter Concerning the Millennium," in *Core*, 103-103.

long before this practice was accepted in Episcopal Methodism.²⁹ These “unpartisan” ethical standards were also viewed as an expression or fruit of the holiness that is grounded in the indwelling Christ within the lives of the reborn.³⁰

By the 1880s, the UB had long abandoned Otterbein’s vision of an informal, interconfessional brotherhood of the reborn in Christ in favor of a strongly denominational self-consciousness.³¹ UB polity included a single, rather than a twofold ordination (elders only); superintendents, elected by members of the annual conference, represented the interests of the preachers before the presiding bishop; bishops were elected to four-year terms; and local as well as traveling preachers had voting privileges in the annual conferences. Although they had grown to more than 200,000 members, they were still the most rural of all major American denominations. However, they were increasingly marked by growing bourgeois tendencies, including the acceptance of secret society membership among an increasing number of their members.

This cultural accommodation was viewed as “progressivism” by the liberals. Their rationale is typified by the argument of one UB preacher. He declared that

Otterbein had pronounced anti-secrecy opinions, and as a result for three quarters of a century members of secret orders were not admitted into the fellowship of this Church. This, with the lack of organization and the transition from the German to the English, retarded our progress so that many other

²⁹The UB ordained Ella Niswanger on September 13, 1889; earlier, Charity Orpheral was licensed by the White River Conference in the 1850s. See Jonathan Cooney, “Maintaining the Tradition: Women Elders and the Ordination of Women in the Evangelical United Brethren Church,” *Methodist History* (28) (October 1988), 25-35.

³⁰Otterbein wrote, “We must be renewed by Him in such a way that He gains an importance in us, which alone can bring us the rest, peace, salvation, and happiness from and in God.” P.W. Otterbein, “The Salvation-Bringing Incarnation and Glorious Victory of Jesus Christ over the Devil and Death,” in *Core*, 87.

³¹A major denominational history had been published in 1869 by John Lawrence that had, in Arnold fashion, identified the UB as the rightful heirs of the old believers’ church tradition, rooted in the “Unitas Fratrem” of the Czech Brethren. It is noteworthy that the seventeenth-century leader of the Unitas Fratrem, Jan Comenius, had been a graduate of the Herborn academy, from which P. W. Otterbein, the organizer of the United Brethren in North America, also graduated in the eighteenth century. See John Lawrence, *History of the United Brethren in Christ* (Dayton: Wm. Shuey, 1868), 2 vols.

denominations have outgrown us. Frequently our ministers have gone into new communities and held great revival meetings with large numbers of converts, nearly all of whom would become members of other churches. The converts were members of secret orders and could not unite with us. In this we followed Otterbein too long.³²

The criterion this author values is denominational success, with no attention given to the theological basis that had supported the anti-secrecy position. In the perception of the liberals, adhering to that position meant that "our churches everywhere in the cities and towns almost perished, being sustained only by a sacrificial ministry and . . . a few poor lay members."³³ From this perspective, the new constitution was perceived to be the key to UB survival. At York, Pennsylvania, in 1889, on the very ground where Otterbein had first proclaimed these opinions, the General Conference now declared that old law repealed. Consequently, "since that time we are prospering generally in the cities and towns, and few religious bodies are growing so rapidly."³⁴ From the liberal perspective, not only were UB now able to "string the fish we catch"; there was now the prospect that they would experience less difficulty in ". . . getting the world to understand who we are."³⁵ That is, the preeminence of "the brother idea," derived from Otterbein would now be more effectively promulgated without the restrictions that had been imposed by the anti-secrecy code.³⁶

If the liberals opted for bourgeois success and adapted the tradition to meet that end, the radicals held out for integrity and non-accommodation of the original, unaltered constitution and Confession of Faith. Continued opposition toward secret societies became the rallying point. Significantly, each side was following a course that it thought would best facilitate the commonly-held ideal of promoting a "Christian America."³⁷

³²Robert Todd, *How Churches Pioneer in American Communities* (White Pigeon, MI: Swihart, 1957), 80-87; and E. W. Curtis, "Philip William Otterbein," *The United Brethren Quarterly Review*, III (Dayton: U.B. Publishing House, 1892), 249-250.

³³Curtis, 250.

³⁴Curtis, 250.

³⁵Curtis, 250.

³⁶Curtis, 250.

³⁷The radicals' adherence to this ideal, under the leadership of Bishop Wright, is explicated by Elliott, 48-107.

For his part, the radical UB leader, Bishop Milton Wright, pursued a course that was designed to guard American society as well as the UB denomination against the encroachment of deistic heresy clothed in the moralistic hues of freemasonry. Our main point is that Wright did not rise to his leadership role in this crisis as a fundamentalist, but rather with the postmillennial outlook that was characteristic of nineteenth-century American evangelicalism,³⁸ and with the encouragement of friends such as Jonathan Blanchard, the holiness-reformer president of Wheaton College.³⁹ America, believed Wright, was to be at the vanguard of the millennium on earth, an event that cannot come to pass until the church first cleanses itself in order to overcome the persisting enemies of God.⁴⁰ What was at stake in freemasonry was the secularization of Christianity in the name of “enlightened liberality,” and a minister who denied the threat from this source should be “branded as a traitor to the truth.”⁴¹ Like Blanchard, Wright’s anti-secrecy zeal was seen as a continuation of the antebellum anti-slavery crusade, in that both evils were tolerated by clergy to retain the wealth of the affluent for the church.⁴²

In 1867, Blanchard had called for a conference of anti-secrecy evangelicals to meet in Aurora, Illinois, which led to the formation of the National Christian Association. Due to heavy UB participation, the first president elected to lead the Association was UB Bishop David Edwards.⁴³

³⁸Wright personally owned the Otterbein letter that explains the founder’s postmillennial position (Elliott, 127).

³⁹For an analysis of Blanchard’s relationship to Wright, see 182-207.

⁴⁰In overcoming these vestiges of evil, Wright, according to Elliott, contends for the regal rights of blacks, a continuation of Reconstruction politics in the South, humane treatment of native Americans in the course of extending Christian civilization on the Western frontier, advocacy of women’s voting rights in church and state, the need to convert immigrants to Protestant Christianity, fear of Roman Catholic encroachment into national life, Sabbatarianism, temperance, and the responsible uses of wealth (Elliott, 137-166).

⁴¹Milton Wright, “The Church and Secret Societies,” *Religious Telescope*, 11 December 1878, 2; Elliott, 172.

⁴²Elliott, 173, 181-2. Wright called Blanchard a “Champion of reform” (Milton Wright, “The Anniversary at Pittsburgh,” *Religious Telescope*, 16 June 1875, 25).

⁴³“The National Anti-Secret Society Convention,” *Religious Telescope*, 13 May 1868, 284; Elliott, 183. Other participants included Reformed Presbyterians, United Presbyterians, Free Methodists, German Baptists, Swedish Lutherans, Evangelical Lutherans, and Wesleyan Methodists. See *A Brief History of the National Christian Associations* (Chicago: Ezra Cook and Company, 1875), 28.

Wright became a contributor to Blanchard's *Christian Cynosure*, and was elected the CSA vice-president in 1876.⁴⁴ Here was a joining of the Holiness Movement agenda with the older radical Pietist ethos of the UB. Methodist Episcopal and Evangelical participation were notably absent in the CSA movement.

Wright had also served as editor of the official UB periodical *The Religious Telescope*, from 1870 to 1877, which he had increasingly turned into an ardent anti-secrecy organ. He resigned this post after his election as bishop in 1877, with support from his anti-secrecy constituency. Elliott refers to this group as "conservatives," in view of their opposition to the growing pro-freemasonry "liberal" faction.⁴⁵ This description obscures the radical, pro-reform outlook of Wright's group, especially in view of Wright's praise of Blanchard as a fellow "reform" leader.⁴⁶ Further, the Wright group did not stand opposed to the liberals' advocacy of pro-rata representation and lay delegation in church conferences, but only to the liberals' linkage of those issues to their goal of rescinding the anti-secrecy prohibition in the church constitution. The liberals had hoped that the laity and the more populous eastern conferences would increase the representation at General Conference in favor of rescinding the secrecy rule.⁴⁷

Wright's opponents were relieved when he was assigned to the Western Episcopal area in 1877, where he would be distant from the centers of controversy. Liberal, pro-secrecy forces gained strength at the 1881 General Conference, and their position was secured by the passage of pro-rata representation.⁴⁸ Further, when Wright was defeated for re-election as bishop, Blanchard blamed that defeat on the failure of radicals to support Wright fully, believing that Wright had "softened" his anti-secrecy cam-

⁴⁴Milton Wright to J. Blanchard, 19 January 1875, printed in "Sound Sense," *Christian Cynosure*, 28 January 1875; cited in Elliott, 184.

⁴⁵Elliott, 199.

⁴⁶Wright, "The Anniversary at Pittsburgh," *Religious Telescope* (16 June 1875, 300).

⁴⁷Elliott, 195, cites biblical arguments used in favor of the liberal position by William McKee, in "Notices," in the *United Brethren Observer*, 21 May 1877, 2; for Wright's counter position that argued that each issue should be handled separately, see Milton Wright, "Constitutional Amendment," *Religious Telescope*, 5 May 1875, 252; cited in Elliott, 195.

⁴⁸*Proceedings of the Eighteenth General Conference of the United Brethren in Christ. Held in Lisbon, Iowa, from the 12th to the 26th of May, 1881, Inclusive* (Dayton: U.B. Publishing House, 1881), 167; cited in Elliott, 207-208.

paign.⁴⁹ As a matter of fact, Wright's denominational loyalty was now being called into question in view of his collaboration with Blanchard in an abortive proposal to organize a new association of anti-secrecy churches, to be called the "United Churches of Christ."⁵⁰ Elliott reports that Wright persuaded Blanchard to drop the term 'United,' to avoid the appearance of forming a new sect other than an association of Churches.⁵¹ To that extent, Wright's churchmanship had prevailed over his reform agenda.

Liberal and radical forces polarized further in the decade of the 1880s, leading to the split of 1889. Divested of the office of bishop, Wright moved to Richmond, Indiana, where he edited an anti-secrecy organ, *The Richmond Star*, from 1882 to 1885 under the masthead "First Pure; then Peaceable."⁵² Blanchard needled Wright for remaining in a denomination of "lodgedevils," and the latter irritably objected to Blanchard's interference in UB affairs.⁵³ Wright opposed Blanchard's summons to "loyal" UB to follow him in forming a new denomination—a call issued in the pages of his *Christian Cynosure*.⁵⁴

The last phase of the debate was launched with the naming of a church commission by the 1885 General Conference. It was charged with preparing the new Confession of Faith and Constitution that would totally alter the anti-secrecy rule.⁵⁵ Ironically, Wright was reelected bishop for this quadrennium, but then he was "safely" dispatched to the Pacific Northwest, far from the center of controversy. The liberals were now proposing a revised secrecy statement that left the impression that membership in secret societies could be accepted so long as it did not produce harmful effects on "Christian character."⁵⁶ To Wright, this was but a

⁴⁹Jonathan Blanchard, "'Sirs, Ye Are Brethren,' Acts 7:26," *Christian Cynosure*, 21 December 1882, 8; Elliott, 208.

⁵⁰"The United Churches of Christ," *Christian Cynosure*, 16 July 1874, 8; Elliott, 205.

⁵¹Elliott, 205-206.

⁵²Elliott, 212.

⁵³Wright, *Diary*, 15 July 1881; cited in Elliott, 216.

⁵⁴Jonathan Blanchard, "Ichabod," *Christian Cynosure*, 9 June 1881, 8; cited in Elliott, 216.

⁵⁵The text of this 1885 statement on secret societies is found in the 1885 *Discipline* (UB), 82-83.

⁵⁶The 1841 *Discipline* (UB), Article IX. Section 2, "There shall be no connection with secret combinations."

covert attempt to abolish anti-secrecy without officially eliminating the restrictive rule which forbade actual abolition of the provisions of the constitution of 1841. In addition, the fact that the commission was appointed by General Conference and not directly elected by the total church membership was, to Wright's group, an unconstitutional act.⁵⁷

The constitutional issue at stake concerned the interpretation of an ambiguous provision in the 1841 UB Constitution that asserted, "There shall be no alteration of the foregoing constitution, unless by request of two-thirds of the whole society."⁵⁸ It was unclear whether "by request" meant "by vote" (as the term "Stimmzahl" in the German edition of the *Discipline* suggested),⁵⁹ and also whether "society" meant all members or only General Church delegates. After extensive and lively discussion throughout the denomination between 1885 and 1888, the proposals of the church commission were presented in a ballot to the entire membership. The General Conference of 1889 received a vote tally of 50,685 for the new constitution, with 3,659 opposed; 48,825 for lay representation, with 5,634 against; 51,070 for the new Confession of Faith, with 3,310 against; and 46,994 for the revised section on secret combinations, with 7,298 against.⁶⁰

When the report of the commission, as ratified by the general membership, was presented to the General Conference of 1889 in York, Pennsylvania, it was accepted by a vote of 110 to 20. The Conference then convened under the new constitution, which led Bishop Wright and 15 fellow "radical" delegates to withdraw.⁶¹ They were then denounced and

⁵⁷*Proceedings of the Nineteenth General Conference of the United Brethren in Christ, Held in Fostoria, Ohio, from the 14th to the 27th of May, 1885, Inclusive* (Dayton: U.B. Publishing House, 1885), 207; cited in Elliott, 220.

⁵⁸The 1841 *Discipline* (UB), Article IV; A. W. Drury, *Disciplines of the United Brethren in Christ, 1814-41* (Dayton: U.B. Publishing House, 1895), 207. All other regulations could be altered simply by a majority of the General Conference.

⁵⁹*Ursprung. Lehre. Constitution und Zuchtordnung der Vereinigten Brüder in Christo* (Baltimore, 1841), in Drury, *Disciplines*, Part II, 81.

⁶⁰*Proceedings of the Twentieth General Conference of the United Brethren in Christ. Held in York, Pennsylvania May 9-22, 1889* (Dayton: U.B. Publishing House, 1889), 173.

⁶¹*UB General Conference Minutes (1889)*, 196; also, Behney and Eller, 186. Wright had even gone so far as to declare his willingness to abide by a change in the secrecy rule, if it would be done in a constitutional way. See *Minutes of the Proceedings of the Twentieth General Conference of the United Brethren in Christ. convened at York. PA. May 9-19.1889* (Dayton: Milton Wright. 1889), 24; Elliott, 247.

evicted by the new liberal UB Conference, and they proceeded to reconvene at another site in York, where they declared themselves to be the true United Brethren in Christ, under the original constitution of 1841.

Like Wright, the liberals, led by Bishops Glossbrenner, Weaver, Castle, and Mills, had also been ardent opponents of slavery, and they often took progressive stands in social issues. However, the “secret combination” section of the old constitution had proved to be the fault line that allowed the emergence of two opposing attitudes toward the bourgeoisification of the denomination. The other radical bishop, John Dickson, now came over to the liberal side.⁶² Wright’s radicals had been as shocked by the liberals’ use of political manipulation to advance their agenda as by their accommodationist position itself. Whereas the official periodical, the *Religious Telescope*, applauded the “mandate” for change that the one-sided vote represented,⁶³ the radicals’ new organ, the *Christian Conservator*, read the outcome in a quite different light. It charged that, by dubious methods, including the “suppression of facts,” 46,947 votes had been secured against secret combinations, out of a membership of more than 200,000. By the radicals’ reckoning, the vote should have been two-thirds of the total membership, or at least 132,000 votes.⁶⁴ Elliott reports that this radical perspective was also upheld by Orville and Wilbur Wright, who wrote an article in their newspaper, *The Dayton West Side News*, asserting that the liberals were the real schismatics.⁶⁵

In retrospect, the triumph of sectarian tendencies is evident among the radicals and then these were later exacerbated by further internal splits within the Old Constitution group that also involved Wright. The liberals had also adopted a new Confession of Faith that more fully explicated the doctrines of classical orthodoxy than did the original, terse Confession from Otterbein.⁶⁶ It also adopted the more formalized “Article” format,

⁶²The “radicals” organized as the Church of the United Brethren in Christ (Old Constitution), with only ca. 20,000 members and a college and headquarters at Huntington, IN.

⁶³“Vote of the Commission,” *Religious Telescope*. 23 January 1889, 53; cited in Elliott, 240.

⁶⁴“The Vote,” *Christian Conservator*, 14 February 1889, 4; cited in Elliott, 242.

⁶⁵“United Brethren General Conference,” *Dayton West Side News*, 11 May 1889, 1; cited by Elliott, 244.

⁶⁶See J. S. O’Malley, “A Distinctive German-American Credo: The United Brethren Confession of Faith,” *Asbury Theological Journal* 42 (Spring, 1987), 51-64.

resembling more the Anglican and the Methodist Articles of Religion, than the simple, narrative style of the old Confession. The liberals thereby were representing a more conservative, traditional outlook, and the radicals a more primitive, countercultural outlook.

However, from another angle, this split resulted in the heightening of a conservative/liberal polarity (with the radicals as the conservatives and the liberals as the liberals), since Wright's radicals tended to view the pro-secrecy liberals as accommodationists to an increasingly secularized culture.⁶⁷ From the base line of that critique, Wright had also objected to other wider aspects of "Kulturprotestantismus" in America, including those that he saw in the liberal theology of the "fashionable" Brooklyn Presbyterian pulpiteer, Henry Ward Beecher in the 1870s.⁶⁸ Wright's critique of Beecher's flirtation with biblical higher criticism and Darwinism is solidly couched in his disdain for Beecher's New York cosmopolitanism. Wright's context was his agrarian midwestern revivalism, for which the new birth, that he found missing in Beecher, was normative as the measure of orthodoxy.⁶⁹ This of course was not a critique directed against liberal UB, most of whom would have shared Wright's culture-based critique of Beecher.

Even after the split, as Naumann has established,⁷⁰ theological liberalism was a distinct minority among the main (liberal) UB body, being represented mainly by Bishop William Bell's advocacy of the social gospel agenda.⁷¹ Despite the UB liberals' "bourgeoisifying" tendency, as seen in the secret society controversy, they too continued to reflect in large measure a theological and social conservatism based on their rural, midwestern, and even populist ethos.⁷² One symbolic indication of the

⁶⁷See Elliott, 252-318.

⁶⁸Marsden argues that Beecher modified his doctrinal views to accommodate his more urbane congregation. See George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture* (New York: Oxford 1980), 22-25.

⁶⁹For Wright's critique of Beecher's urbane modernism, see his "How are the Mighty Fallen," *Religious Telescope* 31 (July, 1872), 380; and his "Orthodox Support of Heterodoxy," *Religious Telescope* 21, (July, 1875), 340; cited in Elliott, 333.

⁷⁰Naumann, 266-300.

⁷¹Bell, William M., *The Social Message of our Lord* (Dayton: Otterbein Press, 1909).

⁷²Naumann has observed a heavy reliance by UB and Evangelicals on the common sense realist philosophy of Joseph Cook, which they adapted as an

UB conservative populist tendency is the fact that the featured speaker at three successive (liberal) UB General Conferences was the populist presidential aspirant William Jennings Bryan.⁷³ In response to Bryan's 1921 UB address, Bishop M. W. Weekley introduced a General Conference resolution, signed by a Bonebrake Seminary professor, thanking God that the blight of "materialistic unbelief . . . for the most part has failed to find advocates in our church," and "that this conference send out its word of warning to our clergy, membership, church boards, and school faculties, that they be on their guard constantly against the subtle encroachment of these dangerous tendencies of our age."⁷⁴

An important indicator in evaluating the character of evangelicalism in the two branches of the UB is their respective positions on eschatological, and especially millennial interpretation. If the UB split is read from the perspective of the later modernist/fundamentalist controversy, one would expect the liberals to be the postmillennialists and the radicals the premillennialists. It is true that the social gospel movement, with its post-millennial orientation, gained a hearing among the liberals, especially through the writing of Bishop William Bell. Further, it is the case that the liberal UB became participants in the ecumenical movement, including the Federal and National Councils of Churches, and the World Council of Churches, whereas the radicals gravitated toward the NAE. However Bishop Wright was an ardent postmillennialist, and it was his vision of a Christian America as the vanguard of the millennium on earth that energized his opposition to freemasonry as one of the final enemies of the Kingdom that must be eradicated from a purified church.⁷⁵

apologetic for their brand of evangelical orthodoxy. See Naumann, 152-196. Although some liberal titles appeared in the UB course of study for preachers, UB liberals, as well as the radicals, rather consistently held to a position of biblical literalism. For example, before J. W. Hott was elected as a liberal bishop in 1889, he wrote an editorial condemning the abandonment of Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch and warned against subjecting biblical interpretation to conform to schools of modern philosophy. See J. W. Hott, "Dangers of Modern Tendencies in Christianity," *Religious Telescope* 27 (February, 1889), 129.

⁷³Naumann, 347.

⁷⁴*United Brethren in Christ General Conference Journal* (Dayton: U.B. Publishing House, 1921), 559; signed by Professor J. P. Landis; cited in Naumann, 347.

⁷⁵See Milton Wright, "The Millennium's Approach," *Christian Conservator* 1 (December, 1887), 1; cited in Elliott, 128; see also Elliott, 124-131.

By contrast, the liberal UB displayed an ambivalence toward the millennial issue that was in large measure a function of a denomination moving toward "mainline" status, which also reflected the polarity of the larger debate in American evangelical Protestantism. On the one hand, some liberal UB leaders detected in the growing cooperation among American denominations signs of the dawning millennium, such as Bishop J. S. Mills.⁷⁶ Another Bishop, Jonathan Weaver, stated in 1893 that this trend toward unity announced the approaching time "when the lion and the lamb shall lie down together, and when we shall all be united in spirit, and move against the powers of darkness" (which, to Weaver, certainly did not exclude the freemasons!).⁷⁷ The bishop's quadrennial address in 1893 carried this theme further with the words, "The early dawn of the age of all ages is upon the sky. . . . Living, walking, practical, working Christianity is superseding mere dogma, and the cry of the world is for the universal reign of Jesus, the Christ. . . ."⁷⁸

I. L. Kephart, the *Religious Telescope* editor from 1889 to 1908, saw millennial implications in the rapid growth of his denomination in the decade following the split (from 199,000 after the radical secession to 241,000 in 1900).⁷⁹ On the other hand, Kephart's successor as *Religious Telescope* editor, J. M. Phillippi, who occupied that office during the eruption of the modernist/fundamentalist conflict, was an ardent premillennialist. The postmillennial position was barred from being voiced in that journal throughout the duration of his tenure, until 1926.⁸⁰ Phillippi was seeking to position the liberal UB on the fundamentalist side of that debate, whereas his successor reversed that stance once again in favor of postmillennialism.⁸¹

In brief, the postmillennialist vision of a Christian America could at various times flourish either among radicals or liberals, with the secret

⁷⁶Naumann, 387.

⁷⁷*General Conference Journal of the Church of the United Brethren Christ* (1893) (Dayton: UB. Publishing House, 1893), 328.

⁷⁸*General Conference Journal* (1893), 14.

⁷⁹I. L. Kephart, "The Coming of His Kingdom," *Religious Telescope* (3 June 1908), 3.

⁸⁰Naumann, 398.

⁸¹Within three months of editor Phillippi's death, his successor had announced that "I believe that the main object Jesus Christ had in view was to set up the Kingdom of God upon this earth." "My Creed," *Religious Telescope* (December 11, 1926), 3.

society issue appearing to cause no consistent divergence on the question of the millennium. What was seen as cultural accommodation, and even diabolic apostasy, to the one was viewed by the other side as a higher, end-time manifestation of Christian brotherhood. Each side in the split argued its position by appealing to Otterbein and the “unpartisan” (*unparteiisch*) Pietist tradition of the early UB—the radicals appealed to Otterbein’s exclusion of secret combinations as being antithetical to the openness of that brotherhood; the liberals appealed to the inclusiveness inherent in the brotherhood motif, although their position contradicted the practice of Otterbein and his colleagues. In their minds, they were appealing to the spirit but not the letter of their predecessors.

Epilogue: Split in the Evangelical Association (1891-1894)

Although a further paper is needed to explicate the split in the Evangelical Association (EA) during the same era, it is instructive for our study of the UB split to notice the major points of comparison between the two, since a number of related historical and theological factors are present here as well.

Like the UB, the early EA was deeply imprinted by German Pietism, but the EA environment differed in two respects. First, the early “Albright brethren,” as they were called, were consciously patterned more nearly along the lines of Episcopal Methodism, which means that the Pietist motifs that have previously been identified were interacting here with a more classical Wesleyan polity and doctrinal base. For example, the extended essay on entire sanctification in the EA *Disciplines* from 1809 to 1959 is far more complete than any discussion of that doctrine in the Methodist *Disciplines*,⁸² and the EA is the first American denomination to set forth this doctrine in an official declaration. This fact alone should entitle the EA to more attention in current Wesleyan/Holiness research.⁸³ Second, the EA persisted in the use of German for longer and

⁸²This essay was the work of George Miller, who, after Jacob Albright’s death in 1808, was commissioned to draft a Discipline and Articles of Faith based on a German translation of the Methodist Articles of Religion. However, the essay on sanctification was Miller’s addition to these articles, as well as his article on eschatology. See Behney and Eller, 78-79.

⁸³The statement by Dieter that the Wesleyan Methodists were the first body to identify with an official holiness statement at its founding stands in need of correction. See Melvin Dieter, *The Holiness Revival of the Nineteenth Century* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1974), 125.

more pervasively than did the UB,⁸⁴ which meant that its members maintained a greater use of Pietist sources, and these sources carried an even greater significance for the EA.

The EA experienced considerable internal agitation from debates on Christian holiness that began in 1859 and continued for two decades.⁸⁵ By 1891, the lines that had been drawn over this debate had become complicated by the intrusion of several other factors. These included a personal dispute between two groups of bishops and church editors (the foremost factor); differences concerning church polity, episcopal authority and lay representation; regional identity (West vs. East); and a controversy over the rise of German vs. English in church functions.⁸⁶ The secret society issue was not an issue at stake here, and there were members on both sides of this split who were participants in freemasonry. To a larger extent than the UB, EA membership included German craftsmen and shop owners in small towns and cities who were excluded from the religious and social network of fellow German Lutherans and Catholics because of their nonconformist, revivalist religion. Hence, the lodge provided an important web of social and economic contacts and *Gemeinschaft* for them that gave them assimilation into the larger American culture.

The EA split was precipitated in 1891 when two rival General Conferences were held. The majority group, meeting in Indianapolis and representing three-fifths of the membership of some 150,000, retained the original denominational name, the EA, whereas the minority group met in Philadelphia. In 1894, the latter became the United Evangelical Church (UEC) after a series of divisive legal struggles in church and civil courts. The majority group (the EA) represented the following features: an uncompromising defense of the holiness doctrine, a higher view of episcopal authority, continued denial of lay representation, adherence to the original "trust clause" concerning property ownership, continued reliance on German in church functions, and a greater concentration in the West (e.g., Midwest and Canada), where more recent German immigration was

⁸⁴This influence finally was shattered in the era of World War I, although the German denominational organ, *Der Christliche Botschafter*, continued until 1947, making it the longest running German Protestant religious periodical in American history. See Behney and Eller, 347.

⁸⁵See Ralph K. Schwab, *History of the Doctrine of Holiness in the Evangelical Association* (Menasha, WI: Banta, 1922).

⁸⁶See Terry Heisey, "Immigration as a Factor in the Division of the Evangelical Association," *Methodist History* 19 (October, 1980), 41-57.

concentrated. The EA also maintained control of the rapidly expanding free church mission of the denomination in German-speaking sections of Europe.

By contrast, the UEC represented the following features: a revision of the Articles of Faith and of the section on entire sanctification in the *Discipline* by adopting major quotations from the theology of the Garrett M. E. theologian Milton S. Terry;⁸⁷ adoption of a more limited view of episcopal authority, lay representation in church conferences; greater congregational control of church property; a swifter transition to English in church functions; and a concentration of membership in the older, Eastern sectors of the church, where greater assimilation to American culture had occurred.

It is evident in this split where the conservative/liberal tendencies lay, although the issues that define the later fundamentalist/modernist conflict really are not yet present in the EA and UEC discussion. There were also post- and pre-millennial voices in both groups. The embourgeoisment process, at work in both groups, was operating over against an ethnic religio-cultural conservatism. At the same time, the persistence of the older Pietist motifs of *Wiedergeburt*, *Absonderung*, and *Erneuerung* (new birth, separation from the world, and personal renewal), interwoven with the Wesleyan doctrine of sanctification (*Heiligung*), provided a basis for Christian witness and community life that resisted the secularizing aspects of their bourgeoisifying tendencies.⁸⁸

These issues ceased to be divisive for most Evangelicals in 1921-22, when the two groups reunited to form the Evangelical Church. How the issues were resolved is beyond the scope of our study. A minority group continues, known as the Evangelical Congregational Church. It still adheres to the more radical (congregational) aspects of UEC polity, although it (like the UB Old Constitution Church) is now usually regarded as the more conservative body.

⁸⁷This use of Terry has been carefully documented by Harold Scanlin in his article "The Origin of the Articles of Faith of the United Evangelical Church," *Methodist History* 18 (July, 1980), 219-238.

⁸⁸New light on the EA/UEC split is shed in an unpublished chapter by the late Raymond Albright that had been rejected by the denominational publishers when he submitted his manuscript that became the authoritative history of the denomination. Raymond Albright, *History of the Evangelical Church* (Cleveland & Harrisburg: Evangelical Press, 1942).

Conclusion

This study has sought to show how American “evangelicalism” needs to be broadened to include the contribution of German-American Pietist influences. The groups that mediated these influences in a revivalist mode, especially the UB and EA, became active participants in the wider Wesleyan/Holiness movement and in the struggle to define and secure a Christian America. Donald Dayton’s criteria for evaluating American evangelicalism have been helpful in reevaluating this material. The division of the UB in 1889, and the parallel split within the EA, have become for us a focal point for assessing the relative impact of a set of theological and cultural factors that were transforming German-American evangelicalism as it had been practiced since the eighteenth century. These tensions were also positioning these churches to enter into larger streams of American society in the twentieth century and beyond.

HISTORY AND THEOLOGY IN THE AMERICAN METHODIST SOCIAL GOSPEL: THE PUBLIC/PRIVATE SPLIT REVISITED

by

Christopher H. Evans

In the mid-1980s, Jean Miller Schmidt published a provocative essay that challenged many taken-for-granted assumptions of American Protestant historiography.¹ Analyzing the careers of selected Methodist leaders in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Schmidt argued that these persons embodied a faith integrating individual salvation and social holiness. For Schmidt, John Wesley's refrain, "To reform the continent and to spread scriptural Holiness over these Lands," was a key to understanding the integration of personal evangelism and social justice in American Methodist history. It also accentuated what she believed was a false historical-theological dichotomy between leaders and churches devoted either to social justice or to soul saving—the so-called "public/private split."²

¹Jean Miller Schmidt, "Reexamining the Public/Private Split: Reforming the Continent and Spreading Scriptural Holiness," in *Rethinking Methodist History: A Bicentennial Historical Consultation*, ed. Russell E. Richey and Kenneth E. Rowe (Nashville: Kingswood, 1985), 75-88. A reprint of this essay appears in the volume *Perspectives on American Methodism*, ed. Russell E. Richey, Kenneth E. Rowe, and Jean Miller Schmidt (Nashville: Kingswood, 1993), 228-247. Citations of this article appearing in this essay will be to the original edition.

²Schmidt, 75. The book that largely defined a "two-party" split between evangelicals and liberals in American Protestantism was Martin E. Marty, *Righteous Empire: The Protestant Experience in America* (New York: Dial Press, 1970). In that book, Marty described the fateful "public/private split" which developed in American Protestantism, claiming that without an understanding of that "two-party system" twentieth-century Protestantism was "incomprehensible."

Since her essay first appeared, concerted scholarly effort has brought clarity to the critical role played by Wesleyan faith communions in American culture. These studies have begun to unlock what historian Nathan Hatch calls “the puzzle of American Methodism,”³ clarifying how we understand the connection between personal faith and social holiness in the Wesleyan tradition. At the same time, there has been relatively little interest in addressing one era that Schmidt saw as a key period for understanding the interrelationship between personal faith and social holiness in American Methodism. This is the era of the social gospel. The social gospel had a major influence in shaping much of contemporary Methodism’s theological and institutional identity. Pinpointing how that tradition clarifies the meaning of personal faith and social holiness for contemporary Wesleyans needs fleshing out.

Three questions form the backdrop of my analysis. First, at a time when interest in Methodist history is exploding, why has the social gospel largely been omitted from closer scrutiny by Methodist/Wesleyan scholars? Second, how does the social gospel shed theological insight on what Jean Miller Schmidt sees as the false dichotomy between personal faith and social holiness in Methodist history? Finally, how might the social gospel legacy contribute to the ways Methodists, and other Wesleyan communions, develop models for dialogue and civil discourse across theological divides? The social gospel represents a critical period in American Protestant history. It highlights the contemporary theological chasm separating evangelicals and liberals. Reinterpreting the American Methodist social gospel may lead contemporary Wesleyans to a clearer understanding of what we mean when we speak of personal salvation and social holiness.

The Social Gospel in Methodist Historical Discourse

Coming to a clear definition of the social gospel is not easy.⁴ Most historians identify the social gospel as an outgrowth of late nineteenth-

³Nathan O. Hatch, “The Puzzle of American Methodism,” *Church History* 63 (June 1994): 175-189.

⁴Studies of the American social gospel movement are numerous. For an excellent review of social gospel scholarship, see Ralph E. Luker, “Interpreting the Social Gospel: Reflections on Two Generations of Historiography,” in *Perspectives on the Social Gospel: “Papers from the Inaugural Social Gospel Conference at Colgate Rochester Divinity School,”* ed. Christopher H. Evans (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen Press, 1999), 1-13.

century liberal Protestantism, reflecting the effort of various church leaders to apply Jesus' social teachings to the social-economic conditions of late nineteenth and early twentieth-century America. At the same time, defining the social gospel's reform agenda, pinpointing exact dates for the tradition's historical demarcation, and even uncovering an exact theological pedigree has never been accomplished precisely.⁵

Within American Methodism, the social gospel is associated with an eclectic array of church leaders who addressed a range of social questions concerning temperance, industrialization, economic equality, racism, and anti-militarism. Persons associated with American Methodism's social gospel heritage include Frank Mason North, Harry F. Ward, George A. Coe, Reverdy Ransom, Francis J. McConnell, Harris F. Rall, Ernest Fremont Tittle, G. Bromley Oxnam, and Georgia Harkness.⁶ Additionally, the influence of the Methodist social gospel tradition has been documented in relation to the life and thought of America's greatest twentieth-century social prophet, Martin Luther King, Jr.⁷

⁵One of the most difficult questions for historians is establishing clear parameters around the social gospel. Many studies of American Protestantism mark the social gospel's rise in the final third of the nineteenth-century, coinciding with urban industrialization in the North, and its demise in 1918-1919, a victim of the social and cultural disillusionment caused by World War I. A stream of scholarship, however, has challenged the view that the social gospel "died" after World War I, arguing that the movement entered a new phase of critical reflection and synthesis that extended through World War II. For general treatments of the social gospel after World War I, see Paul Carter, *Decline and Revival of the Social Gospel: Social and Political Liberalism in American Protestant Churches, 1920-1940* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1954); Robert Moats Miller, *American Protestantism and Social Issues, 1919-1939* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1958); and Donald Meyer, *The Protestant Search for Political Realism, 1919-1941* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960).

⁶William McGuire King highlights the important contribution of Methodist leaders to the American Protestant social gospel, especially in the 1920s and 1930s. See William McGuire King, "The Emergence of Social Gospel Radicalism: The Methodist Case," *Church History* 50 (December 1981): 436-449; "'History as Revelation' in the Theology of the Social Gospel," *Harvard Theological Review* 76:1(1983): 109-29; "An Enthusiasm for Humanity: the Social Emphasis in Religion and its Accommodation in Protestant Theology," *Religion and 20th-Century American Intellectual Life*, ed. Michael J. Lacey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 49-77.

⁷See Martin Luther King, Jr., *Stride Toward Freedom* (New York: Harper, 1958), 90-107; Paul Deats and Carol Robb, eds., *The Boston Personalist Tradition in Philosophy, Social Ethics, and Theology* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1986).

Given the scope of this legacy, why has there been little interest in examining the theological foundations of the Methodist social gospel? In part, the neglect rests in the fact that most historical accounts of Methodism written in the 20th century have seen little in the social gospel that was theologically distinct. This attitude is surprising since most of the major histories of American Methodism in the twentieth century were written by liberal scholars.⁸ Paul Hutchinson and Halford Luccock, in their 1926 book *The Story of Methodism*, understood the social gospel as the embodiment of a “comprehensive Christianity” that struck a balance between personal piety and social holiness.⁹ Their efforts, however, to interpret the theological moorings of the social gospel tradition were quite superficial.

In the years after Hutchinson and Luccock’s work, much of the investigation of the American Methodist social gospel concentrated on how the tradition redefined Methodism’s institutional identity. Largely adapting the methodology employed by historian Arthur Schlesinger, William Warren Sweet saw the rise of the Methodist social gospel in a “stimulus-response” fashion.¹⁰ Writing at a time in the 1930s when the social gospel heritage in American Methodism was at its zenith, Sweet saw the Methodist embrace of the social gospel as a sign of the church’s adaptability to the changing contours of secular culture. The social gospel, for Sweet, legitimated Methodism’s place as the most quintessential American church.

Sweet’s characterization of the social gospel as a mark of Methodism’s institutional (not theological) virility set the standard for future scholarly interpretations. Writing a generation after Sweet, Richard Cameron restated the classic historiography of the American Methodist social gospel. First, he saw the Methodists as latecomers to the social gospel. Concurring with an earlier generation of historians, Cameron saw Methodism’s lack of an urban base in late nineteenth-century America as a prohibitive factor in that tradition’s ability to articulate a social gospel.

⁸Christopher H. Evans, “From Militant Methodism to Secularized Christianity: The Place of the Social Gospel in American Methodist History,” *Methodist History* (forthcoming).

⁹Paul Hutchinson and Halford Luccock, *The Story of Methodism* (New York and Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1926), 473-481.

¹⁰William Warren Sweet, *Methodism in American History* (New York & Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1933). See also Arthur Schlesinger, “A Critical Period in American Religion, 1875-1900,” *Massachusetts Historical Society, Proceedings* 64 (1932): 523-47.

Since most social gospelers addressed social-economic issues emerging from urban America, Methodists, initially at least, had little to contribute. Second, Cameron saw Methodist social reform initiatives, epitomized by the foundation in 1907 of the Methodist Federation for Social Service, as a reaction to the cultural environment of the times—not as a creative theological synthesis. Methodists led American Protestantism in the process of institutionalizing the social gospel. However, they contributed little to the tradition that was theologically unique.¹¹

The neglect of the social gospel as a distinctive theological tradition by a generation of liberal scholars set the stage for an emerging generation of neo-Wesleyan scholars to critique Methodism's liberal-social gospel heritage. No book did more to highlight the weaknesses of American Methodism's liberal theological heritage than Robert Chiles's 1965 work, *Theological Transition in American Methodism*.¹² Unlike most of his scholarly predecessors, Chiles sees Methodist history as a tragic narrative, whereby John Wesley's emphases on revelation, sin, and grace gave way to the liberal doctrines of reason, moral goodness, and free will. According to Chiles, no tradition did more violation to Wesleyan theological principles than did Boston Personalism.

For Chiles, the writings of the Personalist theologian Albert C. Knudson signified the final blow in what had been a gradual historical erosion of the classic doctrinal teachings of Wesley. In the form of Personalism, "scriptural revelation was compromised by reason's concern for evidence and logical implication; man was identified in terms of his moral capacity rather than by his captivity in sin; and the sovereignty of God's grace in salvation was qualified by man's intrinsic freedom."¹³ According to Chiles, the liberal distortion of human free will defined the essential theological character of the social gospel. Liberalism "encouraged the further moralization of theological categories and also gave support to the emphasis on the Kingdom of God in the Social Gospel movement which helped polarize growing liberal conviction, inherited from revival and perfectionist traditions, that the whole of life must be brought under God's rule."¹⁴

¹¹Richard M. Cameron, *Methodism and Society in Historical Perspective* (New York and Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1961). See especially chapter seven.

¹²Robert E. Chiles, *Theological Transition in American Methodism: 1790-1935* (New York and Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1965).

¹³*Ibid.*, 187.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 63.

Much Wesleyan scholarship since Chiles shares a similar assessment of liberalism and of the social gospel. The ascendancy of Personalism in the early twentieth century has been seen as a form of theological “Dark Age” for American Methodism, whereby Methodists were driven by the quest for intellectual respectability rather than theological authenticity.¹⁵ However, Methodist scholarship has never addressed a critical historical question regarding the social gospel’s ascendancy in American Methodism: Why did this tradition hold such a strong appeal for many Methodist leaders? Even if one concedes that the Methodists were latecomers to the social gospel, it does not explain the passion in which the social gospel was embraced by many influential Methodist leaders in the period between 1907 and 1918.¹⁶ I believe that the social gospel’s appeal within American Methodism did not center in the church’s quest for institutional virility or intellectual respectability. The social gospel’s appeal centered in the fact that the tradition spoke to Methodists in a way that was distinctively Wesleyan.

Re-Defining the Methodist Social Gospel

What constituted the core theological foundations of the social gospel generally, and of the American Methodist social gospel specifically? Liberal suppositions, especially pertaining to the work of Personalist theologians like Borden Parker Bowne, Albert C. Knudson, and Edgar S. Brightman, played a significant role in shaping the theology of many social gospel exponents in American Methodism. However, as Chiles failed to recognize, one must draw a distinction between theological liberalism and the social gospel.

Many proponents of the social gospel channeled their beliefs through a theological orientation that had much in common with early nineteenth-century Protestant evangelicalism. As H. Richard Niebuhr observed, what distinguished liberal theology from the social gospel was the latter movement’s emphasis on crisis, not optimism.¹⁷ As Niebuhr

¹⁵See, for example, Randy L. Maddox, “Respected Founder/Neglected Guide: The Role of Wesley in American Methodist Theology,” *Methodist History* 37 (January 1999): 71-88.

¹⁶As Schmidt points out in her discussion of Lucy Rider Meyer and Belle Harris Bennett, it could easily be argued that the northern and southern home mission movements were early expressions of the social gospel in American Protestantism.

¹⁷See William McGuire King, “Enthusiasm for Humanity,” 51-52, 76-77.

pointed out in his monumental work, *The Kingdom of God in America*, the social gospel's main exponents, like Walter Rauschenbusch, stressed God's sovereignty and the necessity of conversion.¹⁸

Many Methodist social gospelers illustrate Niebuhr's points. In 1916, Francis McConnell noted that, apart from God, human beings lived in a constant state of sin. For McConnell, "the Methodist motive is fundamentally practical. Men are in sin. The first concern is to get them out of sin."¹⁹ Georgia Harkness affirmed that persons are saved only by God's grace. "We are saved by the grace of God—by the free, gracious, outpouring of God's love upon us and his forgiveness when we repent of our sin and turn to him for cleansing and strength. . . . God can save us only as we meet his conditions and open our lives to receive his power."²⁰ For Methodist social gospelers, conversion was an individual's "passage from moral deadness to moral life which profoundly affects the whole course of life."²¹

At the same time, the social gospel was committed to reinterpreting soteriology in ways that reworked earlier evangelical doctrines. While not denying the importance of doctrines like justification and sanctification, the social gospelers focused their inquiry on what they called "social salvation." The result was their emphasis on the doctrine of the kingdom of God. "The central meaning of the Kingdom is the righteous, loving rule of God," affirmed Harkness. Although the social gospelers stressed the immanence of God, reflecting the crosscurrents of theological liberalism, they juxtaposed God's immanence alongside God's sovereignty. Harkness asserted that "God demands allegiance like a king; he loves us like a father. . . . The rule of God is already present, yet it must come in the fullness of time when men repent and seek to do God's will on earth."²²

Although the social gospel's theological language constantly made reference to the kingdom of God, the tradition's understanding of the kingdom was inseparable from human history. What grounded the social

¹⁸H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God in America* (New York: Harper, 1937), see especially chapter five.

¹⁹Francis J. McConnell, *The Essentials of Methodism* (New York and Cincinnati: The Methodist Book Concern, 1916), 12.

²⁰Georgia Harkness, *Understanding the Christian Faith* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1947), 108.

²¹McConnell, *Essentials of Methodism*, 9.

²²Harkness, 159.

gospelers theologically was not an abstract faith in human goodness. Social gospelers stressed that human history was the arena in which sinful persons could gain their salvation. Historian William McGuire King notes: "Social salvation not only referred to the specific objectives of social reform; it also referred to a personal awareness that one's own salvation rested in the freedom God offers mankind to enter into his atoning activity in history."²³ In this regard, most social gospelers made little, or no, distinction between personal and social salvation—they were two sides of the same coin. As Harry F. Ward wrote in 1916, "The gospel of the Kingdom insists that a man can have no relation with God apart from his relations to his neighbor . . . which means that without losing any of its individual definiteness and effectiveness, evangelism must have a conscious social aim and purpose."²⁴

Central to how the social gospel interpreted the theological significance of history was the way that its exponents wrestled with the shifting social terrain of the early twentieth century. Faced with a society straining under industrialization, social-economic inequality, militarism, and racism, social gospelers believed they were living in a moment of unprecedented social crisis—and opportunity. Consequently, the social gospel's stress on God's immanence reflected a belief that God was in partnership with humanity, transforming social structures and history itself. Writing in 1910, George A. Coe noted that the church faced an unprecedented moment in history: "The more important fact is that the Christian consciousness, for the first time in its whole history, is realizing the profoundly radical nature of its cherished principle of fatherhood and brotherhood."²⁵ Coe's assertion bears out the optimism of the social gospel. From the same article, however, Coe warned, "It is as if the eye of Jesus were turned like a searchlight upon the dividends, the business methods, the votes, the social customs, relations, and influence of each of us. . . . It demands a judgement upon our whole industrial system, our social customs and institutions . . . and even the presuppositions of our laws."²⁶

²³William McGuire King, "'History as Revelation' in the Theology of the Social Gospel," 129.

²⁴Harry F. Ward, *Social Evangelism* (New York: Missionary Education Movement of the United States and Canada, 1915), 18.

²⁵George Albert Coe, "Christianity and Social Ideals," *The Homiletic Review* 59 (February 1910), 106.

²⁶*Ibid.*

Contrary to the view propagated by a later generation of neo-orthodox and post-liberal critics, most social gospelers never embraced any doctrine of “inevitable” social progress.²⁷ Proponents of the social gospel saw the essence of Christianity through one’s constant struggle against the social forces of evil. As William McGuire King observes, “Historical crises were genuine crises; the future of the world did literally hang in the balance.”²⁸ While the social gospelers steadfastly embraced an optimistic postmillennial vision of God’s reign on earth, the triumph of God’s reign, while ultimate, would not be obtained without great pain and sacrifice on the part of humanity. According to King, “Progress took place, but it was episodic. Moments of victory emerged only out of a web of suffering and tragedy.”²⁹ In the process of entering into social struggle, Christians entered into an arena where their labors were inseparable from the redeeming work of God in history. George Coe surmised, “There is no way to find out what heaven can be like except to enter into the work of making a heaven upon earth. And this is salvation, a saving of men to themselves, to society, and to God.”³⁰ History was the sacred arena of God’s redemptive work that established a basis for hope in the future.

The social gospel’s connection of salvation and historical events centered in the doctrine of the atonement, epitomized by Jesus’ suffering and death on the Cross. Quoting Borden Parker Bowne, Georgia Harkness affirmed that Christianity outside of Christ’s atonement was incomprehensible. Through the Cross, God “has entered into the fellowship of our suffering and misery and at infinite cost has taken the world upon his heart that he might raise it to himself.”³¹ Far from abandoning the doctrine of the atonement, the social gospelers emphasized what Harkness called a “redemptive/evangelical” view of the doctrine, whereby the Cross “stands as our perfect pattern of suffering love . . . as the focal point in history

²⁷The term “inevitable progress” was used by Martin Luther King, Jr. in his critique of Walter Rauschenbusch. King reflects a common perspective, arguing that the social gospel advocated a progressivism that believed social reform would be a foregone conclusion. For a critique of this position, see Thomas W. Simpson, “The Prophetic Realism of Walter Rauschenbusch: A Comparative Study with Reinhold Niebuhr and Martin Luther King, Jr.,” in *Perspectives on the Social Gospel*, 117-138.

²⁸William McGuire King, “History as Revelation,” 125.

²⁹Idem, “Enthusiasm for Humanity,” 68.

³⁰Coe, 107.

³¹Harkness, 85.

when Divine Love met and conquered human sin.”³² Through our vicarious suffering with Christ, Harris Rall noted, Christians found the only way to combat the powers of evil in the world. “Whether the reference be to an individual figure, a righteous remnant, or the nation as a whole, the conception is clear: men are bound together indeed, in common suffering, but such suffering may be for the sins of others, and, rightly borne, it may be for the saving of men.”³³ The Cross for social gospelers meant that God would never abandon humanity to the forces of evil.

The final realization of God’s kingdom, however, was not a product of this life, but of the life to come. In Harris Rall’s words, “The final consummation for Christian hope is not this world but the next. At its best this world will only be approximating the goal.”³⁴ Reflecting a common sentiment among many Methodist social gospelers, Rall affirmed that the triumph of the kingdom in history meant “an increasing victory over evil, moral and physical; but that victory can never be complete here under the conditions of this earthly life. In the Father’s house yonder there will be no curse of sin. . . . And the physical evil that belongs to earth will be no more.”³⁵

The Social Gospel and the Wesleyan Theological Heritage

Many Methodist social gospel proponents were heavily influenced by non-Wesleyan theologians, in particular Walter Rauschenbusch. To say that Methodism’s social gospel theological roots were derived only from non-Methodist influences, however, ignores how Methodists left a distinctive legacy upon the tradition.

In her examination of the Canadian social gospel, Phyllis Airhart observes that the attraction of many Methodists to that tradition was that they found an approach to theology that resonated with an earlier evangelicalism. She says: “The primitive mission of Methodism to spread holiness throughout the land in all its organized forms, and its central doctrine that Christianity is simply love made perfect in personal life and orga-

³²Ibid., 83-84.

³³Harris Franklin Rall, *Christianity: An Inquiry into its Nature and Truth* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1940), 341.

³⁴Idem, *Modern Premillennialism and the Christian Hope* (New York & Cincinnati: Abingdon Press, 1920), 241.

³⁵Idem, *The Coming Kingdom: Studies in the Christian Hope* (New York & Cincinnati: Methodist Book Concern, 1924), 113.

nized society, were reasserted and re-interpreted.”³⁶ Airhart’s conclusion also applies to the American Methodist social gospel. Chiles points out that Personalism’s emphasis on reason and experience caused Methodists to overemphasize human goodness and free will in their theological method. However, many Methodist social gospelers displayed a theological orientation that held in tension human freedom *and* human sin.

In his 1916 book *The Essentials of Methodism*, Francis McConnell noted what he saw as four historic themes in Methodist doctrinal teaching—conversion, entire sanctification, education (especially related to children), and the witness of the Spirit. These “essentials” for McConnell were tied around an individual’s experience. For McConnell, experience was not a way to talk about an individual’s moral and ethical obligation in the abstract; experience was the way one spoke of salvation.

The emphasis on experience by Methodist social gospelers revolved around an often misunderstood concept, human personality. For social gospelers, the stress on human personality was synonymous with a continuous process of nurture that began in childhood and extended throughout the life cycle. The emphasis that the social gospel placed upon emerging intellectual movements in religious education and social psychology symbolized how the tradition understood faith development.

Although not discounting the importance of dramatic conversion experiences, the social gospelers believed that faith maturation was an ongoing process. “Spiritual advance is not like the ascent of a stairway,” cautioned McConnell. “It is like a growth in an organism in which periods of long preparation are succeeded by quick flowerings.”³⁷ The Christian’s pursuit of knowledge, gained through family, church, school, and society, was a process where over time one grew in the knowledge of God’s love. In McConnell’s words, through “the orderly unfolding of the child’s own nature, and in the blossoming and flourishing periods which mark successive stages of development, we shall find the new birth, by which we mean a birth through self-surrender into a realm of spiritual insight and devotion. . . .”³⁸ An individual’s social and spiritual development, however, was inseparable from the ways that Methodist social gospelers

³⁶Phyllis D. Airhart, *Serving The Present Age: Revivalism, Progressivism, and the Methodist Tradition in Canada* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1992), 110.

³⁷McConnell, *Essentials of Methodism*, 18-19.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 32.

believed they were called to engage worldly sin. Spiritual growth was only relevant if it led to a transformed social order.

This tension between spiritual growth and social transformation revealed itself in two ways for social gospel Methodists. Distinctive aspects of Wesleyan theology can be seen in the movement's attack against premillennialism and in its reinterpretation of the doctrine of sanctification. Harris Rall's 1916 book *Modern Premillennialism and the Christian Hope* includes a chapter titled "Was John Wesley a Premillennialist?"³⁹ Because of its negative view of history, Rall castigated premillennialism for negating human capacity to respond to grace. He saw in Wesley someone who advocated the steady work of God's power in history, quoting Methodism's founder: "No 'former time' since the apostle left the earth has been better than the present. . . . We are not born out of due time but in the day of his power, a day of glorious salvation, wherein he is hastening to renew the whole race of mankind in righteousness and true holiness."⁴⁰

Rall summarized the key components of Wesley's thought as free grace, divine sovereignty, and human freedom. For Rall, Wesley defined faith as "a personal relation moving in the realm of moral forces. And against the rigid determination of the Calvinistic system, he proclaimed God's will for the salvation of all men, a will whose defeat could have only one source, the refusal of man."⁴¹ Rall's belief that Wesley gave modern Christianity both a positive view of history and a faith grounded in the steady work of God in creation points to how social gospel Methodists reworked John Wesley's understanding of sanctification. "The New Testament doctrine of entire sanctification is that we are to carry the sanctifying spirit into all departments of life," noted McConnell. "If we draw lines beyond which we will not go we must recognize that we are Christians only up to those boundary lines."⁴² In McConnell's view talking about Methodism without a theology of sanctification was mute, because within sanctification were the seeds for social struggle and spiritual growth that served as the basis for the Christian quest for the kingdom of God. According to McConnell, "whether progress in the individual life comes through sharply marked crises, or whether it is a gradual

³⁹Rall, "Was John Wesley a Premillennialist?" in *Modern Premillennialism and the Christian Hope*, 245-253.

⁴⁰Quoted in Rall, *Modern Premillennialism*, 246.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, 253.

⁴²McConnell, *Christian Citizenship* (New York and Cincinnati, 1922), 10.

unfolding . . . the truth is that the essential duty of progress must always be kept before the mind of the Christian.”⁴³

Wesley’s doctrine of sanctification helps explain why many early twentieth-century Methodists found the social gospel an attractive theological option. Sanctification validated for them the imperative for social struggle and clarifies how the movement defined social holiness. McConnell noted that the goal of entire sanctification was that all social groups come to find themselves under the influence of a Christian spirit. “What we seek today,” he said, “is not the formal and official connection between the larger social groups and Christianity, but the sanctification of all these groups by the Christian spirit.”⁴⁴

McConnell’s comments on sanctification also point to the social gospel’s affinity with the promotion of liberal democratic ideals in government, industry, and societal relationships. Democratic values embodied the social gospel hope that unjust social relationships would be transformed by “a righteous group spirit.”⁴⁵ As William McGuire King notes, however, the social gospel’s stress on democratic values and institutions did not mean that salvation rested within these institutions. “The search of the social gospel. . . was not a search for a utopian community to replace a lost idyllic past. It was a genuinely religious search, a search for meaning and value within the structures of modern experience that support human aspirations in the midst of the tension between freedom and destiny.”⁴⁶ Many theologians in the social gospel tradition believed that “reform activity sprang not from a sense of moral obligation alone but primarily from a belief in the social nature of religious experience itself. Social struggle was thus a way of being religious, of serving God, and of experiencing communion with God. In this respect, the social gospel represented a new form of personal religion, not its negation.”⁴⁷

In its own way, the Methodist social gospel tradition reinterpreted the Wesleyan Holy Living tradition.⁴⁸ Methodist social gospelers affirmed

⁴³Idem, *Essentials of Methodism*, 22.

⁴⁴Idem, *Christian Citizenship*, 9.

⁴⁵Ibid., 14-20.

⁴⁶King, “Enthusiasm for Humanity,” 66-67.

⁴⁷Idem, “History as Revelation,” 113.

⁴⁸Walter Rauschenbusch was drawn to the model of small-group piety of early Methodism. Additionally, his theology was influenced by Methodist William Arthur’s book, *The Tongue of Fire*. See Winthrop S. Hudson, ed., *Walter Rauschenbusch: Selected Writings* (New York: Paulist Press, 1984), 17-18.

a Wesleyan dynamic that stressed the interrelationship between divine grace and the necessity of works. Harris Rall surmised that the Christian's ongoing engagement with the social order represented a "divine sacrament," "a place for the experience of God."⁴⁹

The social gospel's theological integration of faith development and social action highlights Wesley's theme that salvation is a partnership between God and humanity. In Georgia Harkness's words, "The social gospel is justified, not in the sense that by it we ourselves can 'build the Kingdom,' but in the obligation to be God's servants in removing obstacles to the abundant life he waits to give."⁵⁰ For Methodist social gospelers this quest to grow in one's faith and to achieve a just social order was, in a true Wesleyan sense, a means of grace. It was an opportunity for humans to actively engage God's grace in a fashion that would serve the present age.⁵¹

The Social Gospel and Civil Discourse

At its worst, the social gospel emphasized a resolute dogmatism that avoided self-examination and growth. At its best, the tradition grounded Methodists in a passion for personal faith and social holiness. As a theological movement that is often seen as exemplifying the modern-day gulf between evangelicals and liberals, it is imperative for us to reevaluate this important tradition.

1. **The Real Failures.** First, I argue that the great failure of the social gospel movement was not in what its critics saw as its naive theological suppositions. In fact, a case can be made that the social gospel did not die a natural death, but passed through numerous stages of self-examination and synthesis in the 1920s and 1930s, leading to the articulation of emerging post-liberal and neo-orthodox perspectives of the mid-twentieth century.⁵² The social gospel's greatest failures relate to two issues: its often ambiguous definition of the church and its proclivity toward an

⁴⁹Quoted from King, "History as Revelation," 128.

⁵⁰Harkness, 161.

⁵¹Wesley's use of the term "means of grace" dovetails with how the social gospel viewed social engagement as a form of holy living. Walter Rauschenbusch employs the concept, relating to the right of working-class persons to obtain a living wage. See Rauschenbusch, "Property and a Job as a Means of Grace," in *Christianizing the Social Order* (New York: MacMillan, 1912), 341-351.

⁵²King, "An Enthusiasm for Humanity," 50.

uncompromising triumphalism. These tendencies were embodied in the contentious career of Harry F. Ward. Through his role as executive secretary of the Methodist Federation for Social Service, Ward was the author of Methodism's first social creed and a major voice of the American Protestant social gospel in the early twentieth century.⁵³ Ward, especially by the late 1920s, articulated an uncompromising social vision that left little role for the church as a faith community. By the 1930s his uncritical embrace of Marxism accompanied an open hostility to the church, castigating those who relied on what he called "the aesthetic tendency" of Methodism (those who, in Ward's mind, overemphasized the role of worship).⁵⁴

Ward's life also illustrates the social gospel tendency to embrace a dogmatic, and arrogant, triumphalism. William McGuire King argues that the metaphor that best described the social gospel's image of God was a "God of Battles," "a God of creative power who 'bears down' on history as the ground of possibility."⁵⁵ This metaphor explains the optimism of many social gospelers who believed that they were not only advocating for righteous causes, but for divine ones. God "is the ground of optimism," noted Rall. "That is why we dare to talk of banishing disease and driving out poverty and overthrowing oppression."⁵⁶ However, the "God of Battles" metaphor also suggests that the idealism of the social gospel reflected an orientation that saw compromise as a sign of moral weakness. Harry Ward's biographer, David Nelson Duke, describes Ward's theological stance as a "pragmatic holy war dualism" that drew sharp and irrevocable barriers between good and evil, often expressed in crusading and militaristic terms.⁵⁷ As Ward asserted in 1918: "In a desperate military situation, oftentimes the only possible defense is a vigorous offensive.

⁵³See David Nelson Duke, "Harry F. Ward, Social Gospel Warrior in the Trenches: The Social Gospel's Staying Power During the War and Its Aftermath," in *Perspectives on the Social Gospel*, 197-219.

⁵⁴Ward's dogmatism is apparent in his critique of the famed Methodist social gospel preacher Ernest Fremont Tittle. See Robert Moats Miller, *How Shall They Hear Without a Preacher?: The Life of Ernest Fremont Tittle* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1971), 391; Christopher H. Evans, *Social Gospel Liberalism and the Ministry of Ernest Fremont Tittle: a Theology for the Middle Class* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen Press, 1996), 237-239.

⁵⁵King, "Enthusiasm for Humanity," 70.

⁵⁶Quoted in King, "Enthusiasm for Humanity," 70.

⁵⁷Duke, 206-213.

This is now the case with the ethical teaching and practice of Christianity. . . . If we do not advance, then we retreat.”⁵⁸

The social gospel represented the culmination of an era when Protestant churches defined their mission through the metaphor of “Christianization,” whereby the church sought to impose its theological values on American public morality. At the end of the twentieth century, evangelical Christians who stress the imperative of bringing “Christian values” to America sound much like social gospellers of an earlier time. Schmidt points to the continuity between the social gospel and segments of contemporary evangelicalism when she observes that one of the driving factors behind the social gospel was “an attempt to bring traditional values such as the importance of community into a modernizing public world.”⁵⁹

Despite the common assertion that the social gospel placed too much emphasis on God’s love over God’s judgement, the reverse was often the case. Some Methodist social gospel leaders, like Ward, ultimately saw the pursuit of social justice as an ethical sledge hammer, not as a means of grace. However, the Methodist social gospel heritage has much to teach contemporary Wesleyans about the nature of civil discourse. First, I believe that Methodist social gospel theologies are more in continuity with Wesley’s thought than has been acknowledged. While optimistic in its view of human free will, the social gospel defined itself around the imperative that faith was a constant struggle against sin, a struggle that helped reinterpret for a generation of early twentieth-century Methodist leaders the meaning of sanctification.

Although social gospellers did not reject accounts of dramatic conversion experiences (or accounts of instantaneous entire sanctification), they emphasized that traditional language of conversion-sanctification must be related to social-historical processes. In Francis McConnell’s words: “Upheavals may indeed accompany self-surrender, and self-surrender may be marked by joining a church, but the center of the new birth is a surrender of the will in response to which the new influences, which we think of as divine, begin to lift the life toward higher levels.”⁶⁰ For Methodist social gospellers, true conversion was not a simple matter of personal confession; it was a confession of one’s accountability to God

⁵⁸Quoted in Duke, 207.

⁵⁹Schmidt, 85.

⁶⁰McConnell, *The Essentials of Methodism*, 16.

and neighbor. Explained McConnell: "This system of social consequences leads out to certain very practical implications of the Methodist doctrine of sanctification. We have come to see today that a man shows himself by what he does, that he is in a sense where he acts, and that he is in the relations that obtain between him and his followers."⁶¹

Wesleyans need to be mindful of Theodore Runyon's recent observation that the essence of John Wesley's understanding of sanctification is faithfulness to the Great Commandment, love of God and love of neighbor. Consequently, salvation "points to the divine goal not just of reconciliation and a new status in the eyes of God, but the gracious re-creation of both individuals and the social world through the renewal of the image of God in humanity. It holds out the promise that through the transforming energy of divine love reflected into the world the future can indeed surpass the present."⁶² Runyon's assessment of Wesley's theology of sanctification fits perfectly with the theological orientation of many American Methodist social gospelers.

2. A Practical Theology. Second, the social gospel reminds us that any Wesleyan theology is practical theology. One of the reasons that scholars dismiss the social gospel is they see it as a movement antithetical to doctrinal formation. It is true that most social gospelers were critical of what they saw as outmoded conceptions of Christian doctrine. At the same time, Methodist social gospelers believed that one's experience was never isolated from Methodism's doctrinal heritage. "Methodism looks upon everything except human experience itself as instrumental to experience," observed McConnell. "Doctrines, organizations, rules of conduct are but means of grace; that is, tools for the furtherance of the Christian life."⁶³ Responding to the argument that Methodist theological seminaries were getting too liberal (in 1916!), McConnell commented: "If criticism is passed upon Methodist theological schools for liberal tendencies, let it be remembered that only those schools where radical views are faced and thought through turn out true conservatives."⁶⁴

McConnell's view reflects the recent sentiments of Henry Knight and Don Saliers, who argue that the Wesleyan tradition, at its best,

⁶¹Ibid., 24.

⁶²Theodore Runyon, *The New Creation: John Wesley's Theology Today* (Nashville: Abingdon Press), 231.

⁶³McConnell, *Essentials of Methodism*, 41.

⁶⁴Ibid., 64.

emphasized the essential connection between doctrine and experience.⁶⁵ According to Knight and Saliers, doctrine in the Wesleyan tradition “includes correct information about God,” but it also is “engaged knowledge that emotionally connects the knower with the known.”⁶⁶ This assertion explains the high premium that many Methodist social gospelers placed on worship and pastoral care. In juxtaposition to the dogmatism of Harry Ward, several social gospel Methodists saw pastoral care not simply as a therapeutic means of spiritual comfort; it was the primary means where one’s social conscience was stirred through an encounter with the divine will.⁶⁷ The Methodist social gospel tradition fits into a Wesleyan legacy of “practical divinity,” whereby doctrine often served a pastoral, not systematic function.

Georgia Harkness cautioned as follows: “It is a mistake . . . to make worship in the Church an emotional or aesthetic luxury unrelated to the hard requirements of Christian living; it is a mistake, on the other hand, to suppose that the Church can make the world better unless its people are brought through worship into a vital encounter with God.”⁶⁸ Those who claim the heritage of the social gospel need to see the connection between how the church as a community of worship, prayer, and praise is inseparable from the church’s commitment to social justice.

3. Personal Faith and Social Holiness. The social gospel also clarifies what I see as an often overlooked sub-text of Jean Miller Schmidt’s analysis. Any theological discussion that drives a wedge between history and theology contributes to a false dichotomy between personal faith and social holiness. This assertion serves as a warning for contemporary Wesleyans who seek to discern what is and what is not Wesleyan. Robert Chiles argues that history teaches us more about human folly than the revelatory power of God. The “effort to improve the future by lessons

⁶⁵Henry H. Knight III and Don E. Saliers, *The Conversation Matters: Why United Methodists Should Talk With One Another* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999).

⁶⁶*Ibid.*, 34.

⁶⁷The primacy of pastoral care as a means of social conversion was a centerpiece of many liberal ministers, who rose to prominence in American Methodism in the first two decades of the twentieth century. See Christopher H. Evans, “The Social Gospel as Pastoral Ministry: The Example of Ernest Fremont Tittle,” *Methodist History* 35 (April 1997): 135-147.

⁶⁸Harkness, 151-152.

learned from the past may be a covert stratagem to escape the demands of the present. . . . It is in the present that the evangelical encounter with the living God takes place.”⁶⁹ However, what Methodist history teaches us, as Schmidt points out, is the range of human responses to God’s grace, modeling how faith and works can be integrated into the present. “We need,” she says, “to encourage people who do not believe that their efforts make a difference by helping to acquaint them with heroes and heroines of their own tradition (as well as other traditions) who combined personal faith and social vision and action in their time.”⁷⁰

Historical study is not just designed to find instructive models that can inspire us. It is to help us understand something that the social gospelers knew better than many other strands of Wesleyan theology, namely that history and theology are interconnected disciplines. As Wesleyans, we need to passionately avoid the trivialization of history, seeing it only as a distant cousin to theology. Nathan Hatch points to the tendency of Methodist scholarship to focus only on the intellectual development of the tradition, ignoring how theological beliefs translated into practice.⁷¹ What makes a figure like John Wesley meaningful to the present, as Theodore Runyon argues, is not just the intellectual underpinnings of Wesley’s theology, but the way Wesley’s theology emerged out of praxis.⁷²

If contemporary Wesleyans believe that a discussion of doctrine is critical to the future, we not only need to broaden our discussion of what we mean when we speak of practical theology; we need to see how our theologies emerge through concrete historical faith communities. Together we need to ponder the words of Walter Rauschenbusch that “history is the sacred workshop of God.”⁷³

4. Judgment and Grace. Finally, like all strands of our Wesleyan heritage, the social gospel affirms that we are constantly under judgment and the recipients of divine grace. I believe what church history teaches us is not a narrative of faith communities and people who were “right” or “wrong” when it came to interpreting the critical doctrinal issues of the day. Church history shows us narratives of individuals and faith commu-

⁶⁹Chiles, 197.

⁷⁰Schmidt, 86.

⁷¹Hatch, “Puzzle of American Methodism,” 184.

⁷²Runyon, see especially chapter five.

⁷³Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianizing the Social Order*, 121.

nions who glimpsed part of God's sacred truth—but not the whole truth. The social gospel emphasis on the dignity and worth of the individual reminds us that, not only are we entitled to being treated with civility, but that each of us witnesses to an element of sacred truth—but never the whole truth—of God's new creation.

Finish the Baking

Francis McConnell wrote that the problem with most doctrinal discussions is that they were “half baked.” He acknowledged that many people who turned to the church for clarity on social and theological matters found only ambiguity and confusion. McConnell's solution was simple and instructive. “Half-baked doctrines are indeed poor food, but they have value in a sphere where no baking has been done. All that we have to do with some half-baked doctrines to make them wholesome is to finish the baking.”⁷⁴ The social gospel's contribution to the tradition of Wesleyan theology reflects a hope that our willingness to “finish the baking” is not a statement about a need to reach a single consensus on every doctrinal and social question. It is an affirmation, however, that all may grow in the clarity of God's love, defining for future generations the essence of a Wesleyan vision for the new creation.

⁷⁴McConnell, *Christian Citizenship*, 12.

CHRISTIAN PERFECTION AMONG NINETEENTH-CENTURY AFRICAN- AMERICAN PREACHING WOMEN

by

Keith A. Chism

The focus here is on a long neglected aspect of the African-American religious experience, namely the contributions of nineteenth-century African-American preaching women. The specific content addressed is drawn largely from spiritual autobiographies which offer a picture of the struggles endured in the quest of these women to be bearers of the “good news.” While the majority of persons who are heralded as distinguished progenitors of African-American history happen to be male, it certainly would be wrong if the significant stories of these nineteenth-century African-American preaching women were not told.

I address here the following: (1) the importance of spiritual autobiography and its relevance to the struggle of nineteenth-century African-American preaching women; (2) a brief overview of the lives of six nineteenth-century African-American preaching women; and (3) the doctrine of Christian perfection in the witness and preaching of these women. I endeavor to reach some conclusions relative to the differing notions these women held about Christian perfection. It is my hope that the end result is clear identification of which of these nineteenth-century African-American preaching women possessed the most clear understanding of what John Wesley meant by “Christian perfection.”

The Importance and Relevance of Spiritual Autobiography

While it may be widely assumed that the first persons who offered the world the gift of Afro-American literature were male, a cursory glance at the history of this subject quickly dispels this erroneous notion. The birth of the Afro-American literary tradition can be traced to 1773 when Phillis Wheatley published a book of poetry. While Wheatley's book would gain widespread recognition, the struggle through which she came to publish the text was the larger part of Wheatley's accomplishment.¹

It was during the year 1772 that Wheatley, a young African girl, was asked to come to a specified room in the city of Boston to endure an oral examination administered by some of the most celebrated citizens of the city. Among the members of the august assembly were: John Erving, a prominent Boston merchant; the Reverend Charles Chauncy, pastor of the Tenth Congregational Church; and John Hancock, who would later distinguish himself as a signatory to the Declaration of Independence. The principle members of this assembly were Thomas Hutchinson, governor of Massachusetts, and Andrew Oliver, his lieutenant governor.²

We can only speculate regarding the kinds of questions that were asked of Ms. Wheatley. She could have been asked to give detailed insights about the Greek and Latin gods and poets she had alluded to so frequently in her work. They may have asked her to conjugate a verb in Latin or to translate some selected passages from the Latin. This panel may have even requested that Ms. Wheatley recite from memory key selections from the texts of John Milton and Alexander Pope, who were the two primary influences cited by Wheatley as influences on her work.³

While it is difficult to ascertain the specific content of this inquisition, it is clear that the responses given by Wheatley were convincing enough that they agreed to write, sign, and publish a two-paragraph attestation that became the primary prefatory content in her *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral*, which would be published in London in 1773. In part it read:

¹Henry Louis Gates, Jr., General Editor, *Six Women's Slave Narratives* (with an Introduction by William L. Andrews). The Schomburg Library of Nineteenth-Century Black Women Writers. (New York: Oxford Press, 1988), vii.

²*Ibid.*, viii.

³*Ibid.*

We whose Names are under-written, do assure the World, that the Poems specified in the following Page, were (as we verily believe) written by Phillis, a young Negro Girl, who was but a few Years since, brought an uncultivated Barbarian from *Africa*, and has ever since been, and now is, under the Disadvantage of serving as a Slave in a Family in this Town. She has been examined by some of the best Judges, and is thought qualified to write them.⁴

While Wheatley would distinguish herself as the first African-American poet, male or female, there were other African-American women writers who contributed to the literary genre. Ann Allen Shockley chronicles the contributions of African-American women writers from the eighteenth through the early twentieth centuries, which points up the fact that women's autobiographies increased dramatically during this period. Noting the significant contributions of Phyllis Wheatley and Lucy Terry, who had established themselves as the first African-American female poets, she also lifts up the important work of Ann Plato. Plato, who wrote sixty-eight years after Wheatley's publication of *Poems and Various Subjects, Religious and Moral*, is credited as the writer of the second book by an African-American writer.⁵ The importance of Plato's work is that it clearly reflects both an individual and a communal understanding of the experiences of African-American people generally and the experiences of African-American women specifically.⁶

Clarice J. Martin notes that religious Black women who make up the group that wrote spiritual autobiographies in the nineteenth century may have sought sanction for their itinerant ministries within their ecclesiastical hierarchies, but often they were not granted the needed support to pursue their ministries. The end result was that they faced seemingly insurmountable challenges in the quest to give voice to their calling and spiritual experience. She further notes that nineteenth-century Black women demonstrated a freedom that came from their faith as they chronicled both the search for Christian perfection and the development of their

⁴Ibid., vii-ix.

⁵Allen Ann Shockley, *Afro-American Women Writers, 1746-1933. An Anthology and Critical Guide* (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1988), 4.

⁶Ann Plato, *Essays: Including Biographies and Miscellaneous Pieces in Prose and Poetry*. The Schomburg Library of Nineteenth-Century Black Women Writers, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., General Editor (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

gifts of ministerial leadership and service. These women heralded the importance of religious duty and instruction as they continued on their quest for sanctification and wholeness.⁷

We consider the lives of several African-American preaching women who are helpful in assisting us in understanding the struggle for equality and inclusion in both the Black church and in the church in general. Because of the discovery of significant pieces of African-American literature known as the spiritual autobiographies, we are given insight into the lives of African-American preaching women who fought against exceedingly discouraging odds in order to be granted the right to exercise their gifts for ministry within the church. The women considered here are Jarena Lee, Zilpha Elaw, Rebecca Cox Jackson, Amanda Berry Smith, Sojourner Truth, and Julia A. J. Foote. While all of African-American preaching women of this period did not leave their autobiographies, many did and they provide for us a picture of their challenges and struggles as they attempted to preach the Gospel.

Six Nineteenth-Century African-American Women Preachers

1. Jarena Lee. Jarena Lee was the second Black woman known to preach. She was born in Cape May, New Jersey, on February 11, 1783. While little is known about her childhood, she was hired out by her parents at the age of seven to work as an apprentice to a family for seven years. It was during this period that she gained domestic skills, as well as learning how to read and write. When Jarena Lee became twenty-one, she experienced a religious awakening when she heard a passage from the Psalms read by a Presbyterian minister.⁸

Lee would go to Philadelphia where she would affiliate with a white Methodist congregation. After being there for three months, she began to experience the feeling of being distant from the members of the church. She longed for fellowship with Black Methodists; thus, she sought out the

⁷Clarice Martin, "Biblical Theodicy and Black Women's Spiritual Autobiography—"The Miry Bog, the Desolate Pit, a New Song in My Mouth," in *A Troubling In My Soul-Womanist Perspectives On Evil & Suffering*, ed. Emilie M. Townes (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1993), 19-20.

⁸"Religious Experience and Journal of Mrs. Jarena Lee, Giving an Account of Her Call to Preach The Gospel" in *Spiritual Narratives* (with an Introduction by Susan Houchins). The Schomburg Library of Nineteenth-Century Black Women Writers. Louis Henry Gates, Jr., General Editor (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 3-4.

Reverend Richard Allen. After hearing Allen preach, she united with the African Methodists:

The man who was to speak in the afternoon of that day, was the Rev. Richard Allen, since bishop of the African Episcopal Methodists in America. During the labors of this man that afternoon, I had come to the conclusion, that this is the people to which my heart unites, and it so happened, that as soon as the service closed he invited such as felt a desire to flee the wrath to come, to unite on trial with them—I embraced the opportunity.⁹

In 1809, Lee felt the call to preach and attempted to have this sanctioned by the Black Methodist Church. She was denied a license to preach by Allen. Despite this obstacle, she would enter the ministry.¹⁰ Her journal records her heartfelt conviction on the subject: “If a man may preach, because the Saviour died for him, why not a woman? seeing he died for her also. Is he not a whole Saviour, instead of a half one? as those who hold it wrong for a woman to preach, would seem to make it appear.”¹¹ In 1811, at the age of twenty-eight, she married Joseph Lee, the pastor of a Black church at Snow Hill which was six miles from Philadelphia. William L. Andrews states that the move to Snow Hill left Jarena feeling displaced and it robbed her of her energy and greatly affected her efforts to hold informal evangelistic meetings in her home. Within six years, greater tragedy struck when five members of her family, including her husband, died. Jarena Lee was left with two young children to care for.¹² She would return to Philadelphia in 1819.

Lee would not allow the exclusion voiced by male ministers to hinder her work. She would conduct prayer meetings that included both men and women, a practice which stood in stark opposition to the prevailing attitudes of the day. Making a bold, public statement that expressed her sense of calling, during a worship service in Bethel Church she extemporaneously offered exhortation from the text being offered by the minister behind the pulpit. Bishop Allen now endorsed the ministry of Lee, gave

⁹Ibid., 5.

¹⁰Ibid., 10-11.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²William L. Andrews, ed., with an Introduction by William L. Andrews, *Three Black Women's Autobiographies of the Nineteenth Century Sisters of the Spirit* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 5.

her his blessing, and would allow her to speak in churches throughout Pennsylvania. She would also travel with him and other ministers to New Jersey and New York. Lee's preaching tours would cover the Middle Atlantic and Northern states from Baltimore, Maryland, to Rochester, New York, and as far west as Dayton, Ohio. She would preach to both Black and White. The relationship would remain cordial with Richard Allen and she would maintain a place as a "traveling exhorter" in the all-male hierarchy of the African Methodist Episcopal Church.¹³

Lorine Cummings correctly observes that Jarena Lee was both womanist and Afrocentric because she refused to accept the definitions of ministry that were externally imposed by society and that were internally imposed by the African-American church. Cummings rightly states that Lee created a legacy of hope and inspiration that is the essence of womanist thought and Afrocentrism.¹⁴

2. Zilpha Elaw. While the available details of her early life are sketchy, it appears that Zilpha Elaw was born free around 1790 and grew up near Philadelphia. Her family likely was religious in its orientation. At the age of twelve, Zilpha's mother died and the young girl was placed in the home of a Quaker family where she attended their religious meetings. It seems that the teachings of the Quakers had little effect on her. Viewing herself as an unrepentant sinner, she would draw closer to God and describes her conversion as occurring at an early age and says that her whole being was filled with the Holy Ghost.¹⁵

In 1810 Zilpha married Joseph Elaw. She depicts him as a man of worldly ways, which would lead her to advise her "unmarried sisters" to resist the temptation to marry a nonbeliever. She also states that her husband attempted to persuade her to denounce her religion and to cease attending church. In 1815 the couple would move from Philadelphia to Burlington, New Jersey, which represented a more wholesome environ-

¹³Ibid., 5-6.

¹⁴Lorine L. Cummings, "A Womanist Response to the Afrocentric Idea—Jarena Lee, Womanist Preacher," in *Living The Intersection—Womanism And Afrocentrism In Theology*, Cheryl J. Sanders, ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 63-64.

¹⁵"Memoirs of the Life, Religious Experience, Ministerial Travels, and Labours of Mrs. Elaw," in *Three Black Women's Autobiographies of the Nineteenth Century—Sisters of the Spirit*, William L. Andrews, ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 53-61.

ment as far as Zilpha was concerned.¹⁶ In Burlington she would become deeply engaged in her religious work. In 1817 she attended her first camp meeting. Because the camp meetings were most meaningful to her, she would attend them as often as possible. In the year that followed, her sister was near death. In the midst of this experience, her sister became possessed by the Holy Ghost. In a vision, she saw Jesus and was told by an angel that she was to “tell Zilpha that she must preach the gospel.”¹⁷

It would not be until 1821, while Zilpha was attending another camp meeting, that she would be told by a voice to go outside. It was there that she began to exhort in a loud voice. She gave herself over to the power of the Holy Ghost and accepted the call to preach.¹⁸ By acknowledging the call of God upon her life, Elaw came to view the demands of being a wife, mother, family member, and friend as being secondary concerns in relation to her mission to engage in preaching and teaching. Her husband would be ridiculed because his wife preached; he would die in January of 1823. While Zilpha would experience persecution from family and friends, she embarked upon an itinerate ministry in 1827. She would preach for thirteen years in the Northeast and even in some small Southern towns, fearing being arrested, as well as facing the threat of being sold into slavery. The news of this Black women proclaiming the gospel would spread far and near. She would travel to England in June 1840, where she remained for six years. It was here that she published her memoirs in 1846. After the publication of her work, not much is known about her remaining years. It is highly possible that she died in England.¹⁹

3. Rebecca Cox Jackson. Rebecca Cox Jackson was born in Hornstown, Pennsylvania, in 1795. Like many of the nineteenth-century African-American preaching women, she was not born into slavery. She was raised by her mother, Jane, and her maternal grandmother. Cox would move to Philadelphia where she worked as a seamstress. She lived with her brother, Joseph Cox, who was a tanner and local preacher at the Bethel A.M.E. Church. At the age of thirty-five, she would marry Samuel S. Jackson.²⁰

¹⁶Ibid., 61-65.

¹⁷Ibid., 67-73.

¹⁸Ibid., 78-82.

¹⁹Ibid., 90-138.

²⁰Jean McMahon Humez, “Jackson, Rebecca Cox,” in *Black Women in America: An Historical Encyclopedia*. Vol. 1. Darlene Clark Hine, Elsa Barkley Brown, and Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, General Editors (Brooklyn: Carlson, 1993), 626-627.

Jackson was best known for an aspect of her ministry that made her distinct from many of the other African-American women ministers of her time. She was an advocate of celibacy for those who wished to engage in the holy life. Jackson accused the African Methodist Episcopal Church of fostering “carnality” (having sexual intercourse for pleasure). This belief served to alienate her from her husband, family, and friends. Jackson was a staunch believer in spiritual sanctification; she relied on her “inner voice.” She believed that she had direct personal communication with the Holy Spirit.²¹

During the years 1830 through the early 1840s, Jackson would serve as an itinerant preacher. She joined the Shakers in Watervliet, New York, who embraced similar notions regarding celibacy. This group also focused on spiritual experience and advocated the notion of a non-gender specific deity. She would later become concerned about the Shakers because of their lack of evangelistic zeal when it came to the proselytization of African Americans. She left Watervliet in 1851 and returned briefly in 1857, when she would be granted permission to found and lead a Shaker family group in Philadelphia. She led this group of Blacks and women for about two decades until her death in 1871.²²

4. Amanda Berry Smith. Born a slave in Long Green, Maryland, on January 23, 1837, Amanda Berry Smith was the second child born to Samuel and Miriam Berry. Her father worked hard and saved enough money to purchase the freedom of the entire family. While she was born a slave, it appears that she had very little firsthand knowledge of its cruelty. Smith would receive only a few months of formal education; however, she would teach herself to read and write. She lived and worked as a domestic in Shrewsburg, a small town near York, Pennsylvania, beginning in the year 1850. There she attended the Methodist Episcopal Church. The membership, tragically, expressed their thoughts about the “place” of Blacks. Because they believed that Blacks held a subordinate role in the society at large and in the church, she was always the last to be called upon during the church’s classes. This ultimately caused her to be late for her domestic job. She had to choose between going to church and keeping her job. She would choose the job.²³

²¹Ibid.

²²Ibid.

²³Smith, Amanda Berry, *An Autobiography: The Story of the Lord’s Dealings with Mrs. Amanda Berry Smith* (Chicago: Christian Witness, 1893), 28, 31.

Smith married her first husband, Calvin Devine, in 1854 at the age of seventeen and moved to Lancaster, Pennsylvania. In 1855 she became seriously ill and almost died. While in this state of illness, one day she had a vision that she encountered an angel and saw herself preaching at a large camp meeting that was attended by several thousand people. After a period of spiritual turmoil, she was converted a year later on March 17, 1856. She would continue to work as a domestic; it was during this period that she and her husband separated.²⁴

In 1862, Smith went to Philadelphia where she met her second husband, James Smith, who was a local preacher and an ordained deacon in the A.M.E. Church. They moved to New York and Smith would soon discover she had made another mistake relative to marriage. Suffering from the effects of emotional abuse by her husband, she sought the counsel of Mother Jones, who was a member of the Sullivan Street A.M.E. Church. Mother Jones, a staunch believer in holiness, told Smith that prior to sanctification, she had endured the same trials with her husband. It seemed that Mother Jones believed that sanctification meant that one became the possessor of enduring grace.²⁵

After the death of her second husband in 1869, Smith began preaching at revivals, primarily at Black churches in New York and New Jersey. While she met great resistance from many Black ministers, Smith eventually won support for her work as an evangelist. She traveled throughout the Northeast from 1870 to 1878, which would win her a national following. During this period, she became a nationally known holiness evangelist. In 1878 her fame even spread to England, where she went for a three-week stay that turned into twelve years. During this time, she also went to Africa and India. Upon her return to the United States in 1890, she devoted her time to writing her memoirs and established a home for Black orphans. She would also become popular among white feminist reformers in the woman's rights and suffrage movements.²⁶

5. Sojourner Truth. One of the interesting aspects of the life of Sojourner Truth is that she has been celebrated as one of the foremost nineteenth-century Black preaching women. Although Truth is revered as one of the more effective African-American leaders of her time, she was

²⁴Ibid., 42-49.

²⁵Ibid., 57-62.

²⁶Ibid., 174, 182-184, 193-198.

not well known nor widely heralded among the vast majority of African-American people. While the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church cites her as a member of their communion and celebrates her life as an African-American preaching woman, she is rarely mentioned in their publications of the period. Born Isabella Baumfree, she was a slave in Ulster County, New York, in 1797 and was free by 1826. As early as 1829, she moved to New York City; she worked as a domestic.

Baumfree was exposed to many activists and Black abolitionists through her involvement in the A.M.E.Z. Church. Yet, because she spoke in a broken Dutch-English dialect, she felt that she would not be able to attract Blacks as a preacher. She perceived herself to be ignorant and inarticulate. This caused her to feel a sense of estrangement from the Black community.²⁷ She would spend some time with the white Methodists, who viewed her as somewhat of an enigma. They saw her as a highly spiritual, exotic Black woman who drew marginal levels of respect for the spiritual insights that she shared. The sad reality, however, was that few whites viewed her as their equal.²⁸

After embracing the religious practices of Elijah Pierson, whom she worked for as a domestic, Baumfree affiliated with Robert Matthias's small cult group, the Kingdom. Matthias was dictatorial and advocated faith healing, strict religious practices such as washing and kissing of members' feet, and sex between "match spirits" (Matthias did not see marriages performed by ministers as being binding). Baumfree allowed Matthias to beat her. She mistakenly believed him to be God on earth. She would work for Matthias as a domestic. After the mysterious death of Pierson, the Kingdom fell apart and Matthias would be tried for murder. His trial would end in an acquittal.²⁹

Baumfree was like many of the other African-American women preachers of this period and contended that she freely conversed with the Holy Spirit. On June 1, 1843, which was the Day of Pentecost, she was converted and felt compelled to embrace the call of the Holy Ghost. The call, in its power, inspired her to change her name to Sojourner Truth.³⁰

²⁷Carlton Mabey and Susan Mabey Newhouse, *Sojourner Truth: Slave, Prophet, Legend* (New York: New York University Press, 1995), 26-27.

²⁸*Ibid.*

²⁹*Ibid.*, 30-36.

³⁰Nell Irvin Painter, *Sojourner Truth: A Life, A Symbol* (New York: Norton, 1996), 74.

While it was always dangerous to travel alone as a woman, Truth left her family and her job and began a new life as a preacher. Traveling to New England, she would spend the 1840s and 1850s as an antislavery lecturer. She would have a significant impact on the antislavery and suffrage movements.³¹

6. Julia A. J. Foote. Julia A. J. Foote was born in Schenectady, New York, in 1823. She was the daughter of former slaves who purchased Julia's freedom and espoused the virtues of Christianity. An important concept she would learn was the notion of "the fruits of slavery," which would give her a necessary foundation for preaching a social gospel. Because she could not attend Schenectady's segregated schools, her parents put her in service in a white household that would ultimately provide her the opportunity to attend a country school outside the city. While Julia was between the ages of ten and twelve, she studied diligently, applying herself to the study of the Bible. When she became twelve, Julia returned to the home of her parents to care for her four younger siblings. Shortly thereafter, the family moved to Albany, New York, where Julia would be converted at the age of fifteen. She was united with an African Methodist church. While Julia had a great desire to pursue education, it was made difficult by the pervasiveness of racial prejudice. Existing doubts about her salvation made what she termed the "sweet peace" of sanctification very significant to her. While this belief was met with skepticism by her parents and pastor, Foote was convinced that she received it about a year and a half after she was converted.³²

When she was eighteen, Julia married a sailor named George Foote and they moved to Boston. Upon arrival, Foote joined the African Methodist Episcopal Church and began to teach the wonders of sanctification. Her husband found her actions objectionable and threatened to send her back to her parents if she did not cease preaching. Refusing to obey his wishes, she more ardently pursued her ministry and became convinced that God had called her to preach.³³ The minister of the A.M.E. Zion Church in Boston, Jehiel Beman, was vehemently opposed to those among the congregation who desired to give Julia Foote access to the pulpit. She would be accused of being a "schismatic" and was removed as a

³¹Mabee and Newhouse, 44-45.

³²Andrews, 9.

³³Ibid.

member of the church. She petitioned the denomination; however, her petition was either ignored or rejected.³⁴

Foote would travel for more than fifty years as an itinerant evangelist and a Methodist holiness preacher, making her presence felt in camp meetings, revivals, and in churches in California, the Midwest, the Northeast, and Canada. In 1879, she presented her spiritual autobiography, *A Brand Plucked from the Fire*, which presents a rationale for including women preachers in the polity of the Christian church. Foote's writing was clearly from a feminist perspective.³⁵

In 1895, Foote became the first woman to be ordained deacon and in 1899 was the second woman to be ordained an elder in the A.M.E.Z. Church. This positioned her to be a role model for those women aspiring to be ministers; it also gave her a prominent place in the struggle for equality and ordination of women in the church.³⁶

The Doctrine of Christian Perfection

One of the significant points of learning that arises from this discussion is that Jarena Lee, Zilpha Elaw, and Julia Foote experienced a special sense of empowerment as a result of the spiritual experience of sanctification. For each of these women, the initial conversion experience was merely a prelude to what early Methodists termed the "second blessing."³⁷ According to Albert C. Outler, John Wesley believed and taught an explicit doctrine of "holiness," which represented the goal and crown of the Christian life. There are three Christian fundamentals that are minimal expectations in order to embrace the Wesleyan belief system: (1) sin and repentance (i.e., self-knowledge); (2) justification and pardon (i.e., assurance); and (3) "holiness of heart and life." For Wesley, terminology such as "sanctification," "perfect love," and "Christian perfection" were synonyms in his vocabulary for "holiness."³⁸

There is an important parallel that is pointed out by William L. Andrews. He notes that in the conversion narratives of Jarena Lee, Zilpha

³⁴Ibid., 9-10.

³⁵Bettye Collier-Thomas, *Daughters of Thunder—Black Women Preachers And Their Sermons, 1850-1979* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1998), 59.

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Andrews, 14.

³⁸Albert C Outler, *Theology in the Wesleyan Spirit* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1975), 69.

Elaw, and Julia A. J. Foote there is a distinctly Wesleyan pattern in their spiritual development: (a) repentance that results from the conviction arising from one's sinfulness; (b) justification from the guilt of sin that is accomplished through the atonement of Jesus Christ and his forgiveness; and (c) sanctification or "second blessing" that allows one to be free from sin (this is accomplished through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit).³⁹

It is clearly the thought of Wesley that perfection does not mean that the "sanctified" Christian will not make mistakes or experience lapses in judgment. Wesley also understood that, while sanctification brings one's humanity into harmony with the will of God, this does not negate the need to be intentional about seeking greater growth in grace. Note:

Christian perfection therefore does not imply (as some men seem to have imagined) an exemption either from ignorance or mistake, or infirmities or temptations. Indeed, it is only another term for holiness. They are two names for the same thing. Thus everyone that is perfect is holy, and everyone that is holy is, in the Scripture sense, perfect. Yet we may, lastly, observe that neither in this respect is there any absolute perfection on earth. There is no "perfection of degrees," as it is termed; none which does not admit of a continual increase. So that how much soever any man hath attained, or in how high a degree soever he is perfect, he hath still need to "grow in grace," and daily advance in the knowledge and love of God his Saviour.⁴⁰

The spiritual journeys of Lee, Elaw, and Foote clearly reflect this Wesleyan orientation. In the preaching of Julia A. J. Foote, however, we are given a more specific understanding of how this Wesleyan notion of Christian perfection was interpreted and incorporated into the witness of one particular nineteenth-century African-American preaching woman.

Julia Foote believed that perfection was misunderstood and became unpopular among Christians because of the beliefs and practices of certain groups. The most prominent of these groups was the Oneida Perfectionists. This group, founded by John Humphrey Noyes, believed that private family life narrowed the circle of benevolence and love. Conversely, he contended that unlimited sexual intercourse led to an indulgent and

³⁹Andrews, 15.

⁴⁰"Christian Perfection" in *The Works of John Wesley, Volume 2, Sermons II*, 34-70. Albert C. Outler, editor (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985), 104-105.

vicious society. In the minds of this Shaker community, it seemed prudent to establish some middle ground. Noyes moved his small group in 1847 from Putney, Vermont, to Oneida in western New York in order to facilitate what he called “complex marriage.” Neither monogamy nor polygamy were to prevail, but a community-directed strategy for union between the sexes that allowed for all men to be potential husbands (even temporarily) and all women to be potential wives (even temporarily).⁴¹ In addition to this group, Foote also believed that those persons in the western New York “Burned Over District” and the Roman Catholic Church had distorted notions about perfectionism.⁴²

It was against these types of distorted notions of perfectionism that Julia Foote would preach. She also opposed Rebecca Cox Jackson, who spoke out against the A.M.E. Church on this issue (it isn’t just a coincidence that Jackson later became a part of the Shaker movement). Foote’s understanding of perfection also put her in direct opposition to the religious understandings of Sojourner Truth, who joined the Kingdom of Matthias.⁴³

Foote’s sermon, “Christian Perfection,” was published in the *Star of Zion*, a publication of the A.M.E.Z. Church. In this sermon she states as follows her Wesleyan understanding of Christian perfection, and the manner in which it is distinct from the understanding of other religious groups:

Then there were the Oneida Perfectionists. They became so perfect that they invented the monstrous idea of complex marriages. By such means the word perfection has been brought into disrepute. The Roman Catholics have helped to make the word unpopular. They teach that we should withdraw from society to monasteries and nunneries if we would attain perfection; we must take the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience to superiors. The devil is a good climber; brick and mortar can not keep him out. Thank God when Martin Luther began he did not throw overboard the idea of perfection, but insisted that it did not consist in celibacy, beggary and filthy clothing, but in utter self abnegation and love.⁴⁴

⁴¹“Oneida Community and Bible Communism” in *A Documentary History of Religion in America to the Civil War*, Edwin S. Gaustad, editor (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company), 345.

⁴²Collier-Thomas, 62.

⁴³Ibid.

⁴⁴Ibid., 68.

Foote brings home the realization that Wesley's understanding of perfection supersedes even that of Martin Luther. She also distinguishes between Wesley and John Calvin; while Calvin operated from the theological premise that grace is only available for the "elect," Wesley states that God's saving grace and the resulting sanctification of Christians is a free gift to all. For Julia Foote, a Wesleyan understanding of Christian perfection is accomplished through sanctification, which enables us to engage in the lifelong work of loving others, in the same manner in which God loves us.⁴⁵ In her sermon "Love Not The World," Foote distinguishes between the extremes of perfection that were taught by her contemporaries:

Do not misunderstand me. I am not teaching absolute perfection, for that belongs to God alone. Nor do I mean a state of angelic or Adamic perfection, but Christian perfection—an extinction of every temper contrary to love.⁴⁶

Conclusion

I have attempted to lift up the struggles and significant work of several nineteenth-century African-American preaching women. I have also attempted to point out some of the differing notions that they held about the doctrine of Christian perfection. In addition to this, I have sought to demonstrate and connect the collective understandings of the doctrine of Christian perfection as modeled in the ministry and witness of Jarena Lee, Zilpha Elaw, and Julia A. J. Foote. Finally, I have attempted to show that the preaching of Julia A. J. Foote is the best exemplar of a Wesleyan understanding of the doctrine of Christian perfection.

It is important to note that the preaching of the nineteenth-century African-American women we have considered played an important role in influencing the development and the content of preaching among later African-American preaching women. The nineteenth-century African-American preaching women that we have considered lifted up the issue of equality for women. The specific way this was accomplished was through the feminist content of their preaching. This would be reflected in the preaching of later African-American women such as Florence Spearling Randolph, Rosa Horn, Quinceila Whitlow, F. E. Redwine, and Pauli Murray.⁴⁷

⁴⁵Ibid., 63.

⁴⁶Andrews, 232.

⁴⁷Collier-Thomas, 101-276.

FREE METHODIST MISSION IN SOUTH AFRICA, 1891-1960: SOCIAL CONFORMITY OR PROPHETIC CHALLENGE?

by

Sarah Elizabeth Johnson

This study of the Free Methodist Church in South Africa examines patterns of conformity and challenge to the racial order of South African society between 1891 and 1960. Following an overview of the evolution of what eventually became South Africa's official policy of apartheid and a brief history of the establishment of a Free Methodist presence in South Africa, this study focuses on three areas where patterns of conformity and challenge can be seen. They are the conference structure, the mission stations, and the relationship between Gospel and Western culture. Finally, the Free Methodist Church in South Africa is placed within the context of worldwide Free Methodism in order to demonstrate ways in which the daughter church in South Africa resembled the parent North American church. This is an attempt to analyze the missionary activity of the Free Methodist Church in terms of conformity and challenge to the existing order in South Africa in which a minority population dominated the majority population economically, politically, and socially. Did the Free Methodist Church conform to South African society or did it issue a challenge to a society long divided by race?

What will be demonstrated here is that the above question does not have a clear answer. The Free Methodist Church (again, with specific attention to the missionary aspect of the church) both conformed to and challenged the existing order in South Africa. At times, the line between

conformity and challenge will be clearly delineated. Often, however, it will not be so clear. There were aspects of Free Methodist church life in South Africa that, at the same moment, issued a challenge to an existing social order and also appeared to mirror it. This means that it will not be possible to declare that the church consistently did one or the other. Rather, it did both, for the worst and best of reasons and in the worst and best of ways.

The Free Methodist Church, as represented by its missionaries and missionary institutions, came to South Africa in order to share the Gospel with black South Africans. Missionaries traveled great distances, leaving family and friends, and risked their lives in order to spread their faith in South Africa. That this was their motivation must not be forgotten or ignored. In general, they were dedicated, hard-working and pious. They established schools, churches, and hospitals for the people to whom they preached. Yet, they also brought with them the cultural assumptions of their time and the prejudices of their denominational piety. Gospel and culture were linked in such a way as to give preference to the culture of “white” South Africa over that of “black” South Africa. Yet, there were moments in which the Free Methodist Church demonstrated a vision that challenged social norms, laws, and economic policies based on racial segregation (although the challenge may often have been implicit). Conformity and challenge co-existed, one sometimes dominating or overshadowing the other, but both maintaining an ability to re-emerge.

South Africa, 1891-1960: Increasing Apartheid

When South Africa elected its first black president in 1993, the world celebrated the end of one of the more notorious political systems of the last half of the twentieth century. Apartheid had ended. In truth, however, apartheid was far more than a political system. It encompassed politics, economics, and culture in South Africa and it had evolved over several centuries. An Afrikaner word meaning separateness, “apartheid” is usually applied to the Nationalist Party policies after its ascension to power in 1948. However, it would be erroneous to suggest that apartheid was a radically new course for South Africa. As Kevin Shillington asserts in his *History of Southern Africa*:

In fact the *apartheid* laws which followed [the election of 1948] were a continuation of the segregationist laws which had discriminated against blacks ever since 1910 and even earlier. The

difference after 1948 was that the overall aims of the Government policy were more clearly formulated. And the National Party's parliamentary majority ensured that their legislation was pushed through with even more determination. (158)

South Africa was, prior to 1948, a bifurcated society and that bifurcation had been and would continue to be increasingly codified and enforced.

When Free Methodist missionaries arrived in Natal in 1891, there was already a system of racial hierarchy in place. Much of this was economic—whites tended to own the land and hold economic power. Moreover, when missionaries first landed in Natal, the divisions among the people of South Africa were not purely racial. Afrikaners and English-speakers (both whites) were also at odds. Indeed, South Africa was not even a political entity as such. Between 1899 and 1902, Afrikaners and English-speakers fought what is commonly referred to as the Boer War. The Afrikaner republics (Transvaal and the Orange Free State) and the English colonies (Cape Colony and Natal) did not unite until 1910, the year the Union of South Africa was born.

Union portended grave things for black South Africans. The English, who tended to be more liberal in their treatment of non-white Africans (at least in law), accommodated Afrikaner demands in order to gain the goal of union (de Gruchy 27). Such “progressive” policies as non-racial voting in the Cape Colony were not extended to other provinces (Shillington 138). According to John W. de Gruchy, when Great Britain ceased to hold territories in South Africa as colonies in order to allow the creation of the Union of South Africa, it “left behind a caste-like society, dominated by its white minority” (27). It began to be evident that whites, regardless of cultural and/or linguistic differences, were going to band together in order to protect their power.

After 1910, a succession of laws were passed that entrenched the bifurcation of South African society. In 1911 the Mines and Works Act made a certificate of competency a requirement for skilled jobs. A certificate was, of course, difficult to gain if one was not white, thereby ensuring that the higher wages associated with skilled labor would go to whites. The Mines and Works Act prevented black South Africans from gaining access to employment; the Natives Land Act of 1913 prevented blacks from gaining access to land. It prohibited the selling of land between blacks and whites and mandated that blacks live on reserves unless they were in the full-time employ of white farmers. Reserve land consisted of a mere seven

percent of land (Shillington 150). Urban areas were also subject to segregation. The Natives Urban Areas Act of 1923 strengthened existing pass laws (in order to live outside of the reserves, black males were required to carry passes documenting their place of employment) and also created urban "locations" where blacks could live but not own land. A greater degree of government control over the native locations in rural areas was seen in 1927 through the Native Administration Act. In 1937 the land allocated to blacks was increased from seven percent to thirteen percent of all South African land, but the removal of blacks residing on "white" land was increased (Shillington 155). The same year, the Native Laws Enforcement Act created stricter pass laws. According to Marjorie Hope and James Young in *The South African Churches in a Revolutionary Situation*, there were two inter-related aims in the land and labor laws: "The real intent of the legislation was not only to ensure that the minority acquire a guarantee in perpetuity to the better land, but that the Native Reserves become a vast labor pool" (27).

Thus, an economic situation was created in which South Africa became economically dependent on cheap, black labor. If black South Africans were to advance economically, the cheap labor pool would disappear. One of the ways that white South Africans assured the existence of a cheap labor pool was to impose laws preventing black South Africans from making economic gains. While there were other, more ideological, reasons for the creation of an official apartheid state, the economic reasons were central. In order for white South Africans to remain economically dominant in a country where they were a numerical minority, it was necessary to prevent blacks from using political power to change their economic situation. The Native Representative Council, created in 1936, was one of the means of preventing the few non-whites who had the right to vote the ability to use the vote in an effective manner. Blacks who could vote were only allowed to pick whites to represent them on a council. Furthermore, blacks who could vote for white representation were limited to those who lived in the Cape Colony. The vast majority of black South Africans were denied the franchise altogether.

Thus, by 1948, South Africa was a segregated society. A minority population exercised control and had effectively prevented the majority population from attaining political, social or economic power. What occurred after 1948 solidified the situation and also introduced a new ideology which justified the bifurcation of South African society. According to the Nationalist Party, apartheid was not a system of political and eco-

conomic repression of a majority population by a minority population but, rather, a policy that sought the development of individual ethnic and racial groups. Indeed, the term apartheid was eventually discarded for “separate development” and “parallel democracy” (Tutu 39). What this meant, at least in theory, was that each ethnic group should have its own land and own government. Of course, it was assumed by the creators of the apartheid state that the land granted to the non-white population would be the land of the reserves, which meant that a minority of the population would still hold a majority of the land (and that would be the best land). Blacks who lived in white areas would be considered resident aliens and would be forced to carry passes in order to prove that their employment necessitated living outside of the reserves.

The legislation that established South Africa as an apartheid state was based on the premise that all races and ethnic groups should be allowed to develop separately. To ensure that this occurred, the government passed the Population Registration Act of 1950 which required that all people be classified in one of the racial categories: white, Indian, coloured or native. It also passed the Immorality Act (1950) and the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act (1949) which forbade marriage or sexual relations between whites and non-whites. Other important legislation in the period between 1948 and 1960 included the Abolition of Passes Act (misnamed since it actually systematized and enforced the pass system) and the Group Areas Act which dictated where members of each racial group could live. The Bantu Education of 1953 (which would force the closure of the Free Methodist trade school at Edwaleni) instituted a new educational system for blacks that aimed to teach them no more than was necessary to make them suitable workers for whites (Shillington 159). Apologists of apartheid claimed that the ideology codified in these policies was not racist or discriminatory, but only created a workable structure for a racially plural society (Crapanzano xix). Not insignificantly for purposes of this study, apartheid apologists also couched their ideology in religious terms. René de Villiers suggests that Afrikaners took Calvin’s division of individual people into the elect and damned and applied it to nations. The Afrikaners saw their nation (defined in terms of race) as the elect and believed it to be their duty to protect the purity of their nation (Hope and Young 29-30). Apartheid, then, was an effort to maintain the order established by God.

The theological considerations of apartheid aside, it is certainly true

that in South Africa, both before 1948 and after, black South Africans were systematically deprived of land, position, and power. Their cultural traditions were viewed as inferior and they were denied the tools through which they could have become part of “white” culture, had they decided this was desirable. Whites dominated every aspect of life and used almost all institutions of society, often including churches, to perpetuate this domination.

A Brief History of the Establishment of the Free Methodist Mission Stations in South Africa

The work of the Free Methodist Church in South Africa began in 1891, only six years after the incorporation of the Missionary Board of the Free Methodist Church of North America. In 1885 a small group of Free Methodist missionaries landed at Durban, on the eastern coast of South Africa. They proceeded north along the coast, across the Limpopo River, and established a mission station at Inhambane in Portuguese East Africa (now Mozambique). In 1891, A.D. and Sophia Noyes established the first mission station in what is now the Republic of South Africa. Seventy miles south of Durban in Natal Noyes purchased 2,265 acres of land and founded Fair View Mission (Burritt 44). The purchase of the land would have been beyond the means of both Noyes and the church if it had not been for the possibility of gaining black African tenants whose rent payments could be used to pay for the land. This system, established first at Fair View, would eventually be used on other mission stations in South Africa (Houser 10). Noyes found Fair View, and the coast of Natal in general, to be a geographically advantageous place for a mission. In a letter written before Fair View had been established, Noyes reported: “The country is for the most part open, that is free from timber, and as the soil is usually good, in some cases excellent, it is specially adapted to grazing and agriculture” (qtd. in Houser 2).

In 1898 the General Missionary Board approved the beginning of another mission, this one to be located in Johannesburg in the Transvaal. The role of the Johannesburg mission in the history of Free Methodist missions in South Africa is somewhat complex because the Johannesburg mission was not always viewed as part of the work in South Africa. Perhaps an explanation of this often confusing situation should begin with the report of the Mission Secretary to the General Missionary Society in 1899. He wrote that the Johannesburg mission had two main attractions.

First, "it will be a regular sanitarium for missionaries from Inhambane" (1899 Annual Minutes, 246). Second, "it is located near five or six mines where there are thousands of heathen natives when the mines are running" (1899 Annual Minutes, 246-247). From the beginning, the Johannesburg mission was seen as tied most closely to the work at Inhambane in Portuguese East Africa. As noted above, the mission secretary thought Johannesburg would be a place of recuperation for the missionaries from Inhambane. He also anticipated that the work in Johannesburg was to be among the men in the mines.

According to Chloe Brodhead, one of the early missionaries to South Africa, "men from many Inhambane tribes work in the mines in the Transvaal, and these natives, if saved, can and will carry the 'Glad Tidings' with them when they return to their homes. So the two fields [Inhambane and Johannesburg] are closely associated from the viewpoint of missions" (Brodhead, "Johannesburg," 29). In the reports to the mission board, then, the work in Johannesburg is often reported in the same section as the mission work in Portuguese East Africa. However, the work in Johannesburg also had ties to the mission stations in Natal and Pondoland because workers would sometimes travel to those areas to attend one of the established Free Methodist schools. Moreover, there are important ways in which the work of missionaries in Johannesburg demonstrates attitudes and institutional structures normative in other areas of South Africa. Although the work in Johannesburg began in 1899, it was soon interrupted by the outbreak of the English-Boer War (1900 Annual Minutes, 257). At the conclusion of the war, the missionaries were able to return to Johannesburg and re-establish their mission.

During the time of the English-Boer War, the work in Natal expanded. This expansion was aided by the fact that G. H. Agnew, who had been working in Johannesburg, had sought refuge in Natal and was able to begin the work of expansion (Brodhead, "Ebenezer and Itemba," 52-53). Three new missions were established in the early years of the twentieth century in Natal. The first was Ebenezer, located forty miles southwest of Fair View. J. P. Brodhead, one of the missionaries at Fair View, received a letter from George Larkan, a white farmer, requesting that a mission be opened in his area in order to evangelize the natives. Apparently Larkan was troubled by the theft of his farming equipment and declared, "I know of no remedy for all the ills that flesh is heir to but the grand old Gospel . . . which had done so much for myself, and which I

knew could raise these heathen amongst whom my lot was cast" (Larkan 51). He did not have any prior relationship with the Free Methodist Church but believed that it preached "the simple truth as it is in Jesus" (51)—which was more than he would say of the Church of the Province of South Africa, "a highly ritualistic concern, with which I had no sympathy on account of its false teachings" (51). J. P. Brodhead responded to Larkan's request and visited him. Soon after, Agnew left Fair View (it was decided that Brodhead would stay) and founded Ebenezer on the site of what had been a German Lutheran mission (Houser 61).

At the Annual Meeting of 1900 it was reported: "This station is located in a part of Natal which is the most thickly populated with natives of any section known to our missionaries. So it seems to be an exceptionally favorable opening, and there are others like unto it near by" (1900 Annual Minutes, 258). The "others like unto it" were Itemba and Edwaleni. The former, Itemba, was in the same neighborhood as Ebenezer. Itemba was on land that the government owned and wanted to sell. This seemed fortuitous, for Ebenezer was being rented from a woman who had no intention of selling, while Itemba could become a permanent mission station (Brodhead, "Itemba Mission Station," 55). Itemba and Ebenezer merged (in some records the merged mission is called Itemba-Ebenezer) and eventually the two stations simply became known as Itemba. Edwaleni, located south of Itemba-Ebenezer on the border between Natal and Pondoland, was also land purchased from the government. Indeed, the missionaries viewed the purchase of both Edwaleni and Itemba as evidences of God's providence, for, as Chloe Brodhead wrote, they were both purchased "on the only day of sale of Government land after our arrival in Natal" (Brodhead, "Ebenezer and Itemba," 53). Thus, with the apparent backing of Providence, Itemba-Ebenezer, Fair View, and Edwaleni established a Free Methodist presence in Natal.

The Free Methodist expansion was not yet complete. Adjacent to Natal was a territory called Pondoland. It belonged to the Cape Colony but had been set aside by the government for black South Africans (Burritt 47). After meeting with J. P. Brodhead, a chief in Pondoland, Patakile, requested that the Cape Government grant the Free Methodist Church land on which to establish a mission station. Greenville Mission Station was established in 1902 on the granted land. It was located nine miles from Edwaleni, across the Umtamvuna River which formed the border between Natal and Pondoland. After the establishment of Greenville, Brodhead was

able to buy another piece of land, fifty miles inland from Greenville. This mission station was named Critchlow after an American minister who gave money towards the purchase of the land (Houser 75-76).

As the church expanded, the missionaries began to desire the establishment of a conference. In 1905 that desire was realized when the South African Conference was created, the first Free Methodist conference to be established outside of North America (F. M. Commission on Missions, 13). The South African Conference was established as a mission conference, which meant that it would remain under the government of the General Missionary Board (1907 Discipline par. 92). It also meant that the missionaries would maintain a privileged position in the conference, a situation which will be explored more fully below. It is, however, important to note that the South African Conference was structured in the same manner as conferences in North America. According to Chloe Brodhead, the church sent Bishop Sellew to Africa “at the urgent solicitations of the missionaries in Africa” (Brodhead, “Nine Years,” 47) so that he might organize a conference based on the North American model. This decision was significant for, as Tillman Houser writes, “Evidently, the Bishop and the missionaries gave no thought to include the Africans in planning what kind of church government fitted in with African culture” (35). The South African Conference would have the same polity, the same doctrines, and the same lifestyle expectations as conferences in North America. While the missionaries did not seem to think that there was anything potentially problematic with such a situation, it did have implications for the way in which the missionaries interacted with the black South African church members. None of this, of course, was seen in 1905. At that point, the missionaries could only look at their rapidly growing (in terms of both numbers of people and geographical locations) church and see a promising future.

The other mission station established in South Africa by the Free Methodist Church was in Durban. This did not occur until the late 1920s or early 1930s (records do not give an exact starting date). In many respects, the work at Durban resembled that of Johannesburg. An urban center, Durban attracted a large number of workers from rural areas. The Missionary Secretary in 1948, Byron S. Lamson, reported that the missionary in Durban was ministering primarily in the compounds (Lamson, “Church Grows,” 327) and was still in the process of constructing a church.

Thus, with the exception of Durban, by 1915 the major Free Methodist Mission Stations in South Africa (Fair View, Itemba-Ebenezer, Edwaleni, Crichtlow, and Greenville) had been established. It is now appropriate to look at the work of the missionaries and the mission stations. While the desire of the missionaries to bring the Gospel of Christ to the people of Africa should not be disparaged, it is necessary to discuss ways in which their activities mirrored the locally existing racial order and, in some ways, may have contributed to the propagation of that order.

Conference Organization

To understand the missionary work of the Free Methodist Church, and probably the missionary work of most denominational missionary enterprises of the same era, it is important to remember that the missionaries were interested in more than simply converting people to Christ. Free Methodist missionaries went to South Africa, not only as ambassadors of Christ but also as representatives of a particular denomination. While this may seem obvious and academic, the consequences are significant. The missionaries went to South Africa fully intending to establish the institutions of a denominational church. As has already been noted, the missionaries were eager for the establishment of a conference and in 1905 requested that a Free Methodist conference be created. It was subsequently created and, not insignificantly, patterned after the conferences in North America. There were, however, structural differences between the conference established in South Africa and those established in North America and, indeed, in other parts of the world.

According to the Discipline of 1907, the annual conferences of the Free Methodist Church “are composed of all the ministers in full connection within their respective bounds, and of lay delegates elected by the several circuits, and women evangelists according to disciplinary provision” (par. 61). Furthermore, members of the annual conference are responsible to that particular conference for “their moral and Christian conduct” (par. 68). A preacher who is in full connection with the conference (which entails recommendation by a quarterly conference, a two-year trial period and a course of study prescribed by the conference) is able to discuss and vote on “all questions coming before the conference” (par. 69). The conference established in South Africa was somewhat, but significantly, different. Again, according to the Discipline of 1907, in the South African Conference “all missionaries who may be members of [the

South African Conference] are under the direction of the Missionary Board and of the Missionary Secretary, as provided for in the Discipline” (par. 92.1). Unlike pastors in other conferences, the missionaries in South Africa were not held accountable (in an institutional sense) to the conference of which they were members, but remained accountable to a Missionary Board which, effective or otherwise, was an ocean away. The structure of the South African Conference was further elucidated in the Discipline of 1915. This Discipline outlined three layers of membership for the South African Conference. The first, members in full relation, was composed of missionaries who were members of both a North American conference and members of the South African Conference. Members in this tier had joint membership in two annual conferences. Obviously, it was nearly impossible for a native South African to meet the qualifications for this tier. Acting missionary members formed the next layer, which included any missionary who had credentials from the missionary board and had been on the field for two years. The native lay members, who formed the third tier, were elected by the circuits and were delegates to the annual conference. As delegates, they were allowed to vote with the missionaries except on certain issues, including: electing district elders, electing the stationing committee, passing on the character of ministerial or acting missionary members of the conference, the consideration or investigation of any questions or complaints affecting the character of ministerial or acting missionary members of the conference, requesting appropriations from the general missionary board, or applying on the field moneys appropriated by the board. On such crucial questions, the missionaries were to meet separately and vote (1915 Discipline par. 124).

This basic structure had changed slightly by 1927 when the two layers of missionary members had been collapsed into one (still the first layer) and a new tier for native preachers had been added. The third layer, elected lay delegates, remained the same. The missionaries were still to hold a separate meeting and retained exclusive voting rights on the aforementioned key issues. The missionaries were also to vote on the reception of trial or full members and the election of deacons in a meeting held prior to the meeting of the full conference. Only if the missionaries had first approved a person as a trial member, full member or deacon was the issue brought before the full conference. While it is not surprising that native lay members would be blocked from such separate meetings, it is interesting that the 1927 Discipline created a new tier specifically for native preachers (who were either ordained or who had spent four years in

ministerial work and passed a course of study) and still excluded them from participating in a meeting that dealt with pastoral issues. Even when black South Africans were ordained, they still had a limited voice in issues of either membership or leadership. Missionaries were alone able to consider the behavior of other missionaries in terms of approbation or correction. They also had a great deal of power in terms of the membership of Africans. It is important to remember that the African delegates who were not given power to vote on these issues were placed as evangelists and pastors in native churches. Thus, the people who were shepherding and discipling converts were, in effect, told at conference that they had a limited voice in the eventual acceptance of those converts into the church. The structure of the conference also ensured that the Africans would have a limited voice concerning the nature of the church into which their converts would be accepted.

At this point, it is helpful to consider the structure of another Free Methodist mission conference. It is conceivable that a conference structure like that of South Africa was instituted in all Free Methodist mission churches. It is possible that in all mission churches, missionaries held meetings to which native preachers were not invited. This, however, was not the case and the rationale behind the difference is significant. Another foreign church established as a mission conference was the Japanese church. It was established as a conference after the South African Conference was created. However, it becomes apparent that the structure for the Japanese Conference was not modeled after that of the South African Conference. As with the South African Conference, there were layers of membership (typical in any conference) but, unlike the South African Conference, the first layer included both missionaries and Japanese nationals. American missionaries, already full members of a conference in America, were immediately eligible to be full members of the Japanese Conference, as were Japanese pastors holding memberships in American conferences or those who held credentials as elders and deacons in Japan. American missionaries not already full members of a conference in North America were eligible to become members of the Japanese Conference provided that they had been on the field for two years and *had completed the required course of language study* [emphasis added] (1927 Discipline par. 276.1, 3). There were no provisions for separate missionary meetings. Indeed, it was required that both the Stationing Committee and the Advisory Board had an equal number of missionaries and Japanese nationals.

At no point does the Discipline make explicit the rationale for the differences between the two mission conferences. However, there are hints in other Free Methodist literature concerning the reasons behind the different structures of the Japanese and South African conferences. In the Missionary Secretary's report in the Annual Minutes of 1915 he reports that "on my way home from India it was my privilege to spend a very short time in Osaka [Japan] in association with the missionaries and native Christians there. I was much pleased with what I saw of our Japanese people. They impressed me as being of about the same class, in Japan, as our people here in the homeland, that is, the middle class" (374). Byron S. Lamson, Mission Secretary in 1963, wrote an overview of Free Methodist mission work. He explained that "in Japan, dependence upon national church leaders was even greater [than in Africa], because of the advances of education and the more developed culture of that country" (Lamson, *To Catch*, 18). Such writing is to be contrasted with the picture of the South Africans which emerges from missionary sources. In the January 27, 1892, edition of *The Free Methodist*, Fair View missionary F. Grace Allen declared, "what miserable, degraded creatures these Zulus are" (5). Similarly, in 1954 Frederick Ryff, a second-generation Free Methodist missionary in South Africa, wrote that "it is an accepted fact that the Negro races as a whole are more ready to receive the gospel truth than are most other races, but they do not retain it as well . . . with regard to the indigenous principle, the danger is that, by reason of the willing response, a large number will be received into the Church who will later backslide" (244). Some of the missionaries who had the opportunity to work with the South Africans did not view them as capable of carrying the responsibility of church work. Thus, it is hardly surprising that when the conference structure was established, it was done in such a manner as to give the missionaries firm control over the conference.

This conference structure remained in place until 1960 (the end of the period covered in this paper). However, some missionaries looked towards a day when this structure would be radically changed and the South African church would govern itself. J. W. Haley, a Free Methodist missionary in South Africa during the 1920s and 1930s, was one of the more vocal proponents of what was known as the indigenous church principle. In a series of articles published in *The Free Methodist* in 1927, Haley shared his vision of an indigenous African Free Methodist church. According to Haley's definition, an indigenous church would be self-

propagating, self-supporting and self-governing. To the modern ear, some of Haley's language may sound paternalistic and Euro-centric. Yet, what he advocated was, for many missionaries, a radical idea. He believed that missionaries should be actively engaged in preparing South Africans for church leadership and that there would come a time when South Africans would be ready to take control of the church. In one of his articles, Haley argued that the missionaries, who at that time were still firmly in control of the South African church, should be working to prepare the South Africans to take control. In order to do this, Haley argued that missionaries must have an understanding of black South African social customs. For example, Haley explained the problem of a missionary who looks upon himself as a "lawgiver." Such a view:

Causes trouble, for from time immemorial the headmen have sat with their chief to hear causes. As a group of men are gathered into full church relationship, they will, uninvited, seek to take part in church business that heretofore has been the exclusive field of the missionary (business is not transacted by individuals in the African system, but by groups, and all men are expected to take part in the affairs of their group). As they have no official church relationship the missionary may resent this, regard their attitude as an impertinence, and warmly rebuke them. He thus outrages all African tradition. His long-suffering church will eventually say, "He has anger," and adopt a non-cooperative attitude until a storm breaks. The discreet missionary who understands native law and procedure will welcome his headmen and with endless patience, listen to the arguments pro and con, guiding and explaining where necessary, and finally announce the decision. Given a place in the proceedings, they readily learn Christian law and practice and are thus trained, from the very beginning, for the important duty of self-government. For shepherding the flock they are admirably adapted, for it is certain that no missionary can so well pilot them past perils of heathenism as those who have had to pick their own way along its tricky path. ("Building the African Church II," 11)

Training Africans for leadership was important to Haley. This is evident not just in this article but in his work as a missionary. During the late 1920s, he opened a training school for pastors at Edwaleni, which at that time also housed a trade school. Although the training school for pastors

was short-lived (it ended when Haley was transferred to a different African field), it did produce some leaders. Yet, in this article Haley still did not argue against the prevailing view that black Africans were not yet ready to take control of the church. An indigenous church was the goal, but it was a distant goal. Thus, for many years after Haley wrote, black South Africans would still hold very few positions of power in the Free Methodist Church. Tillman Houser indicates that between 1939 and 1964 (with the exception of 1945), there was only one black District Superintendent in the South African Conference per year (Houser 33). All other District Superintendents, not to mention all other leadership positions, were missionaries.

During the 1950s, discussions concerning the conference structure increased and the path towards an indigenous church was cleared of various obstacles. One of the reasons for the change in the 1950s may have been an influx of young missionaries to South Africa. Warren and Jean Johnson, who were assigned to the Itemba post in 1951, were the first missionary couple assigned to South Africa in many years (first the Great Depression and then World War II had decreased the number of Free Methodist missionaries being sent to the field). They were followed by a few other young couples. These younger missionaries tended to support the idea of a South African church governed by South Africans (Johnson). Naturally, not all the missionaries in South Africa agreed. In 1953, a second-generation South African missionary, Frederick Ryff, wrote a dissertation for a master's degree from Seattle Pacific College in which he analyzed the indigenous principle in the South African context. He maintained that the missionaries needed to retain control of the South African church because the Africans were not ready to take leadership roles. This view, however, was under increasing attack. Younger missionaries in particular wanted to see control of the church given to the Africans and a new conference structure created. In 1959 plans began to be made for the transfer of control of the South African church to the South Africans. This plan was supported by the General Mission Board. It had become increasingly aware of worldwide trends, particularly nationalism, which made the creation of indigenous churches a necessity. In 1958, the Free Methodist Church of North America released a statement on its new outlook on missions. It stated:

After seventy-seven years of missionary activity around the world, the Free Methodist Church has taken the first step

toward bringing the present mission conferences into the full fellowship of a world-wide Free Methodist organization. . . . This action points to the early organization of largely autonomous national churches which are now under the direction of the missionary department of the North American church, and will apply in those countries where the nationals have developed capacity for such responsibility. This is in line with the missionary policy of the Free Methodist Church to develop as rapidly as possible self-supporting, self-propagating and self-controlling churches in foreign mission fields. (Lamson, *To Catch*, 236)

While there were churches in other places which gained self-control earlier than the South African church (not surprisingly, the churches in Asia were first), the path towards a national church had been set. By 1974, the church was controlled by the South Africans. Because the Free Methodists had concentrated their work among black South Africans, this meant that black South Africans were going to control the Free Methodist Church in South Africa. Missionaries remained in South Africa but they now took orders from the national church and were accountable to that church (Johnson).

The decisions the Free Methodist Church made concerning church structure in South Africa were not solely based on race. It is true that the conference structure, as it was first established, mirrored South African society rather than challenging it insofar as white missionaries dominated black church members. It is also true that the decisions concerning the structure of the church seemed to be based on the degree of "civilization" the people had attained. Because the structure was Western, it was assumed that the people governing the church would need to be Western or "Westernized." Some missionaries echoed Ryff's view that an indigenous church was many, many years away. It could be talked about and was a worthy goal to proclaim but, in practice, black South Africans were not ready, and would not soon be ready, to control their own church. The church structure that grew out of this thinking looked like South African society. White people, a minority, controlled a church overwhelmingly composed of black South Africans. Yet, it would be erroneous to suggest that the Free Methodist Church whole-heartedly adopted the racial views of South Africa.

Haley had advocated, in the 1920s, a plan that was based on the idea that black South Africans would be able, through training, to govern their

own church. Later missionaries agreed. When the decision to give control to the South Africans was made in the 1950s, it seemed to ignore the racial assumptions of the apartheid system completely. We will leave this section, then, in a bit of a quandary. The church certainly did, until the conference structure was altered, resemble South Africa in that a white minority had control over a black majority. Yet, the way in which the Free Methodist Church changed its conference structure defied a white-controlled system during an era in which apartheid was being more firmly entrenched. At the same time, there is no evidence that the church was explicitly (or even implicitly) attempting to challenge apartheid laws or a bifurcated society when it turned control over to the Africans. Indeed, much of the impetus for the change came from North America and involved a worldwide change in the structure of Free Methodist mission churches. So, the question remains: what was the South African Free Methodist Church's response to a bifurcated social order? Was it a mirror, a challenge, or something else?

Mission Stations

Another area that warrants analysis in terms of Free Methodist conformity or challenge to the racial order in South Africa is that of the mission stations. Mission stations were the places where, as the above history of the establishment of the church demonstrates, missionaries began their work in a given region. Missionaries lived on the stations. Most stations boasted a church and some had schools and/or medical facilities. In those areas around the mission stations, out-stations, smaller churches or schools, were instituted. These areas were the circuits of the Free Methodist Church and they were served by black African pastors and evangelists. The role of the mission stations in either challenging or conforming to South African racialism is ambiguous. There were ways in which the mission stations served to provide services and opportunities Africans would not have had without the stations. On the other hand, there is a sense in which the mission stations propagated traditional landlord/tenant relationships and instituted a hierarchy that could be viewed in terms of race.

Mission stations were not only the places where missionaries lived and where many of the mission institutions (schools, hospitals etc.) were established. They were also pieces of land that, in many cases, had been inhabited by Africans before the coming of the Free Methodist missionar-

ies. Thus, when missionaries gained control of the land, they immediately became landlords. Fair View was the first such station established and it was fairly typical. When A. D. Noyes purchased Fair View, he was not obtaining unoccupied land. There were already black South Africans living on the land as tenants. Noyes became their landlord (as the representative of the Free Methodist Church) and used the rents obtained from his tenants in order to pay for the mission. For the missionaries, however, a tenant system was not viewed as simply a wise fiscal policy. Noyes explained that there were other “benefits” to the system:

A missionary or society having control of much land can say who shall or shall not occupy the same, and undesirable parties can be kept at a distance. Converts raised up under our labors can be settled in a little colony about us, where by precept and example they can be taught many things essential to their welfare, and thus become good citizens instead of drifting about and being finally overcome by bad influences, as is too often the case when left to shift for themselves. (qtd. in Houser 10)

As landlords, the Free Methodist missionaries were able to impose their lifestyle expectations on their tenants.

While the imposition of lifestyle expectations could be demonstrated using a variety of issues, perhaps none is so vivid (or so contentious) as the brewing and use of alcoholic beverages. The Free Methodist Church had, since its inception, decried the use of alcohol and required of its members a lifestyle of temperance. Missionaries transplanted the denominational prohibition of alcohol, not only into their churches but also onto their land. They were aided in this by a law, enacted around 1900, which stated that alcohol could not be brought onto a farm without the consent of the landlord. The report to the General Missionary Board in the Annual Minutes of 1900 states, “A few natives attempted to destroy the force of the prohibition law of our station, but summary punishment had a very salutary effect in more strongly establishing it, together with quietness and prosperity” (259). While from the viewpoint of the missionary the ability to enforce temperance was a blessing and the “summary punishment” of those who disobeyed was a tool for constructive change, the Africans were not always so enthralled with the situation. Tillman Houser records the story of Mr. Cele, who lived at the Edwaleni station. His father had lived on the land prior to the coming of

the missionaries and remained a tenant after the missionaries became the landlords. According to Houser's account:

Mr. Cele then recounted a traumatic experience he never forgot. When a child, he saw a missionary stride into his father's home and kick over pots of brewing beer, then proceed to the tobacco plot and yank out all the growing plants. Evidently this event was the last straw in a series of confrontations with the missionary. Mr. Cele's father then decided to move out of the farm into the location. . . . Through the years none of his family became Christians. (26)

The ability and willingness of the Free Methodist missionaries to regulate certain activities on their mission stations is not, of course, evidence that they were mirroring the racial system in South Africa. Landlords are able to make compliance with rules, regulations, and prohibitions a requirement for tenants. The issue presented by Noyes' comments and Mr. Cele's story is not simply that the missionaries prohibited alcohol and used what might have been (or appeared to have been) draconian measures to enforce this prohibition. Rather, these stories are parts of a pattern in which it appears that the mission stations were places in which an elitism, of sorts, was created by the missionaries. In the above case, this elitism is seen in the way in which the missionaries made rules that may well have seemed arbitrary to the African tenants. Rather than being servants to the Africans, the missionaries became landlords and disciplinarians.

Houser suggests that commonly and subtly this elitism can be seen in the way in which the mission stations became bastions for the missionaries. Their homes, schools, churches, and hospitals were on the mission stations. The maintenance and operation of these institutions was time-consuming and may have led to a situation in which many missionaries became isolated on the mission stations. Unwittingly, some missionaries came to be relatively uninvolved in the lives of the African people who lived outside of the stations (Houser 11, 46-48).

One of the reasons for the increasing isolation of the missionaries was, ironically, the missionaries' desire that the African church become self-propagating. As the mission stations became more established and the number of African converts grew, the Free Methodists relied more and more on native evangelists and pastors to minister in the outstations (the smaller missions established around the parent mission). It was often a native evangelist or pastor who would go to an outlying village and speak

with the people. Such an arrangement had been used successfully in Portuguese East Africa and was adopted by the South African church. J. W. Haley explained the rationale behind the use of native evangelists:

[S]end a [native] evangelist to this same place, and quite a different scene is presented. He enters the kraal and approaches the group sitting in the recognized palaver place of the men. No one may pay any attention to him for a time, but finally the headman of the kraal looks toward him and claps his hands together softly a few times, a sign of recognition. The evangelist, squatting on the ground, claps in like manner and then enters the circle where the usual form of salutation is completed. . . . He has placed beside him his earthly effects which are wrapped up in a sleeping mat, and there is nothing there that they do not possess. Presently from his handbag he produces a Testament and begins to read quietly. They are interested in the book, and want to know what it says, and he soon has a class whose ambition is to learn to read. He teaches them carefully, and in the course of a year when the missionary visits the place, he finds a class of professing Christians to welcome him. (Haley, "Work," 22)

Native evangelists were viewed as being better able to communicate with other natives because they shared the same culture, knew the language and could speak to the experience of South Africans. It is difficult to criticize the use of native evangelists and pastors. Not only did they know the culture to which they were bringing the Gospel, but they were also given an opportunity to have some degree of authority in their own churches. If the missionaries had retained control of all evangelistic positions, there would have been no room for Africans in their own church.

Yet, the use of native evangelists also meant that the missionaries did not need to spend time riding the circuit and going to outstations. It is inaccurate to suggest that no missionaries did these things. According to the articles written for *The Free Methodist* and *The Missionary Tidings*, most missionaries went to outstations at least occasionally. Lucy Hartman, who served for forty years at Itemba, was still circuit-preaching in 1949, although her original nine-point circuit had been reduced to four points because she could not, at eighty years of age, ride a horse to the other five stations (Matson 110). Hartman, especially by 1949, seems to be more of an exception than a rule. Most missionaries were too involved

in running the farms, administering the mission station schools or using their professional skills at hospitals to spend much time outside of the mission stations. Indeed, in 1948 the Mission Secretary made no secret of this situation. Writing for *The Missionary Tidings*, Byron Lamson states: “no longer will the missionary be engaged in the primary work of evangelism. In a field as old as this, such work will be done largely by the native pastor and teacher. The missionary must do the secondary level of work in the field of education, agriculture, medicine, Biblical education, and normal school training” (“Your Africa,” 7).

Again, the use of native evangelists and pastors was positive in the sense that it gave them a role in their church and allowed them to minister to their own people. Africans were able to be teachers, evangelists, and pastors. However, the missionaries were still holding the positions of power and they were exercising that power from their mission stations. Whatever the rationale behind this situation or the benefits thereof, the missionaries did appear removed from the everyday lives of the Africans. While in South Africa, Tillman Houser experienced the effects of this pattern. He and his wife were visiting an outstation church near Edwaleni. When the native pastor arrived and saw missionaries in his church, he issued the following admonition:

I notice we have some new missionaries with us today. There is something I would like to say to them before we go on with this service. I don't quite understand why the missionaries come here from America and what they intend to do. They do not seem to minister to the white people, or the Indians, or the Colored, and they don't seem to be interested in the Africans. They go to social functions with the white people, but do not attend revival or evangelistic services in our churches. I want to speak to you new missionaries. If you expect to live on that hill at Edwaleni and not learn our customs and language and associate with the Church among us people, you might as well pack up and return to America. (Houser 50)

There is not enough information available for the author to verify that this statement is indicative of what a majority of South African Free Methodists felt about the missionaries. Houser indicates that, in the interviews he conducted while in South Africa, this sentiment was common if not always expressed with such vehemence. On the part of the missionaries, there does appear to be some awareness that the duties of the mission sta-

tions could create a situation in which the missionaries dealt more with the institutional side of the church and less with people. As early as 1892, Grace Allen reported to *The Free Methodist* that making the mission self-supporting (through farming) was taking time from evangelism. Thirty-four years later, Allen wrote for *The Free Methodist* again, this time giving a brief history of the establishment of the Free Methodist Church in South Africa. Her history focuses on the many institutions that had been established at the mission station and the missionaries who managed the institutional side of the church. This is hardly conclusive evidence that the mission stations were inhibiting work in the outstations, but it does suggest how understaffing (which was a chronic problem, particularly through the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s when the North American church did not have the money to bring new missionaries to the field) combined with numerous institutions requiring attention could lead to a situation in which the missionaries simply did not have time to spend with the people. Perhaps it is best to say that this was a case of unintentional elitism with the best of intentions.

To say that this situation proves that the Free Methodist Church was conforming with the racial system in South Africa would be a gross overstatement. It is highly doubtful that anyone intended a situation in which the missionaries remained on their mission stations, doing their work largely apart from the Africans. It is much more likely that the missionaries desired to establish churches, schools, and hospitals in order to help the Africans and found that the maintenance of those institutions was more time-consuming than had been anticipated. Unfortunately, this unintended situation appears to have created a "missionary elite." Combined with the problem of missionaries as landlords, it is possible to see how a Free Methodist missionary living on a mission station (doing work, no matter how noble) could look like a white South African farmer in many ways. Thus, it is possible to see why the South African government did not fear but, rather, supported the mission stations. Even if much of the work that they did, especially in terms of education, seemed to contradict the racial assumptions upon which the social order was built, the relationship between the missionaries and the Africans did not seem to challenge the existing order.

The Relationship Between Gospel and Western Civilization

Another area in which the Free Methodist Church could have either challenged or conformed to the existing social structure in South Africa

was in terms of how the Gospel was presented to the Africans. The writings from the period suggest that the Free Methodists tended to view the Gospel and Western Civilization as deeply connected. To accept the former was also to accept the trappings of the latter.

When Free Methodist missionaries went to South Africa at the end of the nineteenth century, they believed that they came from a Christian civilization. Although the merits of this belief could well be debated, it is certain that the missionaries believed that they were aiding the Africans by bringing both Christ and civilization. Bishop Sellew, the man who was sent to South Africa in 1905 to organize the conference, expressed the accepted view in his introduction to *Our Free Methodist Missions in Africa*. He wrote “THESE INFERIOR PEOPLES MUST BE ELEVATED [sic]. Christian civilization must be introduced in order that the various international, social, political and business relations may be safeguarded” (Intro.) Although Sellew’s use of the term “inferior peoples” is striking, what is more significant is his assumption that Christianity and civilization exist in a mutually reinforcing relationship. Free Methodists brought with them to South Africa the Western, Christian assumption that Christianity was more than simply a religion. It was, in a sense, a glue that would keep the world together and enable the peoples of the world to become progressively more civilized. Such a view left little room for cultural differences. Inferior peoples were to become more civilized by becoming Christians. For black South Africans, adopting Christianity would also mean adopting certain elements of Western civilization.

It is not surprising, therefore, that many of the requirements placed upon South African Free Methodists bore a resemblance to American Holiness cultural norms. The proper kind of clothing and the proper housing structure were seen as important distinctions of a Christian. In 1924, Minnie Olmstead and her husband visited the South African missions. Her observations were published in *The Free Methodist* and demonstrate the centrality of clothing and housing to the mission church:

One woman’s heart was touched during the service, and she said that she would like to be a Christian if only she had clothes. She had just a blanket about her. If she proves to be sincere our missionaries will make clothes for her as they have done for many others. The first requirement made of native converts is the putting on of clothes, and the second is that they must change the style of their huts as soon as possible,

building them square instead of round, and with partitions between the living and sleeping rooms. If this cannot be done soon, they must try to rearrange their huts so living conditions are more tolerable. These requirements are essential if they are to live respectably. As we beheld the wretchedness in this kraal, we appreciated more than ever before the fact that we were born in a Christian land. (11)

It is important to note that Olmstead believed such changes to be “essential.” It is not that the missionaries were forcing Africans to dress differently and change their living arrangements out of a sadistic need to make Christianity difficult. Rather, they viewed these as matters of “respectability.” In both cases, there were issues of modesty involved. They equated the clothing of the people and the living arrangements with licentious and pagan behavior. The obvious (at least to the missionaries) answer was to make a change of clothing and a quick housing adjustment part of becoming a Christian. While the missionaries were undoubtedly acting with good intentions, the result was a religion which rejected much of one culture in favor of another. That the missionaries would have had the same requirements in another African country where there was not a large white population is probable. There is no evidence that the missionaries were attempting to please white South Africans by requiring their converts to wear different clothing and build different houses. However, the type of clothing and housing advocated did correspond with that which was accepted by the white minority. Thus, in this area, albeit again unintentionally, there was a tacit conformity with the white culture of South Africa.

The perceived relationship between Christianity and civilization may have had an even greater effect on the Free Methodist Church’s response to the racial structure, however. Although what follows is difficult to document, it is a matter worth discussing. If Christianity and civilization were seen as deeply related, then it is conceivable that the missionaries may have been reluctant to challenge the social system implemented by those people who were viewed as the carriers of civilization. Again, no Free Methodist literature explicitly states this, but there are hints in a few documents which suggest an appreciation on the part of missionaries for the South African government because the government was supportive of the missionaries’ efforts and was viewed as a partner in “civilizing” the black South Africans.

Perhaps this is most evident in the realm of education. The Free Methodists established schools on both the mission stations and the out-stations. The establishment of these schools would have been impossible without aid from the government. Both the English government prior to 1948 and the Nationalist government after 1948 subsidized schooling. Missionaries repeatedly mention the government's support of education. While explaining the reasons behind race riots between Indians and black Africans in 1949, Margaret LaBarre reported: "The Indians have not helped the natives educationally and socially as the white people have" (111). Even in 1959, after passage of the Bantu Education Act which mandated a curriculum which would prepare black students only for jobs involving menial labor or service to whites, one missionary wrote in *The Missionary Tidings*, "this multi-racial country, now endeavoring to maintain separate development of the races, educates its children well, but separately. There are African schools, Indian schools, colored schools, English schools, and Afrikaans schools. Each child learns the three R's in his 'mother tongue'" (Kline 266).

Missionaries had every reason to see the government as a partner in their desire to provide education for the black Africans. The subsidy granted to mission organizations in order to establish and maintain schools was crucial, for without it the Free Methodists would not have had the money necessary. The importance of this subsidy to the maintenance of the Free Methodist schools is demonstrated by the fact that when the Nationalist government began to withdraw subsidies (after the Bantu Education Act), Free Methodist schools closed. Edwaleni Technical College was the most prominent example among Free Methodist schools. It closed in 1959 when the government refused its subsidy. Even with the prospect of schools closing, it is difficult to find any officially published missionary writings that condemn the government for its new attitude towards the education of Africans. Frederick Ryff, for example, reports the comments of the minister of native affairs concerning "Bantu" education, including his assertion that "by blindly producing pupils trained on a European model, the vain hope was created among Natives that they could occupy posts within the European community despite the country's policy of 'apartheid'" (qtd. in Ryff 278). To this Ryff responds by suggesting that the missionaries have traditionally had positive relationships with individual school inspectors and that it is to be expected that these relationships will be the basis for a continuation of the mutual goal of

native education (279). At no point does Ryff explicitly condemn the government or suggest any action to be taken should his hope be dashed (as it was). Rather, he persists in viewing his goal and the government's goal as similar.

The education example is an important one, but it is not the only one. Missionaries felt that they were bringing civilization to the black Africans and also thought that the government should be credited with doing the same (or with at least enabling the missionaries to do so). Houser refers to this as a symbiotic relationship between the government and the missionaries (9). Since Christianity and civilization were related, the government was seen as promoting both. Thus, there was a sense in which an open challenge to the government by the missionaries would have been, to use a cliché, an instance of biting the hand that fed them. Warren and Jean Johnson mentioned this feeling in an interview conducted by the author. They did not necessarily agree with the government's policies, but they also saw the government as a pro-Western, pro-Christian force. Challenging this force seemed counter-productive.

Again, there are ways in which the church both challenged and conformed to the culture around it. Western culture and the Gospel were seen as connected, which meant that conversion to Christ necessitated a cultural conversion. To an extent, black South Africans were forced to adopt some of the cultural norms of the dominant minority. Furthermore, the missionaries often found it beneficial to work with the government and believed the government to be supportive of its efforts. It was difficult, therefore, for the church to challenge the government or the culture of white South Africans. Yet, there is a sense in which the missionaries did challenge the government or, at least, some of the assumptions of the government (particularly the post-1948 government). The very fact that the government believed it necessary to close the schools run by the missionaries seems to demonstrate that the mission schools were over-educating black South Africans. Ironically, the assumption that Christianity and Western culture were related forced the missionaries to provide black South Africans with the tools to become civilized, education not being the least among these. This led to a problem with a government that wanted to maintain an uneducated labor pool and that was telling black South Africans that they were fit only for menial labor. Perhaps the church was too good at civilizing black South Africans for the purportedly Christian government of South Africa.

Of course, this educational challenge to the existing order was not a vehement challenge because when the government withdrew the subsidies, the Free Methodist Church did not attempt to keep its schools open. It, like almost all churches in South Africa, allowed its schools to be closed. The church did not openly challenge the government.

Contexts

In the three areas (church structure, mission stations and the relationship between Gospel and culture) discussed above, the Free Methodist Church both challenged and conformed to the existing racial order in South Africa. It might be tempting simply to condemn the church for not taking a more active role in challenging a system that most people today recognize as one of the more vile of the twentieth century. Such condemnation, however, would be premature without looking at the contexts of this picture. Although many contexts could be considered, there is one that is crucial. The ethos of the Free Methodist Church in North America must also be understood in order to have a well-informed picture of the Free Methodist Church in South Africa. Because the missionaries came from America and they remained under the jurisdiction of the General Missionary Board in America, the attitudes of the American church are important. A brief look at the North American church demonstrates that the South African church was not radically different from other Free Methodist churches in its racial attitudes. The period under discussion was not one in which the Free Methodist Church as a whole was deeply politically active, nor one in which it challenged human rights abuses and racist political and economic structures. It was a time in which the Free Methodist Church was concerned with individual morality and holiness and, like other theologically conservative, evangelical churches, tended to remain aloof from social and political issues.

When the Free Methodist Church was born in 1860, it offered a prophetic challenge to mainstream society by purposefully standing apart from middle class society. In its early years, the church stood with the poor and dispossessed (Wall 127). Benjamin Titus Roberts, the founder of the Free Methodist Church, believed that the church had a specific responsibility to preach the gospel to the poor. The concern for the poor manifested itself in a variety of ways in Roberts' theology and life, including the purchase of a mission above a saloon in order to minister to people in an inner-city area. Concern for the poor was also what prompted

Roberts to insist upon simple dress and temperance. According to Donald Dayton:

Prohibition was urged in part because [drinking] was perceived to generate poverty and to oppress especially the poor. Simple dress was adopted not primarily for modesty or simplicity, but in an effort to make the poor feel comfortable in church if they could not afford fine clothes or jewelry. (qtd. in Snyder 18)

Such prohibitions, however, would be remembered when the deep concern for the poor had become a less dynamic part of Free Methodism.

Not only did the church stand with the dispossessed in 1860, but it stood with those in human bondage. From the beginning, the Free Methodist Church was adamant in its opposition to human slavery. The effort of the U. S. government to emancipate the slaves, even through the use of war, was supported. After the war was over, Free Methodists were concerned that the fight for racial equality not end with emancipation. Liam Iwig-O'Byrne asserts that during Reconstruction the church remained interested in issues of racial justice for "it was not enough to simply have the government declare the rights of the blacks, but the blacks must be empowered at the expense of the power of the white southern 'rebels'" (135). Again, the young church was positioning itself on the side of the dispossessed, poor, and downtrodden.

One might expect a church with such radical beginnings to remain involved in political and social issues. However, the radicalism of early Free Methodism began to ebb as the twentieth century drew near. Free Methodist scholars note a change in the church around 1890. David McKenna notes that in that year the General Conference repudiated the leadership of B. T. Roberts. None of the major issues over which the conference and Roberts disagreed were explicitly related to either a concern for the poor or the equal rights of black Americans, but the repudiation of Roberts did signal a change from radical, visionary leadership to a greater concentration on organizational structure (McKenna 36-38). Howard Snyder also suggests that a decisive change occurred in 1890. "Separation from the world" replaced concern for the poor as a major theme for the church. Rather than remaining a dynamic force that insisted on social reform and championed the causes of the poor, "the denomination developed into an inwardly-focused counterculture with a considerably less-

ened reform and evangelistic focus. The disciplines of early Free Methodism developed into legalism” (Snyder 20). Thus, at almost exactly the same time that the first missionaries were going to South Africa, the Free Methodist Church began to focus less on social issues and more on issues of organizational structure and personal holiness. While the church in South Africa was dealing with issues such as the shape of huts and modest clothing, the church in America was debating the role of instrumental music in church (not allowed by the Discipline until 1943), simplicity of dress (until 1947 it was required that John Wesley’s sermon on dress be read periodically), and the wearing of wedding rings (not declared an acceptable practice until 1951) in an attempt to keep the church separate from the world (Wall 125; McKenna 41-42). If the South African F. M. Church was not active in attacking the great social and political issues of the time, the same can be said of the American F. M. Church.

During the 1940s, perhaps because of the increasing realization wrought by World War II that the church was part of a truly global community facing critical issues, there is evidence of an increasing social consciousness. In the forties, the church in the United States started to consider the possibility of working with and among African-Americans. A “Negro Jurisdiction” was created for the work being done among African-Americans. It is worth noting that when the jurisdiction was established, its organizational plan called for the placement of one *white* superintendent over the entire Negro Jurisdiction. In 1948, the Negro Jurisdiction was changed to the Department of Interracial Evangelism. The thinking of some of the leaders concerning the interracial movement in the United States is not unlike that of the leaders of the South African Church who were discussing the eventual nationalization of that church. David Paul Smith, who wrote a brief history of the interracial movement while at the John Wesley Foundation, discussed the beliefs of one interracial movement leader:

When the work was begun in 1943 and ’44, Brother James began an intensive study of American history as related to the Negro-white problem in America, and of as much sociology as he could study at home. . . . It was not long before his studies, contacts with intergroup relations organizations, his field notes, and private conversations brought him to the realization that an effort to help the Negro on a segregated basis was destined for failure. In setting up such a program, the leaders

were perpetuating an un-Christian pattern and appropriating the out-moded methods of other churches which had already been tried and discredited. It was found that most churches followed one of two definite courses of action in race relations: 1. The definite plan of segregation in race relations. In every section of the country where such work existed it was operated on a separate racial basis with no effort or indication of intention to ever integrate the program into the main body of the denomination; 2. The idealistic plan of complete integration with no compromise whatever in any area. This plan was equally destined for failure.

Out of his study Brother James came to the conviction that there must be an ideal goal of a completely integrated church with no racial or ethnic distinctions anywhere in the practical level, depending on the mores and customs of the areas in which the work existed. Always in mind must be the intention of moving as rapidly as possible toward the previously-affirmed goal. (Smith 38-39)

Like the South African church, the American church was not immune to the often conflicting biblical calls to justice and equality and that societal call for conservative action (if any). The same attitude is found in a *Missionary Tidings* article in February 1948. The Women's Missionary Society president, in commemoration of Race Relations Day, urged her readers to consider their own racial prejudices and the need to be aware of the plight of racial minorities in the United States. She also declared, "far be it from me to suggest that anyone go into another section of the country and try overnight to override laws, customs, and ways that have been the accepted rule for long years. . . . Geography does make a difference, but the Golden Rule is a good one, both for North and South" (Daniels 49). Thinking of this type demonstrates that the church was becoming more socially aware, but that it still remained far from its prophetic roots. It also suggests that the South African church was not significantly less aware than the American church of such issues. Certainly, it would be hard to claim that in 1948 the American church was on the forefront of racial reconciliation as opposed to a South African church that had, in spite of the example of its parent church, capitulated to the standing social order.

It appears that the Free Methodist Church was becoming more aware of the outside world during the 1950s. Howard Snyder, for one, begins to date a new age characterized by an outward, as opposed to

inward, focus around 1950. The church entered a new phase in which the focus became less inward and less embattled by an attempt to separate itself completely from the world (Snyder 56). The Discipline also showed signs of becoming less legalistic and more open to social concerns. Temperance remained an issue (as it does today), but issues of dress, music, and adornments began to disappear. The church also experienced an increasing awareness of its place in a global community. Again, Snyder and McKenna both posit that World War II was not insignificant in this regard. A greater appreciation for diversity began to be demonstrated. There was also a desire to see the churches overseas become truly national churches. As mentioned above, in 1958 the Commission on Missions began to plan for the development of nationally controlled churches. It made a request to the Board of Administration:

The Free Methodist Church . . . is approaching the time when it must think in terms of a world church of related national churches, and plan with representatives of national Free Methodist groups looking toward the organization of largely autonomous national churches within the various countries now controlled in large measure by mission extensions of the home church. Therefore, the Board of Administration is requested to take steps toward setting up a World Planning Council for Free Methodism. (qtd. in McKenna 42)

Six years later, in 1964, the church again demonstrated its growing global and social awareness by including a statement on human rights in the Discipline. It is not surprising, then, that these same years saw a change in the South African church as well.

Although its beginning might have portended otherwise, the Free Methodist Church was not, between 1891 and 1960, an institution committed to social awareness and involvement. It focused almost exclusively on issues of personal holiness and upon establishing institutional structures. This began to change, however, in the 1940s and 1950s. What is evident is that the Free Methodist Church in South Africa was not unlike its parent church in the United States. If the church in South Africa was not radical, it certainly had no indication from the North American church that social radicalism was to be practiced. Perhaps even more than conforming to the South African social order, the South African Free Methodist Church can be said to have conformed to the image of the North American church.

Conclusion

The temptation of the historian is to dissect the past with all its failures, traumas, joys, and victories and declare winners and losers, heroes and villains. History itself, however, will make such declarations difficult. Right and wrong are not always clearly defined. Context, while always needed, can make the waters murkier. It is not just that one thing occurred, but that one thing occurred in the midst of many other things and they all impacted each other. Easy declarations are confounded by the complexity of the past.

In 1891, a man and his family began the work of the Free Methodist Church in South Africa. They left their home, many of their possessions and their friends to preach the Gospel in an unknown place. Others followed them. Some returned to their homes; some died while in a foreign country. They all came to a land struggling with issues not so very different from those found in America. Skin color gave some the keys to economic, social, and political power while preventing others from attaining a lifestyle above that of subsistence. The missionaries were not social theorists, not the recipients of degrees in missiology and, in most cases, not even informed of the problems in South Africa (Johnson). What they knew was that they felt a call to preach the Gospel as they understood it.

And what exactly happened? They had problems, they had victories, and the two were sometimes related. There were ways in which the Free Methodist Church conformed to the social and racial order of South Africa. From 1891 to 1960, power remained in the hands of the white missionaries. They controlled the land, the conference structure and, to a great extent, shaped the way in which the Gospel message would be understood. Missionaries tended to look upon the government, both prior to and after 1948, as supportive and were wary of thwarting it. If the church is to be a prophetic voice in an unjust world, then it would appear that it failed.

At the same time, the Free Methodist missionaries established hospitals, educated children who otherwise would have received no schooling, gave black South Africans opportunities to minister to their own people and, eventually, gave them a church that they could control. None of this had a documentable effect on the surrounding society, but surely it had an effect on those involved. To the extent that the offer of education, medical care, and evangelism tacitly acknowledges the worth of the recip-

ient, then the church might be said to have challenged a social order based on dehumanization.

The Free Methodist Church was not alone in its struggle to negotiate a difficult situation. Willem Saayman, in an article titled "Christian Missions in South Africa: Achievements, Failures and the Future," notes several issues concerning mission churches generally in South Africa. Two of those four are pertinent to the Free Methodist Church. The two issues are: "(1) the fact that Christianity in Africa (also in South Africa) tends to conform to society, for example, in racial matters, rather than to transform it; (2) the fact of the church/mission's identity with the West and its civilisation, and the tacit assumption that Africa will do best by adopting the Western pattern" (28). Mission churches tended to conform to a society that often resembled the "civilized" societies from which missionaries hailed. In some cases, like that of the Free Methodist Church, the home church did not stress social awareness and so the missionaries focused almost exclusively on evangelism and erecting denominational structures. Yet, as Saayman suggests, all is not gloom for:

Very often the Christian church in its mission was the first importer of ideas of freedom, independence and human rights. . . . It would therefore be a simplistic judgment to state that church and mission simply conformed to society. Although very often the church which grew out of the mission looked distressingly like the society around it, Christian mission did, in its best moments, plant the seeds which would eventually grow to challenge unchristian and dehumanizing forces such as racism. (30)

The message that God loves all people, that God desires to transform them and manifest himself in their lives could not forever passively co-exist with the racist order of South Africa. Should the Free Methodist Church have more explicitly challenged that order? Probably. Did it implicitly challenge that order through the message it brought? Again, probably. Success and failure are closely related.

Perhaps what is most crucial is not accurately detailing every area where the Free Methodist Church either conformed to the existing social order or challenged it, but to realize that the church, in an effort to carry out what it perceived to be its mission, did both. Acknowledgment that the church is in the world and has the potential to conform to that world even when it is attempting to separate itself from the world can aid the

church as it proceeds into the twenty-first century. Hopefully, understanding the complexities of the past, with all the successes and failures, will enable to the church to be a prophetic voice of challenge in the future.

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Delbert R. and Susan (Schultz) Rose
WTS Lifetime Achievement Award, 2000

**TRIBUTE TO
DRS. SUSAN A. (SCHULTZ) ROSE
and
DELBERT R. ROSE**

by

**William C. Kostlevy
March, 2000**

Susan A. (Schultz) Rose is a native of Mountain Lake, Minnesota, and a life-long member of the Christian and Missionary Alliance Church. She was educated at St. Paul Bible College, Nyack Missionary College, and John Fletcher College (B. A. 1940) and received an M.L.S. degree from the University of Illinois. She has served as a librarian at Bethany-Peniel College, now Southern Nazarene University, and as Director of Library Services at Asbury Theological Seminary (1949-1978). She was a charter member of the Wesleyan Theological Society.

During her tenure at Asbury, she was a leader in the American Theological Library Association, the Kentucky Library Association, and the Christian Library Association. In 1967 she was named the "Outstanding Special Librarian" by the Kentucky Library Association. Always deeply committed to missions, she spent a sabbatical organizing the library at Union Bible Seminary in India. At the fiftieth anniversary celebration of Asbury Theological Seminary in 1974, she was given the seminary's distinguished service award. She has also been the recipient of the Christian Library Association's "Emily Russell Award." In 1974, she was awarded an honorary Doctor of Letters degree from Houghton College.

At Asbury, Susan Schultz (Rose) was an integral member of the team of young scholars who included Harold Kuhn, George Turner, Curry Mavis, and Harold Greenlee, later joined by William Arnett and Delbert Rose. Rose not only established the first evangelical scholarly journal, the *Asbury Seminarian*, but played a key role in founding the Wesleyan Theological Society. A colleague once observed that Susan Schultz (Rose) was a serious no-nonsense person with a marvelous sense of humor. She has needed these qualities as she sought to create a theological library and later as she planned the construction of the building to house her collection. In the words of Dr. Frank B. Stanger, "Dr. Schultz is the builder of the library at Asbury Theological Seminary. When she came she inherited little in theological resources. But she had a dream that she held onto." By the time of her retirement, Dr. Stanger noted that her dream had been fulfilled in a collection of over 111,000 volumes housed in a state-of-the-art library facility, B. L. Fisher Library. As he fittingly concluded, "a plaque bearing similar words to the one at St. Paul's Cathedral, London, giving tribute to Sir Christopher Wren, could be placed appropriately inside the B. L. Fisher Library. If you would see her monument, just look around you."

As much as I agree with Dr. Stanger's sentiments, I see her lasting contribution to the Wesleyan heritage not merely in books, bricks, and mortar, but in her role as a mentor to future theological librarians and scholars. I see her ministry through the lives of her protegees who include Donald W. Dayton, D. William Faupel, and David Bundy. In the early 1970s, it was Susan Schultz (Rose) who insisted that these three young scholars write three bibliographic monographs on the Holiness, Pentecostal, and Keswick movements. In the course of this assignment, she changed not only the lives of these young scholars but the course of evangelical historiography. Lest we underestimate her accomplishment, Donald Dayton reports that he had never read a holiness book until given this assignment of preparing a bibliographic essay on the literature of the Holiness Movement. Little wonder that Don's alma mater, Houghton College, awarded her an honorary doctorate.

The recent talk of the "death" of the holiness movement must seem all too familiar to Dr. Delbert R. Rose. After all, it was common knowledge in the 1940s when he began his Ph. D. studies at the University of Iowa that the holiness movement had ceased to be a vital force in American Christianity. Presumably it had died with the passing of the trans-Allegheny frontier sometime before 1850. The scholars making this judg-

ment at least realized that the holiness impulse still reigned among the economic and socially marginal in isolated rural enclaves and in urban ghettos. As is often true of tidy theses, however, there was a lot of contradictory evidence that scholars were forced to ignore as they sought to assign the holiness impulse in American Christianity to the same fate as the buffalo, the open range, and the cattle drive. In the late 1940s, holiness camp meetings continued to flourish while the nation's distinctly holiness denominations, such as the Church of the Nazarene and the Church of God (Anderson), were experiencing rapid growth. Within the older evangelical denominations, especially the Methodist Church, noted evangelists such as E. Stanley Jones and D. Willia Caffray and bishops such as Arthur Moore and Arthur Wesley remained deeply rooted in the experiential piety of the holiness movement.

Dr. Delbert Rose was a scholarly pioneer, but he did not act alone. Other young Wesleyan historians, such as John L. Peters and Timothy L. Smith, chose more diplomatic courses. Peters dealt with holiness currents in nineteenth-century Methodism, while Smith explored the perfectionist current in antebellum urban revivalism. Delbert Rose attempted something far bolder, a detailed study of the thought of a late nineteenth and early twentieth century holiness camp meeting preacher, Joseph H. Smith. Implicit in the proposal was the unthinkable thought that a holiness evangelist was actually a worthy subject of serious research.

As a member of the Evangelical Church and a native of one of America's most fertile holiness belts, the central region of lower Michigan, Rose realized that holiness Christianity was not the exclusive property of such small Wesleyan denominations as the Wesleyan Methodist Church and the Free Methodist Church, or even of larger bodies such as the Church of the Nazarene. So unusual was this perspective in the late 1940s that, in order to write his dissertation on Joseph H. Smith, he had to first write an 80-page introduction to the holiness movement to establish the merit of such a seemingly dubious venture. Nearly fifty years later, Rose's work remains one of the best introductions to holiness movement. By insisting that the story of Christian perfection in America was far more than an account of the origins of distinctly holiness churches, Rose rightly located the enduring center of holiness Christianity in Methodism. The republication of *Vital Holiness* by the Schmuel Publishing Company will allow a new generation to familiarize themselves with this enduring classic.

Perhaps of even greater significance has been Dr. Rose's role in the location and preservation of archival materials that document the history of the holiness movement. As historian of the National Holiness Association, now the Christian Holiness Partnership, he tenaciously pursued the literary fragments that constituent this documentary heritage while carrying a full academic teaching load at Western Evangelical Seminary, Asbury Theological Seminary, and Wesley Biblical Seminary. Dr. Rose's interest in the holiness tradition has always been more than purely academic. In the tradition of his NHA heroes, he has served as a noted camp meeting and revival preacher. His biographical sketches of the giants of the holiness movement which appeared in the Asbury Theological Seminary *Herald* remain an especially rich source of biographical data on often neglected holiness movement figures.

Even as the Roses have made significant individual contributions to the Wesleyan tradition, they have continued to serve internationally with World Gospel Mission and closer to home they have helped in the revitalization of Vennard College. It therefore is with considerable pride that the Wesleyan Theological Society award them the "Life-time Achievement Award" for the year 2000.

TIMOTHY L. SMITH AND MILDRED BANGS WYNKOOP BOOK AWARD

**Presented by the
Wesleyan Theological Society**

Established March, 1999. First Awarded, 2000

Nature and Purpose

This award is named in honor of the outstanding scholarly contributions of historian Timothy L. Smith and theologian Mildred Bangs Wynkoop. It is granted periodically by the Wesleyan Theological Society to recognize a recent publication of distinction in a research area related to the Wesleyan/Holiness tradition. Each book honored is judged to have helped the Wesleyan/Holiness tradition to be better understood and/or promoted.

Criteria for Choice

The book chosen for this award must fit well the nature and purpose of this award, be a full-length work published by a recognized academic press, and be deemed to make a substantive contribution to the author's particular field of study and to the Wesleyan/Holiness tradition generally. The book must have been published no longer than two years prior to its nomination as an award recipient.

Process of Choice

Nominations may be made by any member of the Wesleyan Theological Society or any academic publisher by submitting three copies of the nominated book to the Editor of the *Wesleyan Theological Journal* for the review of the Editorial Committee. Included

BOOK AWARD

with such copies must be a formal letter of nomination supporting the book, with a written rationale that addresses the book in terms of the purposes of this award. Such submission must be received by November 1 of the year prior to the March when the award would be given at the WTS annual meeting. All submissions will be considered. The Editor of the *WTJ* will coordinate the Editorial Committee's consideration of nominations received, leading to a decision on which if any nomination will be recommended to the WTS Executive Committee. The Executive Committee will take final action on any recommendation so received. The award is made only when a recommendation is received from the Editorial Committee and approved by the Executive Committee.

Public Honors

Recipients of this award will be recognized formally at the annual meeting of the Wesleyan Theological Society and the book will be featured in a subsequent issue of the *Wesleyan Theological Journal*. Other recognitions may be given as the Executive Committee determines from year to year.

History of Recipients

2000. Douglas M. Strong, *Perfectionist Politics: Abolitionism and the Religious Tensions of American Democracy*. Syracuse University Press, 1999. [See ad below.]

2001. ———

BOOK REVIEWS

Barry L. Callen. *Clark H. Pinnock: Journey Toward Renewal*. Napanee, Indiana: Evangel Publishing House, 2000. 293 pps. ISBN 1-928915-02-7

Reviewed by Henry H. Knight III, Saint Paul School of Theology, Kansas City, Missouri.

Certainly one of the most significant as well as dramatic stories in the evangelicalism of the last half-century is the theological journey of Clark Pinnock. While many of the neo-evangelicals sought to crack open the door of fundamentalism to the winds of reform, Pinnock eventually flings the door wide open, creatively rethinking a wide range of central theological issues. It was a story demanding to be told. Fortunately Barry Callen has provided us with an insightful and faithful account of what Pinnock has called his theological pilgrimage.

This intellectual biography has a number of important strengths. Callen has exhaustively researched primary and secondary sources, including material awaiting publication, in order to present a comprehensive and thorough analysis of Pinnock's theological journey. In addition, his numerous conversations with Pinnock provide richness and insure accuracy, yet do not compromise Callen's own contribution of helpful analysis throughout.

The book is further enhanced by seven selections from the writings of Pinnock, from 1968-1998, each followed by a reflection on "How My Mind Has Changed" written by Pinnock expressly for this volume. There is also a four-page *Afterword* by Pinnock reflecting on the volume as a whole, an extensive bibliography, and a helpful index. Pinnock reports that "Dr. Callen has created a convincing interpretation of my work, and I

do not challenge it in any way.” The inclusion of primary sources and contemporary responses marks this book as a potential theology text, especially in light of the theological analysis found within Callen’s chapters themselves.

There are at least three reasons why this book should be of high interest to readers of this *Journal*. The first involves the issues which Callen discusses. From the nature of Scripture to free-will theism, from an inclusivist theology of religions to a dynamic pneumatology, Pinnock has offered creative and often controversial ideas which push us to think more carefully and deeply. These are important concerns, addressed by Pinnock with considerable courage and passion. Callen helps us not only to understand how Pinnock thinks, but why the issues are important. More often than not, they are driven by Pinnock’s deep commitment to a God of love and power.

The second reason this book should be of particular interest is the trajectory of the journey recounted. Callen shows how the Reformed Scholasticism which marked Pinnock’s early years (and which Pinnock had ably built into a kind of rationalist theological fortress) began to unravel one element at a time, leading Pinnock toward a more dynamic and Arminian theology oriented toward a God of love. In saying that this should be of interest to Wesleyans, what I have in mind is not an Arminian triumphalism, but something quite different. Pinnock provides an angle of vision lacked by those who have been Arminians throughout their theological lives. His journey has much to teach us about our own commitments as well as his.

The final reason for this book’s high interest involves how Pinnock’s story sheds light on the theological task itself. Here is a theologian who insists that theology is fundamentally a pilgrimage in which we grow in the knowledge and love of God, who refuses to divorce theological reflection from vital piety, who has remained an evangelical yet dialogued with and learned from liberals, Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, process thinkers, and many others. Pinnock models for us that all-too-rare combination of passionate evangelical conviction and a humility that truly listens to others. Is his not a contemporary expression of the sort of approach to theological reflection and conversation that is recommended by John Wesley?

When Pinnock opened wide the fundamentalist door, he found standing on the other side a large number of evangelical Wesleyans, Pen-

tecostals, Anabaptists, and others. The impact of this encounter is evident in his most recent works, and he has graciously said that he wished he had known more of these traditions earlier in his pilgrimage. He has learned from us. Likewise, we have much to learn from Clark Pinnock. We are fortunate indeed that he has become a theological friend of Wesleyanism, and we are greatly indebted to Barry Callen for providing us with this lively and readable account of Pinnock's theological journey.

Tore Meistad. *Martin Luther and John Wesley on the Sermon on the Mount*. Pietist and Wesleyan Studies, No. 10. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1999. xviii + 357 pages. ISBN 0-8108-3567-3.

Reviewed by Randy L. Maddox, Paul T. Walls Professor of Wesleyan Theology, Seattle Pacific University, Seattle, Washington.

The present volume is a moderate revision of the author's 1989 doctoral dissertation at the University of Trondheim. In the decade since receiving his degree Meistad emerged as a leading theological voice in Norwegian Methodism. He also had begun to build a presence in broader Methodist/Wesleyan theological circles, and in (John and Charles) Wesley Studies in particular. Thus, it was with shock and great sadness that his friends learned of the diagnosis of his aggressive cancer, watched his brief struggle, and mourned his premature death this past June. Part of what we mourn in a situation like this is the potential foreclosing of a promising research program. While Meistad was working on two or three rather different projects, what I want to do in this review is summarize the general theme of his comparative study of Luther and Wesley, and then suggest a new direction in which questions were driving him (and that now we are dependent upon someone else to pick up).

It is not hard to understand why Methodists raised in a "Lutheran" nation would consider it important to relate Wesley's theology to that of Luther. At the outset of his study, Meistad notes that the broad tendency of the immediately prior generation of Methodist scholarship (particularly on the Continent) had been to attempt to harmonize Wesley with Luther. In keeping with the reclaiming of Wesley's distinctive voice that characterized Wesley Studies in the last quarter of the twentieth century, Meistad frames his study instead as an assessment of Luther on Wesley's terms! Meistad's basic thesis is that, far from being in broad harmony, Luther and Wesley represent two different theological paradigms or traditions in the Christian family. Drawing on an interpretive schema of Justo Gonzalez, he argues that Luther exemplifies the classically "Western" tradition or type of theology while Wesley's views fit *predominantly* a more "Eastern" type. This is obviously not a new suggestion; it can be traced back to several passing remarks of Albert Outler, if not earlier. What makes this book significant is the way in which Meistad marshals specific evidence to warrant the suggestion.

The first step in such an agenda is to decide what type of evidence is most helpful. Meistad argues that one of the more crucial places where the difference between alternative paradigms (or, at least, between the Western and Eastern paradigms) in Christian theology emerges is in their understanding of the relationship between salvation and ethics. He notes that one of the more central and debated biblical texts dealing with this relationship is the Sermon on the Mount. Therefore, Meistad organizes his study as a detailed comparison of Luther's commentaries and Wesley's sermons on the Sermon on the Mount.

Several points of difference emerge in this comparison. Meistad repeatedly characterizes specific differences as expressions of a broader underlying distinction: Luther focuses primarily on the formal relationship between God and humankind (emphasizing the unmerited nature of divine forgiveness), while Wesley is more concerned to stress God's gracious transformation of creation into God's likeness. The discussion of how this distinction plays out in Wesley's dissent from Luther's "Two Kingdoms" doctrine and Luther's dialectical relating of Law and Gospel are particularly helpful. Also suggestive are Meistad's observations on how Luther makes Pauline theology the key to reading the Sermon on the Mount (73), and how the active search for salvation that is supposed in the Wesleyan societies is foreign to Luther's thought (105).

By virtue of its detailed comparison, this book makes a significant contribution to current debate over Wesley's "place" in the Christian theological traditions. But in an ironic way it also poses an important question about this debate. How adequate are any such theological typologies to the complexity of historical figures? The reason it poses this question is that one of the more vigorous areas of recent research and debate is "Eastern" resonances in the "early" Luther. Meistad was just beginning to consider how this proposal might impact his reading of Luther and by implication his reading of Wesley. I can think of no better way to honor Tore Meistad's memory than for others to pursue such proposals, even as they may call into question some of the specific judgments expressed in this helpful book.

Henry H. Knight III, *A Future for Truth: Evangelical Theology in a Post-modern World*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997. 253 pages. ISBN 0-687-00960-X.

Reviewed by Barry L. Callen, Anderson University, Anderson, Indiana

The motive said to be behind the writing of this “constructive” theology goes beyond the intellectual pursuit of truth. The central concern is to find distinctly Christian ways to support effectively the proclaiming of the enduring truth of the Christian gospel in a postmodern world. One is taken through the complex world of current cultural assumptions and contemporary theological theories for the purpose of enhancing a credible witness to authentic Christian life in the prevailing culture.

Recalling appreciatively what he refers to as the “integrative approach” of John Wesley, Henry Knight sets forth what he intends to be “a fresh vision of revelation and redemption which is at the same time faithful to scripture and the Christian tradition” (p. 15). He does so consciously for the sake of the well-being of the “evangelical” community of Christians, an admittedly diverse community which he defines more broadly than many and in which he is a self-proclaimed Pietist and Wesleyan. The task being pursued, then, is the author’s seeking to identify the core meanings of a contemporary evangelical theology that are freed from excessive and sometimes distorting reliance on Enlightenment categories of thought. For instance, Knight explores clearly and at length the seeming dilemma of the Christian concern for proclamation of good news for all people and a postmodern cultural setting in which the very possibility of universal truth is questioned sharply. He concludes that, notwithstanding this current cultural orientation, a continuing affirmation of Christian truth does have a future, including a future for the basic belief that the redemptive implications of the resurrection of the crucified Jesus is a truth claim applicable to all people.

To arrive at the viability of such a dramatic truth claim first requires that the meaning of “evangelical” be clarified. This is done in chapter one, in part by emphasizing the importance of integrating Scripture and doctrine with the renewal of heart and life—calling for a strong doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Knight recounts with appreciation the work of Stanley Grenz which argues that the core meaning of “evangelical” involves a “distinctive spirituality” that rests on scriptural revelation in a way that

desires this revelation to come alive in personal and communal life (p. 19). The call to authentic faith realized experientially and embodied meaningfully in faith communities is said to be a call that can be heard with appreciation by seeking postmoderns.

Chapters two and three focus on a close examination of modernism and postmodernism. Knight notes especially a “post-critical” stream of postmodernism that recovers a hermeneutic of affirmation in contrast to the ultra-critical postmodernists who are highly suspicious of all metanarratives. This recovery of an attitude of affirmation is said to keep open the door to a Christian witness that is focused properly. Knight discusses helpfully the important contributions of Ludwig Wittgenstein, Alasdair MacIntyre, and Michael Polanyi. All metanarrative may not be incredible and “imperialistic” after all. In fact, it is said rightly that evangelicals can and should utilize select postmodern resources in the quest to “more faithfully and effectively understand and communicate that [Christian] revelation” (p. 68). Authentic Christianity will make itself evident in how believers form their communities and live their lives.

With this openness to the potential insights of select streams of contemporary thought, Knight begins with chapter four to develop his own “constructive proposal.” The following quotation highlights how the author incorporates into his proposal the assumptions of Jesus centeredness, the Spirit’s vital ministry, the narrative (as opposed to propositional) nature of scriptural revelation, transforming spiritual experience, and the relational and communal dimensions of Christian truth. Writes Knight:

The Spirit incorporates us and enables our participation in not only the community but the narrative of salvation, and in not only the narrative but the very life of God. The truth claim at stake in this is eminently personal. It is, in short, the testimony of Christians that this Jesus who they experience as risen and with whom they have a relationship is Savior, Lord, and God; and likewise the God in whom they believe is revealed most fully and faithfully by Jesus of Nazareth. (p. 84)

Of central concern in this book is the issue of relevance. Faith must have both biblical-historic roots and credible-contemporary fruit. Explored at length are the questions of how the scriptural text refers truthfully to the revelatory event of Jesus Christ and how one can properly overcome the considerable distance between ancient scripture and current culture. Is there “a future for truth”? The answer given here is “yes!” if a

postmodern evangelical theology is “securely anchored in the resurrection of Jesus Christ which gives a universal and ultimate significance to the particular life and death of Jesus” (p. 139).

Postmodernity has reopened key issues about the character and agency of God. Knight welcomes this opening and devotes his final chapters to exploring three interconnected theses. First, the pattern of God’s activity reveals God’s character. Second, once this divine character is clear, we are thus provided with important direction for identifying God’s actions today (God always acts in accord with the divine character). Finally, who God is and what God now is doing illumines the divinely intended character and agency of Christian believers. Believers are called to service in God’s present mission and they are called to serve by God’s way of doing things (which is not “imperialistic”).

In these final chapters one finds numerous insights into the love, power, and people of God. For instance: “The power of God has a christological shape, but a christological shape ultimately means the cross” (p. 179). Knight says this about churches that are alive to God and thus capable of effective evangelism in relation to postmodern people (p. 202):

These communities will not be free of ambiguity nor immune from conflict, as if Jesus had already returned in glory. But they will manifest in their own life together and in their relations to those around them the truth that the Jesus who was crucified is risen from the dead.

A conclusion reached is that there is an urgent need for Christ-narrated communities of faith that function with “a vigorous doctrine of the Holy Spirit” (p. 202) and thus actually embody the love of God revealed in Jesus. When the traditional claim that Jesus is Lord is Spirit-filled and community-realized, postmodern people just may be persuaded that this Jesus is their Lord and Savior as well.

Henry Knight’s *A Future for Truth* has not provided that last word on the crucial range of subjects it addresses—an impossibility not claimed or even attempted by the author. It does, however, present an insightful, well-documented, and clearly needed picture of the cultural problems at hand and the evangelistic and redemptive potential that still lies in Christian faith when the faith is conceived according to the biblical revelation of the crucified and risen Christ and when it is lived faithfully as enabled by Christ’s abiding Spirit.

The author's primary purpose is to offer a model of a postmodern evangelical theology "that upholds without compromise the truth of the gospel" (p. 15). For Christians in at least the pietist, pentecostal, and Wesleyan/holiness traditions, the likely judgment will be that this purpose has been largely achieved. For others, the challenge remains for them to evolve a better constructive model. This will not be easy for them to do. The author's secondary purpose is to provide an accessible introduction to the issues and thinkers in contemporary evangelical theology. This purpose has been fulfilled quite well. There are few books about Christian theology in today's setting that attempt and accomplish more than Knight's *A Future for Truth*.

John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock, and Graham Ward, *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology*. London and New York: Routledge, 1999. 277 pages.

Reviewed by Henry W. Spaulding II, Trevecca Nazarene University, Nashville, TN.

This book extends a theological discussion of enormous importance. The publication of *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology* goes a long way toward increasing the influence of the “radical orthodox” movement within theology. John Milbank, Graham Ward, and Catherine Pickstock edit the book and themselves are three of the more important interpreters of this way of doing theology. Numerous others have written essays in the volume. Recently the *Christian Century* ran a three-part article on the new British Theology where radical orthodoxy was featured prominently. The purpose of this review is to look at this book and the movement it names in order to assess its significance for Wesleyan-Holiness theology.

Milbank, Ward, and Pickstock define “radical orthodoxy” as the attempt “reclaim the world by situating its concerns and activities within a theological framework” (1). The depth and breadth of this theological analysis and its constructive proposals testify to the seriousness of the project. There are chapters on knowledge, revelation, language, friendship, erotics, aesthetics, music, etc. One will note throughout that radical orthodoxy is characterized by a rich treatment of sources.

The writers turn first to an explanation of the radical orthodoxy. They explain that it is orthodox in the “sense of commitment to creedal Christianity and the exemplarity of its patristic matrix” (2). The authors explain that the orthodoxy envisioned is much more akin to the Middle Ages than those of either “Protestant biblicism” or “Catholic positivism.” Milbank, Ward, and Pickstock set forth the meaning of “radical” in four ways. First, it is “a return to patristic and medieval roots, and especially to the Augustinian vision of all knowledge as divine illumination. . . .” (2). Second, it is “seeking to deploy this recovered vision systematically to criticize modern society, culture, politics, art, science and philosophy. . . .” (2). This is very plain by the range of topics addressed in the table of contents. Third, “radical” is defined in the sense of re-thinking the tradition. Fourth, the authors talk about a “radicalism [which] refuses the secular, but at the same time it does ‘re-envision’ a Christianity which never sufficiently valued the mediating participatory sphere which alone can lead us

to God" (3). These four parameters indicate the sense in which the authors mean to use "radical." Therefore, radical orthodoxy is really an *ancient postmodernity*. It is ancient in the sense that it is focused on the external as opposed to the internal. It is postmodern in the sense that it is interested in relationality as opposed to spatiality. This clearly attempts to go beyond the substantialism of premodernity as well as the subjectivity of modernity in order to explicate Christian practice. This bold vision calls one to the liturgy and the sacraments. It points to a way to get beyond the debate between modernity and postmodernity by critiquing both as inadequate.

One will also note that *Radical Orthodoxy* employs two distinct movements of thought. First, it critiques modern theology for its attempts to accommodate to secular reason. The chief target is liberalism, but there is a sense in which all theology has to deal with the post-Kantian situation. Second, it asserts a version of theology that calls one to the liturgy and the sacraments. This approach to things attempts to articulate Christian difference in such a way as to make it "strange." The first move is critical and the last is constructive. These two movements can be noted from beginning to end in this book.

The critique of secular reason is evident in the first major essay of the book, which is written by John Milbank. He begins by saying, "Modern theology on the whole accepts that philosophy has its own legitimacy, its own autonomy, apart from faith" (21). This way of doing theology is said to be inadequate. He points out how easily modern theology has accepted the proposition that theological articulation is in terms of philosophical categories. This way of doing things characterizes liberal theology and, to a surprising degree, even Barth according to Milbank. This leaves the question, "has there really been in this century, at least within Protestantism, any post-liberal theology?" (22). Milbank doubts it and for insight looks to Hamann, Jacobi, Wizenmann, and Herder who were late eighteenth-century individuals. He says, "These thinkers did produce a theological critique of philosophy construed as the autonomy of reason . . ." (22). He spends much of the rest of the article pointing out how especially Hamann and Jacobi accomplished this task, suggesting that they "are the source not of neo-orthodoxy, but of a more genuinely anti-liberal radical orthodoxy . . ." (23). Milbank closes by suggesting that these thinkers are important because they show how it is possible to "outwit nihilism" (32). Thus, this essay reveals a consistent critique of postmod-

ernism made by radical orthodoxy, that it is essentially nihilistic. It also suggests that theology should not attempt to define itself by some other independent field. At the center of this expression is the idea that space/secular reason is the invention of modern theology. The presence of secular reason is characterized by accommodation. This has had the effect of making reasonableness theology's most important move. Therefore, even within the camps of evangelicals there has been the sense that historical evidence demands or logically leads to a faithful verdict. Indeed, in such a situation it is a most pressing need for theologians to recover the "strangeness" of the gospel story.

John Montag makes a similar point in his essay on "Revelation." He says, "One of the great difficulties of all-knowing modernity is its blindness to its own blindness" (38). Modern theology is blind to its definition of revelation and its attachments to modern metaphysics. Instead, Montag turns to patristic and medieval sources in order to recover an understanding of revelation as gift. This kind of move is characteristic of radical orthodoxy. Laurence Hemming, in a essay entitled "Nihilism: Heidegger and the Grounds of Redemption," argues for an orthodoxy "in the vanguard of the working out of questions concerning faith and salvation, and never bringing up an angry or reluctant rear" (91). Theology needs to be more attentive to the gift, which lies at its center. In other words, "Orthodoxy in this sense ceases to be 'assertion' and is better understood as prayer and most formally as sacrament . . ." (93).

One way in which *Radical Orthodoxy* attempts to argue for a radically different approach to Christian orthodoxy is to point out the post-Kantian character to modern theology. There is a certain "agnosticism" in the secular groundwork, an ahistorical foundationalism that poses a threat to the "strangeness" of the Christian faith. Secularity seems to rescue the Christian faith to intellectual credibility; but it actually delivers the faith to a "subjective aspiration" that can only precariously affirm objective values and divine transcendence. When theology begins with the subject, it cannot but end with a version of the Christian faith that has already lost "the authentic shock of the divine word."

Central to Milbank's attempt to critique secular reason is his noting of its complicity with an ontology of violence. He argues that theology will require counter-ontology, one that is Trinitarian. His critique of secular reason points to a need to recover the strangeness of the gospel. Milbank's "strange word" means that the attempt to locate what is real out-

side theology is doomed to failure. Theology is its own social theory and its own metaphysic. This strangeness posits harmony as prior to force, peace before violence, and practice over theory. It requires a radical orthodoxy that articulates a Christianity that is more incarnate, participatory, aesthetic, erotic, socialized, and even Platonic. The task of such a theology is “to tell again the Christian mythos, pronounce again the Christian logos, and call again for Christian praxis in a manner that restores their freshness and originality.” Milbank’s theology intends to re-narrate the Christian faith as counter-history, counter-ethics, counter-ontology, and counter-kingdom. The importance of counter-ontology is crucial for understanding Milbank’s Trinitarian ontology. He talks about metanarrative realism at the heart of counter-history, agreeing with George Lindbeck’s rejection of founding doctrines either as cognitive or experiential expressions.

The line of thought argued in this book basically points in the right direction. Milbank is rightly suspicious of any attempt to ground Christian metanarrative realism in the story of Jesus, as does Lindbeck, an attempt Milbank calls “narratological foundationalism.” Milbank instead locates a counter-history or metanarrative realism in the church. Essentially, Milbank argues that surrendering any domain of truth to something outside of the church is an admission of some other narrative that is more fundamental. This is a path tragically taken by modern theology and not tolerated by this book.

Two important themes emerge from this analysis. First, Milbank is insistent that an emphasis on *practice* does not reduce the importance, even the necessity of *ontological speculation*. Second, Milbank sees counter-history as ontological peace. Therefore, any ontology of violence is a sign of an alien intrusion into the Christian story. Milbank’s counter-history is dependent on a Trinitarian ontology. His theology is “radical” because of its insistence on *doxology* as a pathway to orthodoxy. He highlights the relational and participatory nature of Christian faith.

The authors of this significant indicate the central theological framework of radical orthodoxy to be participation “as developed by Plato and reworked by Christianity.” Any alternative configuration “reserves a territory independent of God” (3). This tenet of *Radical Orthodoxy* includes the thrust of “ancient postmodernity,” a term which is especially important for radical orthodoxy because it requires that all of life be construed through the theological lens. It is hoped that the obliteration of the usual

faith-reason and grace-nature distinctions will make a re-narration of the Christian faith possible. This is highly important because it leads to a relational construal of the Christian faith, something vital to the Wesleyan-Holiness theological tradition.

The array of topics dealt with in this book testifies to the importance of radical orthodoxy. Articles appear on knowledge, revelation, language, nihilism, desire, friendship, erotics, bodies, the city, aesthetics, perception, and music. These topics suggest that radical orthodoxy does, indeed, intend to situate the world within Christian theology. This theological option will not allow some independent sphere of knowledge to stand apart from theology.

Sung Ho Kim, *History of the Korea Evangelical Holiness Church*, ed. by the History Compilation Committee of the Korea Evangelical Holiness Church, translated by Chun-Hoi HEO and Hye-Kyung HEO (Seoul: Living Waters, 1998). 386 pps. No ISBN.

Reviewed by David Bundy, Christian Theological Seminary, Indianapolis, IN.

The Korean Holiness Church (inserting the term “Evangelical” was insisted upon by American missionaries of OMS, but the term is not part of the Korean name) is arguably the third largest Holiness church in the world after the Salvation Army and the Church of the Nazarene. It is the third largest Christian denomination in Korea and functions there as a “mainline” church. It has about 2000 congregations and about one million adherents and supports the largest theological education institution in Asia, Seoul Theological University, first founded in 1911. Its periodical, *Living Waters* (founded 1922), circulates widely in Korea and around the world. The Korean Holiness Church, affiliated with OMS, Inc., is growing rapidly, boldly evangelistic, and developing an intellectual community that is as least as sophisticated as those of the North American or European Holiness churches. The Korean Holiness Church is committed to global mission. Missionaries are at work in the USA, Russia, Thailand, Sri Lanka, India, Kenya, Bolivia, the Philippines, China, Indonesia, Bangladesh, Cameron, Taiwan, and Japan.

This history narrates the story of the Korean Holiness Church from the initial preaching in Korea (30 May 1907) of Sang Jun Kim and Bin Chang who were graduated from the Tokyo OMS Bible School. They established the Cho Sun Oriental Missionary Society Jesus Doctrine Mission Hall at Yumgok and another at what is now Seoul. For connections to the American context, it is worth noting that the Japanese school was the successor to God’s Bible School founded in Cincinnati, Ohio, earlier in the century. The missionary connection was to the Cowmans and Kilbournes. There was however, a crucial and close connection to Nakada Juji, leader of the Japanese Holiness church and a prolific theologian. However, the Korean Holiness Church was a Korean church from the beginning, as might be expected by practitioners of a mission theory developed by William Taylor, encouraged by Martin Wells and Minnie Knapp at God’s Bible School, and inspired by the story of Sammy Morris.

After three decades of establishing the church, the periods of suffering came. The first (1937-43) was at the hands of the Japanese occupiers of Korea during World War II. During this period, the leaders of the church, both clergy and lay, were persecuted and frequently martyred. The Japanese required that the Church turn over title of all properties to them. This was done. Then in 1943 the church was officially dissolved by order of the Japanese controlled government. After the War, the church was reconstituted only to face another test of life, organization and faith. The Korean War (1950-1954) forced continuous movement of persons and congregations in both what became the North and South. There was persecution, martyrdom, and deprivation. Several areas of strength of the Korean Holiness Church eventually became part of North Korea.

After the Korean War, the Korean Holiness Church was re-established out of the ashes of devastation. As part of the Korean renaissance, it has been active in the creation of culture for the modern period. The story of the last half century has been one of continuous growth, splits, reunification, and the evolution of diverse Korean Wesleyan/Holiness churches that have their own ministries and theological trajectories. This volume discusses this history, establishes a chronology, provides prosopographical data, and offers insights into organizational and institutional history. Given the energy and frenetic culture creating and missional efforts of the denomination, it is remarkable that this is the first book published in English that examines the history and theology of the church. There is the volume of Robert Wood, *In these Mortal Hands: The Story of the Oriental Missionary Society. The First Fifty Years* (Greenwood, IN: OMS International, 1983), but that important book is written as a history of the mission organization from an American institutional perspective. Both the work of Wood and the *History of the Korea Evangelical Holiness Church* are of ambiguous genre, and will long function as both primary and secondary literature for the tradition. Despite the fact that it is published by the denomination, it is a straightforward and honest book that is not afraid to discuss in detail the problems, conflicts, divisions and reunions of divided groups. The English translation is undocumented, but the Korean literature exists to lead the scholar from the easily accessible to the more careful documentation. Comparisons of the “story” of the church presented in this volume with the Korean language historiography suggests that there are no serious problems with the English presentation. The resultant book is a carefully crafted, responsible, and trustworthy guide for those interested in the historical narrative of the tradition.

The strengths of this volume are many. If there is any weakness, it is in the analysis of the American (as well as Japanese and British Holiness) roots of the Korean Holiness Church. This is certainly understandable. In the USA, there was also a split between the radical Holiness tradition and the major Holiness denominations after World War II. The historiography came to focus on the wealthier and more powerful denominations. God's Bible School and the radical Holiness tradition, out of which the Korean Holiness Church grew, has been little studied. It is hoped that the volumes forthcoming in celebration of the centennial of God's Bible School and the research presented in *The Revivalist* during the centennial year will shed light on this period of Holiness history. Certainly the history of the Korean Holiness Church and its theological perspectives have serious implications for the discussion of the Holiness churches around the world. Any "meta-theory" of the worldwide Holiness movement will of necessity be required to give significant attention to the developments of the Holiness traditions in Korea. This book will provide the essential narrative of that history. The author, translators, and publisher are to be congratulated for their fine work.

Glenn K. Horridge, *The Salvation Army: Origins and Early Days 1865-1900*. Godalming, Surrey: Ammonite Books, 1993. 300 pages. ISBN 1-869866-07-X.

Reviewed by R. David Rightmire, Professor of Theology, Asbury College, Wilmore, KY.

This work by Glenn Horridge is the first published detailed analysis of the origins, growth, and organization of the Christian Mission and Salvation Army between 1865 and 1900. He assesses the development of William Booth's new religious movement by identifying the factors and conditions which proved most conducive to the Army's success. In so doing, the author reveals the important contribution the Army made to late Victorian and Edwardian socio-religious life. This work discusses the background of the movement's leadership, the forces of opposition to its mission, and the successes and failures of Booth's methods. It looks critically at why the movement grew and in what locations. The author's interpretations are verified by means of five case studies that highlight the development of the Army in diverse geographical regions within Britain. The work includes numerous tables, maps, illustrations, as well as eleven appendices and an index.

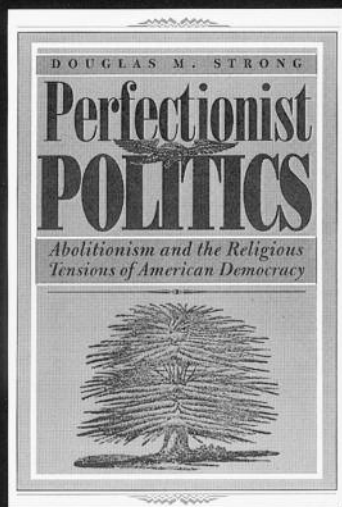
Horridge seeks to go behind the hagiographical accounts of Army origins to provide objective verification (where possible) and explanation of the events themselves. He views the Army's adaptation of methods as a strength of the organization as it sought to find new and effective means of communicating the gospel to a variety of audiences. The author maintains that Booth's "springboard" policy of expansion and adaptation, combined with the utilization of women, the adoption of the military metaphor to express its mission, Booth's autocratic control, and the use of novel methods to communicate its message were the keys to the Army's success. By meeting the need among the working-class for a sense of belonging, the Army provided security amidst insecure times for its adherents. Persecution became a measure of the movement's effectiveness and a means of eliciting public sympathy. Once persecution diminishes, social work replaces it as a means of attracting public support. Adaptation of missiology to encompass social work is thus interpreted as a direct result of Booth's pragmatic ecclesiology.

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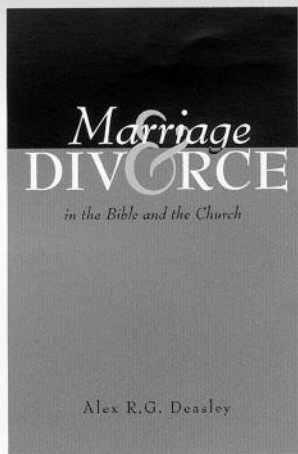
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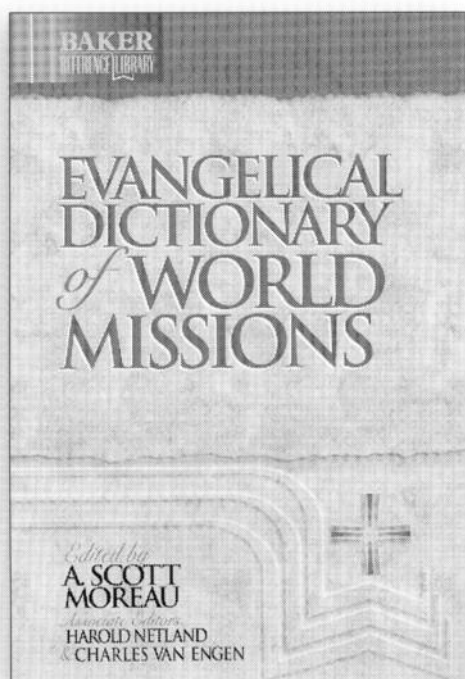
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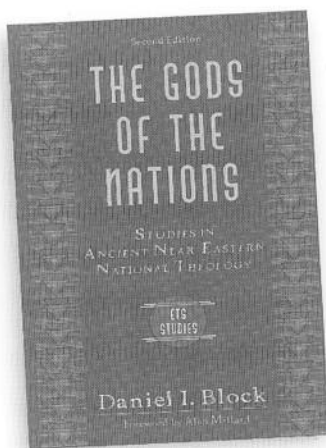
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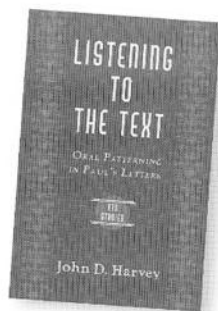
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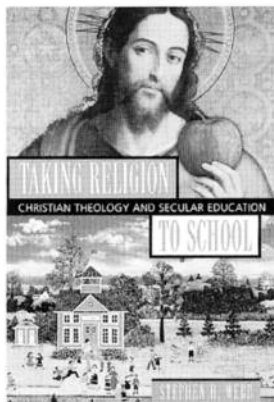
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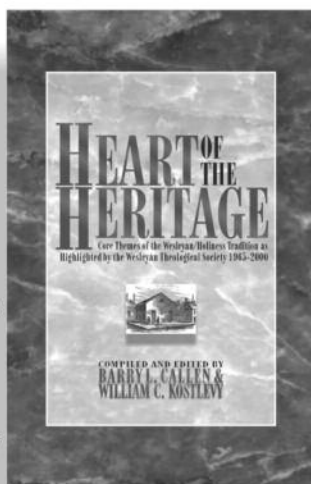


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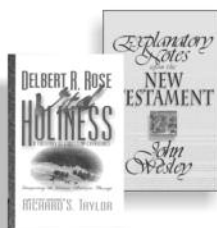


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