

# ***Wesleyan Theological Journal***

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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

The 35th annual meeting of the Wesleyan Theological Society convened on the campus of Azusa Pacific University in March, 2000. The program was organized around the theme "The Holy Trinity." Since the primary intent of John Wesley's theological work was "practical" as opposed to metaphysical, ontological, or speculative, one does not find a carefully developed Trinitarian reflection in his work. Nonetheless, as Geoffrey Wainwright demonstrated in his keynote address to the Society, the Trinitarian pattern of theological thought behind such reflection is key to Wesley's biblical hermeneutic. Explored in this issue are considerations of the biblical rootage of Trinitarian thought and related philosophical, theological, educational, and liturgical foundations and implications. Two articles focus on the nature and relevance of the philosophy of John Milbank.

The nature and work of God are also explored in other ways. The Presidential Address of Dr. Al Truesdale raises key questions about the logical link between God's nature and the destiny of humans. Reflecting an "open" view of God, Barry L. Callen traces the theological journey of Clark H. Pinnock from a Reformed scholasticism to a stance which is relationally rich and Wesleyan-friendly. Jirair Tashjian then illustrates this move away from divine determinism with his study of divine providence and the commonly supposed necessity of the death of Jesus for the reconciling work of God in the world. Craig Keen extends this relational journey, refusing the temptation to infuse the passion of Jesus with an atonement theory that sees God's forgiveness of sin controlled by the need to exact payment to satisfy divine wrath.

Earlier issues of the *Journal* have carried material by Laurence Wood and Randy Maddox concerning the issue of John Fletcher, John Wesley, and "baptism of the Spirit" language. Appearing now is a point/counterpoint by them regarding the clarification of a key research fact and discussion about whether or not this clarification is of particular significance. Six reviewers explore a series of recent book publications that are illuminating aspects of the Wesleyan/Holiness tradition in North and Latin America.

We note with pleasure that the 2001 Smith/Wynkoop Book Award given by the Wesleyan Theological Society goes to Billy Abraham's *Canon and Criterion in Christian Theology* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1998). The Fall 2001 issue of the *WTJ* will carry an extended review of this significant work and a response to the review by Billy Abraham. An ad is found in this issue.

Barry L. Callen  
Anderson University  
April, 2001





# WESLEY'S TRINITARIAN HERMENUTICS

by

Geoffrey Wainwright

If one consults the entry “Trinity” in the index of an edition of John Wesley’s works or in a book on Wesley’s theology, the pickings are likely to be slim. The superficial impression might be formed that Wesley undervalued the reality and the doctrine of the Trinity. Or else, from another corner, the paucity of references might happily be taken as confirmation that “the Trinity” belonged to that “orthodoxy” by which Wesley seemed to set such little store in comparison with “the religion of the heart.” Thus Wesley could indeed say, in his sermon “The Way to the Kingdom”:

A man may be orthodox in every point; he may not only espouse right opinions, but zealously defend them against all opposers; he may think justly concerning the incarnation of our Lord, concerning the ever blessed Trinity, and every other doctrine contained in the oracles of God. He may assent to all three creeds—that called the Apostles’, the Nicene, and the Athanasian—and yet ’tis possible he may have no religion at all, no more than a Jew, Turk, or pagan. He may be almost as orthodox as the devil (though indeed not altogether; for every man errs in something, whereas we can’t well conceive him [the devil] to hold any erroneous opinion) and may all the while be as great a stranger as he to the religion of the heart.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>“The Way to the Kingdom” (1746), I. 6, Sermon 7, in *The Works of John Wesley*, Bicentennial Edition (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984 onward), vol. 1 (ed. A. C. Outler, 1984), 220-221.

However, two things need to be noted. First, when Wesley appears in his writings to demean orthodoxy, it is *dead* orthodoxy he is aiming at; he is well aware that *living* faith has classic Christian doctrine as the intellectual formulation of its content. Second, it will be observed in the very passage just quoted that Wesley includes “the ever blessed Trinity” among the “doctrines” that are “contained in the oracles of God.” This point should itself suffice to give initial plausibility to looking for the trinitarian dimension in Wesley’s hermeneutics of the Bible.

There is a further reason why people may miss the trinitarian dimension in Wesley: he himself does not often use the term “Trinity” in his writings. In the sermon that bears by way of exception the title “On the Trinity,” Wesley writes:

I dare not insist upon anyone’s using the word “Trinity” or “Person.” I use them myself without any scruple, because I know of none better. But if any man has scruple concerning them, who shall constrain him to use them? I cannot; much less would I burn a man alive—and that with moist, green wood—for saying, “Though I believe the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God, yet I scruple using the words ‘Trinity’ and ‘Persons’ because I do not find those terms in the Bible.” These are the words which merciful John Calvin cites as wrote by Servetus in a letter to himself. I would insist only on the direct words unexplained, just as they lie in the text: “There are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one.”<sup>2</sup>

We shall return to that sermon of Wesley’s and to the problematic character of the scriptural text on which it is based, but meanwhile a passage may be quoted from the conclusion of the sermon that puts us on the right track towards Wesley’s trinitarian hermeneutics. Listen for the soteriological and doxological thrusts in this paragraph:

The knowledge of the Three-One God is interwoven with all true Christian faith, with all vital religion. . . . I know not how anyone can be a Christian believer till “he hath” (as St. John

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<sup>2</sup>“On the Trinity” (1775), 4, Sermon 55, in *Works*, Bicentennial Edition, vol. 2 (ed. Outler, 1985), 377-378. Wesley’s ironic reference to Calvin is perhaps not surprising. Outler shows, however, that Wesley’s account both of Servetus’s teaching and of Calvin’s part in the affair is somewhat garbled.

speaks) “the witness in himself” [1 John 5:10]; till “the Spirit of God witnesses with his spirit that he is a child of God” [cf. Romans 8:16]—that is, in effect, till God the Holy Ghost witnesses that God the Father has accepted him through the merits of God the Son—and having this witness he honours the Son and the blessed Spirit “even as he honours the Father” [cf. John 5:23].<sup>3</sup>

Incidentally, that same passage uses the other term that Wesley sometimes used in place of “Trinity,” namely “the Three-One God.”

Fortified by the passage from the sermon “On the Trinity,” I shall now seek to expound Wesley’s trinitarian hermeneutics, sometimes picking up what may be considered mere hints, but at other times drawing on quite explicit statements of his. My argument will be that Wesley was thoroughly trinitarian in his understanding of the composition of the Scriptures, in his ways of proceeding with the Scriptures, and in his reading of the content of the Scriptures.

### How the Scriptures Came To Be

In the Preface to his *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament*, Wesley gives the following succinct account of the historical origins of the Scriptures:

Concerning the Scriptures in general, it may be observed, the word of the living God, which directed the first Patriarchs also, was, in the time of Moses, committed to writing. To this were added, in several succeeding generations, the inspired writings of the other Prophets. Afterwards, what the Son of God preached, and the Holy Ghost spake by the Apostles, the Apostles and Evangelists wrote. This is what we now style the Holy Scripture: This is that “word of God which remaineth for ever”; of which, though “heaven and earth pass away, one jot or tittle shall not pass away.” The Scripture, therefore, of the Old and New Testament is a most solid and precious system of divine truth.<sup>4</sup>

A human role of various kinds, differing according to historical circumstances, is clearly recognized by Wesley in the writing down of God’s

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 17, 385.

<sup>4</sup>Preface to *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament* (1754-55), 10, in *The Works of John Wesley*, ed. Thomas Jackson (London: Wesleyan-Methodist Conference Office, 1872), vol. 14, 238.

word by Moses and his successors, and by the apostles and evangelists. For present purposes we do not need to go into the question of Wesley's oscillation in other discussions between a dictation theory—whereby certain parts of Scripture were given to the human writer by “particular revelation”—and the allowance that the human writers used their human judgment in a more general accordance with “the divine light which abode with them, the standing treasure of the Spirit of God.”<sup>5</sup> What is clear from the passage in the Preface to the *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament* and remains consistently so in Wesley's thought, is that Scripture is God's word all through, including now gospels and epistles as well as the law and the prophets. The God of Israel, who directed the patriarchs and inspired the prophets, is (as we shall see later) the Holy Trinity, who has now been revealed as such in the incarnation of the Son, the Word made flesh, and in the Holy Spirit who was seen to rest upon Jesus and heard to speak through the apostles at Pentecost and beyond.

This trinitarian origin of the Scriptures is to be matched, according to Wesley, in our appropriation of them.

### Searching the Scriptures

Searching the Scriptures is, in Wesley's view, an “ordinance of God,” a “means of grace,” and a “work of piety.” Thus in the General Rules, the “ordinances of God” include both “searching the Scriptures,” apparently understood as a family or private exercise, and “the ministry of the Word, either read or expounded” as part of “the public worship of God.”<sup>6</sup> In the sermon entitled “The Means of Grace,” the list contains “searching the Scriptures (which implies reading, hearing, and meditating thereon).”<sup>7</sup> In the sermon “On Working Out Our Own Salvation,” the exhortation to “works of piety” embraces “Search the Scriptures: hear them in public, read them in private, and meditate therein.”<sup>8</sup>

The guidance that Wesley gives for proceeding with the Scriptures is trinitarian in shape. He begins pneumatologically. In the Preface to the

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<sup>5</sup>See Scott J. Jones, *John Wesley's Conception and Use of Scripture* (Nashville: Abingdon Press/Kingswood Books, 1995), 18-21.

<sup>6</sup>“Nature, Design, and General Rules of the United Societies” (1743), 6, in *Works*, Bicentennial Edition, vol. 9 (ed. R. E. Davies, 1989), 73.

<sup>7</sup>“The Means of Grace” (1746), II. 1, Sermon 16, in *Works*, Bicentennial Edition, vol. 1, 381.

<sup>8</sup>“On Working Out Our Own Salvation” (1785), II. 4, Sermon 85, in *Works*, Bicentennial Edition, vol. 3 (ed. Outler, 1986), 205.

*Explanatory Notes upon the Old Testament*, Wesley declares that “Scripture can only be understood through the same Spirit whereby it was given.”<sup>9</sup> Similarly in the lengthy letter to William Warburton, Bishop of Gloucester: “I do firmly believe (and what serious man does not?), *omnis scriptura legi debet eo Spiritu quo scripta est*: ‘We need the same Spirit to understand the Scripture, which enabled the holy men of old to write it.’”<sup>10</sup> The Latin tag comes from Thomas Kempis’s *Imitation of Christ* (I.5) and was taken up by the Second Vatican Council’s constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum* (12), and quoted in turn by the new universal *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (§ 111) as “a principle of correct interpretation”: “Sacred Scripture must be read and interpreted in the light of the same Spirit by whom it was written.”

For John Wesley, this pneumatological principle entailed in practice that the study of Scripture be surrounded by prayer. That is explicitly stated in the same paragraph 18 of the Preface to the *Explanatory Notes upon the Old Testament*:

Serious and earnest prayer should be constantly used before we consult the oracles of God; seeing “Scripture can only be understood through the same Spirit whereby it was given.” Our reading should likewise be closed with prayer, that what we read may be written on our hearts.<sup>11</sup>

In his counsel to the reader of his edition of the English New Testament, Wesley provides a sample prayer whose phraseology we have already heard him echo:

I advise every one, before he reads the Scripture, to use this or the like prayer: “Blessed Lord, who hast caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning, grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience and comfort of thy holy word, we may embrace, and ever hold fast, the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou has given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ.”<sup>12</sup>

<sup>9</sup>Preface to the *Explanatory Notes upon the Old Testament* (1765), 18, in *Works*, Jackson edition, vol. 14, 253.

<sup>10</sup>“A Letter to the Right Reverend the Lord Bishop of Gloucester, occasioned by his tract ‘On the Office and Operations of the Holy Spirit’” (1762), in *Works*, Jackson edition, vol. 9, 154.

<sup>11</sup>*Works*, Jackson edition, vol. 14, 253.

<sup>12</sup>*Works*, Jackson edition, vol. 14, 307.

That is a collect from the Book of Common Prayer, located in the 1662 Prayer Book at the second Sunday in Advent. It carries a subtle trinitarian watermark: the “Lord” of the opening address may be either the First Person or the entire Trinity; “patience” and “comfort” are characteristically in the Scriptures the result of the Holy Spirit’s operation; the work of redemption is Christ’s.

So we may now proceed christologically. Throughout the Church’s history, Christ has been taken as the key to the Scriptures. Again, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* sums up the entire tradition thus: “Different as the books which comprise it may be, Scripture is a unity by reason of the unity of God’s plan, of which Christ Jesus is the center and heart, open since his Passover” (§ 112). In line with the Christian tradition, beginning from the writers of the New Testament, the Old Testament is interpreted by Wesley in a broadly prophetic way, as the preparation for the coming of Christ. The point is put in a nutshell when Wesley recalls Jesus’ instruction to Jewish controversialists to “search the Scriptures, for they testify of me” (John 5:39): “For this very end did he direct them to search the Scriptures, that they might believe in him.”<sup>13</sup> Then, in the Preface to his *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament*, Wesley delineates the contents of the New Testament—gospels, acts, epistles, apocalypse—christocentrically:

The New Testament is all those sacred writings in which the new testament or covenant is described. The former part of this contains the writings of the Evangelists and Apostles; the latter, the revelation of Jesus Christ. In the former is, first, the history of Jesus Christ, from his coming in the flesh, to his ascension into heaven; then, the institution and history of the Christian Church, from the time of his ascension. The Revelation delivers what is to be, with regard to Christ, the Church, and the universe, till the consummation of all things.<sup>14</sup>

Christ himself is our way to the Father. For Wesley, according to the Preface of his *Explanatory Notes upon the Old Testament*, the purpose of reading the Scriptures is “to understand the things of God”:

<sup>13</sup>“The Means of Grace,” III. 7, Sermon 16, in *Works*, Bicentennial Edition, vol. 1, 387.

<sup>14</sup>Preface to the *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament*, 12, in *Works*, Jackson edition, vol. 14, 239.

“Meditate thereon day and night” [cf. Joshua 1:8; Psalm 1:2]. So shall you attain the best knowledge, even to “know the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom He hath sent” [John 17:3]. And this knowledge will lead you “to love Him, because He hath first loved us” [1 John 4:19]; yea, “to love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength” [cf. Deuteronomy 6:5; Matthew 22:37; Mark 12:30; Luke 12:27]. Will there not then be all “that mind in you which was also in Christ Jesus” [Philippians 2:5]? And in consequence of this, while you joyfully experience all the holy tempers described in this book, you will likewise be outwardly “holy as He that hath called you is holy, in all manner of conversation” [1 Peter 1:15].<sup>15</sup>

Thus this particular hermeneutical circle—the trinitarian one—is complete. Study of the Scriptures in the Spirit, by whom they were divinely written, conveys the incarnate Christ, who gives us knowledge of the Father who sent him, so that we may love Him and thus be conformed to the Son and enjoy the holiness which the Holy Spirit gives. The dynamic pattern described by Wesley matches well the movement which St. Basil of Caesarea sets forth in one of the most important treatises in the history of trinitarian doctrine, his work *On the Holy Spirit*: the Father’s blessings reach us through the Son in the Holy Spirit, in whom then our thanks and prayers ascend through the Son to the Father. Wesley traces the function of the Scriptures in this soteriological and doxological process. With that, we come to what may be called the scope of the Scriptures.

### The Scope of the Scriptures

John Wesley characteristically spoke of the “general tenor of Scripture” or “the whole scope of Scripture.”<sup>16</sup> As a Greek scholar, he would know that *skopos* connotes both goal and range.

The salvific purpose of the Scriptures is graphically rendered in the celebrated passage of Wesley’s Preface to the *Sermons on Several Occasions* that appears indebted, perhaps via William Law’s *Christian Perfection*, to the arrow and the sparrow of Wisdom 5:9-13 and Bede’s story from the court of King Edwin:

<sup>15</sup>Preface to the *Explanatory Notes upon the Old Testament*, 17, in *Works*, Jackson edition, vol. 14, 252.

<sup>16</sup>See Jones, *John Wesley’s Conception and Use of Scripture*, 43-53.

To candid, reasonable men I am not afraid to lay open what have been the inmost thoughts of my heart. I have thought, I am a creature of a day, passing through life as an arrow through the air. I am a spirit come from God and returning to God; just hovering over the great gulf, till a few moments hence I am no more seen—I drop into an unchangeable eternity! I want to know one thing, the way to heaven—how to land safe on that happy shore. God himself has condescended to teach the way: for this very end he came from heaven. He hath written it down in a book. O give me that book! At any price give me the Book of God! I have it. Here is knowledge enough for me. Let me be *homo unius libri*. Here then I am, far from the busy ways of men. I sit down alone: only God is here. In his presence I open, I read his Book; for this end, to find the way to heaven. Is there a doubt concerning the meaning of what I read? Does anything appear dark or intricate? I lift up my heart to the Father of lights: “Lord, is it not thy Word, ‘If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God’? Thou ‘givest liberally and upbraidest not’ [cf. James 1:5]. Thou hast said, ‘If any be willing to do thy will, he shall know’ [cf. John 7:17]. I am willing to do, let me know, thy will.” I then search after and consider parallel passages of Scripture, “comparing spiritual things with spiritual” [1 Corinthians 2:13]. I meditate thereon, with all the attention and earnestness of which my mind is capable. If any doubt still remains, I consult those who are experienced in the things of God, and then the writings whereby, being dead, they yet speak. And what I thus learn, that I teach.<sup>17</sup>

Having been sensitized by the passages already read from Wesley on the subject, we shall perhaps be ready to catch the trinitarian hints here: God’s “condescension” in the incarnation of the Son and in the Spirit’s writing of the Scriptures; the “Father of lights” [James 1:17], who works by his “Word of truth” [James 1:18] and “reveals deep things by his Spirit” [cf. 1 Cor. 2:10-16].

Moreover, when Wesley speaks of “the way to heaven,” the road is intrinsically related to the destination. The pilgrim’s encounter with the Triune God is a foretaste of the complete achievement of “man’s chief

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<sup>17</sup>Preface to the *Sermons on Several Occasions* (1746), 5, in *Works*, Bicentennial Edition, vol. 1, 104-105.



end" which Wesley likes to quote from the Westminster Catechism, "to glorify God and enjoy Him for ever"<sup>18</sup>—and which Wesley himself describes in a trinitarian way in the peroration to his sermon "The New Creation": "And to crown all, there will be a deep, an intimate, an uninterrupted union with God; a constant communion with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ, through the Spirit; a continual enjoyment of the Three-One God, and of all the creatures in him!"<sup>19</sup>

That universal vision of the End allows us to treat also the range of the Scriptures in their testimony to God's purpose in the Beginning; and it emerges that not only the new creation but already the first creation is presented by Wesley in trinitarian fashion. To interpret "The End of Christ's Coming," in a sermon under that title, Wesley backtracked to Genesis.<sup>20</sup> Without the benefit of Wellhausen's source-criticism, Wesley obviously considered the first three chapters as a single story; whether in "P" or in "J(E)," it was the same Holy Trinity who said "Let us make man in our image" (Genesis 1:26-27) and who "formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life" (Genesis 2:7):

To take the matter from the beginning, "the Lord God" (literally "Jehovah, the Gods"; that is, One and Three) "created man in his own image."

That meant not only in God's "natural" image (endowment with understanding, will, and "a measure of liberty") but also in God's "moral" image, that is, "he created him not only in knowledge, but also in righteousness and true holiness":

As his understanding was without blemish, perfect in its kind, so were all his affections. They were all set right, and duly exercised on their proper objects. And as a free agent he steadily chose whatever was good, according to the direction of his understanding. In so doing he was unspeakably happy, dwelling in God and God in him, having an uninterrupted fellowship with the Father and the Son through the eternal Spirit.

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<sup>18</sup>"The Unity of the Divine Being" (1789), 10, Sermon 120, in *Works*, Bicentennial Edition, vol. 4 (ed. Outler, 1987), 64; cf. "What is Man? Psalm 8:4" (1788), 13-15, Sermon 116, *ibid.*, 25-26.

<sup>19</sup>"The New Creation" (1785), 18, Sermon 64, in *Works*, Bicentennial Edition, vol. 2, 510.

<sup>20</sup>"The End of Christ's Coming" (1781), I. 3-7, Sermon 62, in *Works*, Bicentennial Edition, vol. 2, 474-476, in particular for the following quotations.

But, as is told in Genesis 3, humankind fell; and that is why, for the reestablishment of that communion with the Triune God (indeed “a holiness and happiness far superior to that which Adam enjoyed in Paradise”), the entire trek from Genesis to Revelation had to occur, and “for this purpose was the Son of God manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil” (1 John 3:8, the text of Wesley’s sermon on “The End of Christ’s Coming”).

It is this need for redemption that makes it necessary for the Bible, as it tells the intervening story, to be interpreted according to what Wesley calls “the analogy of faith.”

### The Analogy of Faith

Drawn from Romans 12:6, which the Revised Standard Version translates with a subjective slant as “in proportion to our faith,” the “analogy of faith” bears in the older theology the objective meaning of “the proportion of the faith.” Still in that line, the 1992-94 *Catechism of the Catholic Church* gives as its third hermeneutical rule “attention to the analogy of faith” and defines the *analogia fidei* as “the coherence of the truths of faith among themselves and within the whole plan of Revelation” (§ 114). That corresponds exactly to the advice given by John Wesley in the Preface to his *Explanatory Notes upon the Old Testament*: “Have a constant eye to the analogy of faith, the connexion and harmony there is between those grand, fundamental doctrines, original sin, justification by faith, the new birth, inward and outward holiness.”<sup>21</sup> True, Wesley here considers Scriptures and the faith under the aspect of the human appropriation of salvation; but this rests, as Wesley makes amply clear throughout his Sermons, upon the self-revelation of the Triune God, the redemptive work of Christ, and the sanctifying work of the Spirit.<sup>22</sup>

We must note also that Wesley varies slightly, but not substantively, in his listings of the elements in the doctrinal scheme or the links in what he

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<sup>21</sup>Preface to the *Explanatory Notes upon the Old Testament*, 18, in *Works*, Jackson edition, vol. 14, 253.

<sup>22</sup>Note also this from the treatise *The Doctrine of Original Sin* (1757), in *Works*, Jackson edition, vol. 9, 429: “A denial of original sin contradicts the main design of the gospel, which is to humble vain man, and to ascribe to God’s free grace, not man’s free will, the whole of his salvation. Nor, indeed, can we let this doctrine go without giving up, at the same time, the greatest part, if not all, of the essential articles of the Christian faith. If we give up this, we cannot defend either justification by the merits of Christ, or the renewal of our natures by his Spirit.”

calls, in the sermon on “The End of Christ’s Coming,” the “connected chain” that “runs through the Bible from the beginning to the end.”<sup>23</sup> Thus in *The Principles of a Methodist Farther Explained*, he writes: “Our main doctrines, which include all the rest are three, that of repentance, of faith, and of holiness”; and he likens them to “the porch of religion,” “the door,” and “religion itself.”<sup>24</sup> In his commentary on 1 Peter 4:11, Wesley writes this about speaking according to Scripture: “The oracles of God teach that men should repent, believe, obey. He that treats of faith and leaves out repentance, or does not enjoin practical holiness to believers, does not speak as the oracles of God.”<sup>25</sup> In commenting on Romans 12:6, Wesley takes up the point from 1 Peter 4:11 about “the oracles of God” and then gives his fullest definition of prophesying “according to the analogy of faith,” that is:

. . . according to the general tenor of them [the oracles of God]; according to that grand scheme of doctrine which is delivered therein, touching original sin, justification by faith, and present, inward salvation. There is a wonderful analogy between all these; and a close and intimate connexion between the chief heads of that faith “which was once delivered to the saints.” Every article, therefore, concerning which there is any question should be determined by this rule; every doubtful scripture interpreted according to the grand truths which run through the whole.<sup>26</sup>

For present purposes, I will now demonstrate the trinitarian character of the “analogy of faith” by which Wesley interprets Scripture. A convenient text is Wesley’s sermon “The Scripture Way of Salvation.” Take first what Wesley says here about “preventing grace,” or “the first dawning of grace in the soul,” sometimes identified with “conscience,” though Wesley will not allow that it is merely “natural.” In the bringing of persons to repentance and the conviction of sin, Wesley can ascribe a role to each of the three Persons of the Trinity, seen in Johannine terms as the Father who “draws” (John 6:44), the Son who “enlightens” (John 1:9), and the Holy Spirit who “convicts” (John 16:8). Thus, prevenient grace comprises

<sup>23</sup>“The End of Christ’s Coming” (1781), III. 5, Sermon 62, in *Works*, Bicentennial Edition, vol. 2, 483.

<sup>24</sup>*The Principles of a Methodist Farther Explained* (1746), VI. 4, in *Works*, Bicentennial Edition, vol. 9, 227.

<sup>25</sup>*Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament*, ad loc. (1 Peter 4:11).

<sup>26</sup>*Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament*, ad loc. (Romans 12:6).

. . . all the “drawings” of “the Father,” the desires after God, which, if we yield to them, increase more and more; all that “light” wherewith the Son of God “enlighteneth everyone that cometh into the world,” showing every man “to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with his God”; all the convictions which his Spirit from time to time works in every child of man; although, it is true, the generality of men stifle them as soon as possible, and after a while, forget, or at least deny, that ever they had them at all.<sup>27</sup>

Then “The Scripture Way of Salvation” takes us to justification and sanctification. Here the emphases are respectively christological and pneumatological. The Father forgives the believer for the sake of Christ, thereby setting us in a new relationship to himself (a “relative” change), and at the same time begins to make us holy (a “real” change) by regenerating us through the Holy Spirit, whereby we start to be conformed to Christ:

Justification is another word for pardon. It is the forgiveness of all our sins, and (what is necessarily implied therein) our acceptance with God. The price whereby this hath been procured for us (commonly termed the “meritorious cause” of our justification) is the blood and righteousness of Christ, or (to express it a little more clearly) all that Christ hath done and suffered for us till “he poured out his soul for the transgressors” [cf. Isaiah 53:12]. The immediate effects of justification are, the peace of God, a “peace that passeth all understanding” [Philippians 4:7], and a “rejoicing in hope of the glory of God” [Romans 5:2], “with joy unspeakable and full of glory” [1 Peter 1:8].

And at the same time that we are justified, yea, in that very moment, sanctification begins. In that instant we are “born again,” “born from above,” “born of the Spirit” [John 3:3-8; cf. Titus 3:4-7]. There is a real as well as a relative change. We are inwardly renewed by the power of God. We feel “the love of God shed abroad in our heart by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us” [Romans 5:5], producing love to all mankind, and more especially to the children of God; expelling the love of the world, the love of pleasure, of ease,

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<sup>27</sup>“The Scripture Way of Salvation” (1765), I. 2, Sermon 43, in *Works*, Bicentennial Edition, vol. 2, 156-157.

of honour, of money; together with pride, anger, self-will, and every other evil temper—in a word, changing the “earthly, sensual, devilish” mind [James 3:15] into “the mind which was in Christ Jesus” [Philippians 2:5].<sup>28</sup>

When “The Scripture Way of Salvation” moves on to treat assurance, the trinitarian structure of the Godhead, of God’s dealings with the world, and of the Christian life in relation to God is made abundantly clear on the basis of Ephesians 4:4-6, Galatians 2:20, 1 John 5:6-12, Romans 8:14-17, and Galatians 4:4-6:

The Apostle says: “There is one faith, and one hope of our calling,” one Christian, saving faith, as “there is one Lord” in whom we believe, and “one God and Father of us all.” And it is certain this faith necessarily implies an assurance (which is here only another word for evidence, it being hard to tell the difference between them) that “Christ loved me, and gave himself for me.” For “he that believeth” with the true, living faith, “hath the witness in himself.” “The Spirit witnesseth with his spirit that he is a child of God.” “Because he is a son, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into his heart, crying, Abba, Father”; giving him an assurance that he is so, and a childlike confidence in him.<sup>29</sup>

Given what Wesley describes as “the Scripture way of salvation,” it is hardly surprising that he should declare in his sermon “On the Trinity” that “the knowledge of the Three-One God is interwoven with all true Christian faith, with all vital religion.”

### **The Trinity Revealed and Believed**

In Wesley’s sermon “On the Trinity,” the trinitarian experience of the believer confirms the doctrine of the Trinity, while the doctrine rests on the “fact” which “God has revealed” that “God is Three and One.” As things stand, Wesley appears to find a divine revelation of the Trinity in propositional form in the sentence he takes as the text of his sermon, namely the so-called Johannine comma at 1 John 5:7-8: “There are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one.” The apologetic thrust of his argument is that, as with the creation of light or with the incarnation of the Word, one may believe

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid., I, 3-4, 157-158.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., II, 3, 161-162.

the fact, which has been revealed, without understanding the manner, which has not been revealed and therefore remains mysterious:

I believe this *fact* also (if I may use the expression)—that God is Three and One. But the *manner*; *how*, I do not comprehend; and I do not believe it. Now in this, in the *manner*, lies the mystery. And so it may; I have no concern with it. It is no object of my faith; I believe just so much as God has revealed and no more. But this, the *manner*, he has not revealed; therefore I believe nothing about it. But would it not be absurd in me to deny the fact because I do not understand the manner? That is, to reject *what God has revealed* because I do not comprehend *what he has not revealed*?

This is a point much to be observed. There are many things which “eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive” [1 Corinthians 2:9]. Part of these God hath “revealed to us by his Spirit” [1 Corinthians 2:10]—*revealed*, that is, unveiled, uncovered. That part he requires us to believe. Part of them he has not revealed. That we need not, and indeed cannot, believe; it is far above, out of our sight. Now where is the wisdom of rejecting what is revealed because we do not understand what is not revealed? Of denying the *fact* which God has unveiled because we cannot see the *manner*, which is veiled still?<sup>30</sup>

Wesley was aware of the question about whether the text of the Johannine comma was “genuine”: “Was it originally written by the Apostle or inserted in later ages?” He was persuaded of its authenticity by Bengel’s arguments.<sup>31</sup> Had Wesley not been persuaded of the verse’s canonical authenticity, it is unlikely that he would have preached on it orally twenty-three times.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>30</sup>“On the Trinity” (1775), 15-16, Sermon 55, in *Works*, Bicentennial Edition, vol. 2, 384.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, 5, 378-379.

<sup>32</sup>That figure is given by Outler, *ibid.*, 373. In his *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament*, Wesley offers quite a detailed exegesis of the passage. Concerning the divine witnesses to Jesus Christ as “the complete, the only Saviour of the world,” Wesley’s exegesis reads in part: “*The Father*—Who clearly testified of the Son, both at His baptism and at His transfiguration. *The Word*—Who testified of Himself on many occasions, while He was on earth; and again, with still greater solemnity, after His ascension into heaven (Revelation 1:5; 19:13). *And the Spirit*—Whose testimony was added chiefly after His glorification (1 John 2:27; John 15:26; Acts 5:32; Romans 8:16). *And these three are one*—even as those two, the

I hope a personal intrusion may be allowed at this point. While I believe, in line with teachings of the councils of Nicea (325) and Constantinople (381), that the contested verse is an accurate summary of the scriptural witness to the Triune God, and while I have no objection of principle to the notion of propositional revelation, I am nevertheless grateful that Wesley should also have provided other trinitarian confessions of faith that rely on a broader range of Scripture and on a more complex understanding of how the self-revelation of the Triune God has taken place in the words and events and authorized interpretations that Scripture records. Note this example from the sermon "On the Discoveries of Faith":

I know by faith that above all these [the spirits of angels and men] is the Lord Jehovah, he that is, that was, and that is to come [Revelation 1:4; 4:8], that is God from everlasting and world without end [cf. Psalm 41:13; 90:2; 103:17; 106:48]; he that filleth heaven and earth [Jeremiah 23:24; cf. Ephesians 1:23]; he that is infinite in power, in wisdom, in justice, in mercy, and holiness; he that created all things, visible and invisible [Colossians 1:16], by the breath of his mouth [Psalm 33:6], and still "upholds" them all, preserves them in being, "by the word of his power" [Hebrews 1:3]; and that governs all things that are in heaven above, in earth beneath, and under the earth [cf. Exodus 20:4; Deuteronomy 5:8]. By faith I know "there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit," and that "these three are one" [1 John 5:7]; that "the word," God the Son, "was made flesh" [John 1:14], lived, and died for our salvation, rose again, ascended into heaven, and now sitteth at the right hand of the Father. By faith I know that the Holy Spirit is the giver of all spiritual life; of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost [Romans 14:17]; of holiness and happiness, by the restoration of that image of God wherein we are created [cf. Colossians 3:10]. Of all these things faith is the evidence, the sole evidence to the children of men.<sup>33</sup>

Father and the Son, are one (John 10:30). Nothing can separate the Spirit from the Father and the Son. If He were not one with the Father and the Son, the apostle ought to have said, 'The Father and the Word,' who are one, 'and the Spirit are two.' But this is contrary to the whole tenor of revelation. It remains that *these three are one*. They are one in essence, in knowledge, in will, and in their testimony."

<sup>33</sup>"On the Discoveries of Faith" (1788), 7, Sermon 117, in *Works*, Bicentennial Edition, vol. 4, 31-32.

The plaiting of scriptural and creedal phraseology is not surprising, given that the ancient creeds offer a summary of what is told in Scripture and traditionally provide a grid for reading it. And the creeds, it is known, grew up around the practice of “baptism in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19).<sup>34</sup>

Another writing in which Wesley brings together the trinitarian creeds and the Scriptures is the “Letter to a Roman Catholic.” In setting out the content of what “a true Protestant believes,” Wesley weaves into the trinitarian structures and language of Nicea, Constantinople, and Chalcedon such further threads as the classical doctrine concerning the *munus triplex* of Christ as prophet, priest, and king and his own scripturally based teaching concerning the Holy Spirit as “not only perfectly holy in himself, but the immediate cause of all holiness in us”: “enlightening our understandings, rectifying our wills and affections, renewing our natures, uniting our persons to Christ, assuring us of the adoption of sons, leading us in our actions; purifying and sanctifying our souls and bodies to a full and eternal enjoyment of God.”<sup>35</sup> Then, when Wesley comes to set out the matching practice of a true Protestant, he again follows a broadly trinitarian pattern, with scriptural echoes throughout:

A true Protestant believes in God, has a full confidence in his mercy, fears him with a filial fear, and loves him with all his soul. He worships God in spirit and in truth [John 4:23-24], in everything gives him thanks [1 Thess. 5:18]; calls upon him with his heart as well as his lips [cf. Rom. 10:9-13], at all times and in all places; honours his holy name and his word, and serves him truly all the days of his life. . . .

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<sup>34</sup>In his *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament*, Wesley makes no comment on the Threefold Name at Matthew 28:19, but he refers to it obliquely in his explanation of the instruction at Acts 10:48 that Cornelius and his household be baptized “in the name of the Lord”: “*In the name of the Lord*—Which implies the Father who anointed Him, and the Spirit with which He was anointed, to His office. But as these Gentiles had before believed in God the Father, and could not but now believe in the Holy Ghost, under whose powerful influence they were at this very time, there was less need of taking notice that they were baptized into the belief and profession of the sacred Three; though doubtless the apostle administered the ordinance in that very form which Christ Himself had prescribed.”

<sup>35</sup>“Letter to a Roman Catholic” (1749), in *Works*, Jackson edition, vol. 10, 81-82.



A true Protestant loves his neighbour, that is, every man, friend or enemy, good or bad, as himself, as he loves his own soul, as Christ loved us. And as Christ laid down his life for us, so he is ready to lay down his life for his brethren [cf. John 15:12-13; Eph. 5:2]. . . . Knowing his body to be the temple of the Holy Ghost [1 Cor. 6:19], he keeps it in sobriety, temperance, and chastity. . . .<sup>36</sup>

As a final example, we may take the passage in the sermon "Catholic Spirit" in which Wesley spells out what is implied in the question "Is thine heart right?" Again the structure is trinitarian (provided one remember that the source of love in the Christian is the Holy Spirit who, according to Romans 5:5, has been poured into our hearts), and the text is a tissue of scriptural phrases:

The first thing implied is this: Is thy heart right with God? Does thou believe his being, and his perfections? His eternity, immensity, wisdom, power; his justice, mercy and truth? Dost thou believe that he now "upholdeth all things by the word of his power" [Heb. 1:3]? And that he governs even the most minute, even the most noxious, to his own glory and the good of them that love him [cf. Rom. 8:28]? Hast thou a divine evidence, a supernatural conviction of the things of God [cf. Heb. 11:1]? Dost thou "walk by faith, not by sight" [2 Cor. 5:7], looking not at temporal things but things eternal [cf. 2 Cor. 4:18]?

Dost thou believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, "God over all, blessed for ever" [Rom. 9:5]? Is he "revealed in" thy soul [cf. Gal. 1:16]? Dost thou "know Jesus Christ and him crucified" [1 Cor. 2:2]? Does he "dwell in thee and thou in him" [cf. John 6:56]? Is he "formed in thy heart by faith" [cf. Gal. 4:19; Eph. 3:17]? Having absolutely disclaimed all thy own works, thy own righteousness, hast thou "submitted thyself unto the righteousness of God" [Rom. 10:3], which is by faith in Christ Jesus [cf. Rom. 3:22]? Art thou "found in him, not having thy own righteousness, but the righteousness which is by faith" [Philippians 3:9]? And art thou, through him, "fighting the good fight of faith, and laying hold of eternal life" [1 Tim. 6:12]?

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<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 83-84.

Is thy faith *energoumenê di' agapês*, “filled with the energy of love” [Gal. 5:6]? Dost thou love God? I do not say “above all things”, for it is both an unscriptural and an ambiguous expression, but “with all thy heart, and with all thy mind, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength” [Luke 10:27]? . . . Dost thou love as thyself all mankind without exception? . . . Do you show your love by your works? While you have time, as you have opportunity, do you in fact “do good to all men” [Gal. 6:10], neighbours or strangers, friends or enemies, good or bad?<sup>37</sup>

Our emphasis in the last few pages has fallen on the soteriological and the doctrinal, but the passage from Wesley’s “Letter to a Roman Catholic” brought back a dimension that I earlier asked you to notice towards the end of the sermon “On the Trinity,” namely the doxological. Christians worship God in spirit and in truth; they honor the Son and the Spirit even as they honor the Father.

### **Worship in Spirit and in Truth**

In a score or so of passages in his sermons, Wesley quotes or alludes to John 4:23-24: “The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth; for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is Spirit; and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.”<sup>38</sup> In the words “spirit” and “truth,” trinitarianly attuned ears will pick up christological and pneumatological resonances, echoing such texts as John 1:14 and 17; 8:31-32; 14:6 and 17; 15:26; 16:7 and 13-15; 17:17-19. In a sermon entitled “Spiritual Worship,” Wesley sums up his theme as “the happy and holy communion which the faithful have with God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost”; and it is to that sermon that we shall turn, since it offers one of the most sustained examples of trinitarian hermeneutics in Wesley’s works.

The text of the sermon “Spiritual Worship” was 1 John 5:20: “This is the true God, and eternal life.”<sup>39</sup> As a preliminary, let it be noted how

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<sup>37</sup>“Catholic Spirit” (1750), I. 12-18, Sermon 39, in *Works*, Bicentennial Edition, vol. 2, 87-89.

<sup>38</sup>For Wesley’s uses of that text, see Geoffrey Wainwright, “Worship According to Wesley” in *Australian Journal of Liturgy* 13/1 (May 1991), 5-20, especially 7-9.

<sup>39</sup>“Spiritual Worship” (1780), Sermon 77, in *Works*, Bicentennial Edition, vol. 3, 88-102.

highly Wesley regarded the First Letter of John. At Dublin he wrote in his *Journal* for July 18, 1765: "In the evening, I began expounding the deepest part of the Holy Scripture, namely the First Epistle of St. John, by which, above all other even inspired writings, I advise every young preacher to form his style. Here are sublimity and simplicity together, the strongest sense and the plainest language! How can anyone that would 'speak as the oracles of God' use harder words than are found there?"<sup>40</sup>

In the prelude to his sermon on "Spiritual Worship," Wesley analyzes the structure of what he calls St. John's "tract." Between the opening statement of apostolic authority and purpose (1:1-4) and the final recapitulation (5:18-21), the bulk of the Epistle is seen by Wesley to fall into a trinitarian pattern, treating first communion with the Father (1:5-10), next communion with the Son (2:1—3:24), then communion with the Spirit (4:1-21), and finally the testimony of the entire Trinity on which Christian faith and life depend (5:1-12).

Wesley spends the first part of his own sermon in establishing from Scripture that Christ is indeed "the true God," which he takes his text to declare.<sup>41</sup> Not only do the Scriptures directly attribute divinity to him (John 1:1-2; Romans 9:5; Philippians 2:6) and "give him all the titles of the most high God," including "the incommunicable name, Jehovah, never given to any creature"; they also "ascribe to him all the attributes and all the works of God": he is of all things the Creator (Colossians 1:16; John 1:3; Hebrews 1:10), the Supporter (Hebrews 1:3), the Preserver (Colossians 1:17), the Author or Mover, the Governor (Psalm 103:19; Isaiah 9:6), and the End (Romans 11:36), and he is "the Redeemer of all the children of men" (Isaiah 53:6). Then, in the second part of his sermon, Wesley shows how, according to his text, Christ is "eternal life." Christ is "the author of eternal salvation to all that obey him" (Hebrews 5:9), "the purchaser of that 'crown of life' which will be given to all that are 'faith-

<sup>40</sup>*Works*, Bicentennial Edition, vol. 22 (ed. (7W. R. Ward and R. P. Heitzenrater, 1993), 13.

<sup>41</sup>It must be admitted that some exegetes take the *houtos* of 1 John 5:20e to refer to the Father, not to the Son. Wesley does not even consider this possibility but proceeds immediately to demonstrate the deity of Christ from Scripture. Among recent scholars, the distinguished Raymond E. Brown favors Wesley's exegetical option at 1 John 5:20; see his commentary, *The Epistles of John*, The Anchor Bible, volume 30, Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1982, 639-640. Brown, by the way, does not support the textual authenticity of the Johannine comma, to which he devotes an informative appendix 75-787).

ful unto death' [Rev. 2:10]." This does not apply only to the future resurrection (John 11:25; 1 Corinthians 15:22; 1 Peter 1:3-4), but begins now (1 John 5:11-12). Here Wesley's description is thoroughly trinitarian:

This eternal life then commences when it pleases the Father to reveal his Son in our hearts; when we first know Christ, being enabled to "call him Lord by the Holy Ghost" [1 Cor. 12:3]; when we can testify, our conscience bearing us witness in the Holy Ghost [cf. Rom. 8:16; 1 John 5:10], "the life which I now live, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me" [Gal. 2:20]. And then it is that happiness begins—happiness real, solid, substantial. Then it is that heaven is opened in the soul, that the proper, heavenly state commences, while the love of God, as loving us, is shed abroad in the heart [Rom. 5:5], instantly producing love to all mankind: general, pure benevolence, together with its genuine fruits, lowliness, meekness, patience [Eph. 4:2; Col. 3:12], contentedness in every state; an entire, clear, full acquiescence in the whole will of God, enabling us to "rejoice evermore, and in everything to give thanks" [1 Thess. 5:16-18].<sup>42</sup>

That euchological ending encourages me to turn, for one final demonstration of Wesley's trinitarian hermeneutics, to his exposition of the Lord's Prayer.

### **The Lord's Prayer**

Wesley expounds the Lord's Prayer as part of his Sixth Discourse on Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount. This is what he there says concerning the Name which is to be hallowed:

The name of God is God himself—the nature of God so far as it can be discovered to man. It means, therefore, together with his existence, all his attributes or perfections—his eternity, particularly signified by his great and incommunicable name Jehovah, as the Apostle John translates it, "the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End; he which is, and which was, and which is to come" [Rev. 1:8; 21:6]. His "fullness of being" [cf. Eph. 3:19; Col. 2:9], denoted by his other great name, "I am that I am" [Exodus 3:14]; his omnipresence; his omnipotence—who is indeed the only agent in the material

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<sup>42</sup>"Spiritual Worship," II. 5, in *Works*, Bicentennial Edition vol. 3, 96.

world, all matter being essentially dull and inactive, and moving only as it is moved by the finger of God [cf. Exodus 8:19; Luke 11:20]. And he is the spring of action in every creature, visible and invisible, which could neither act nor exist without the continued influx and agency of his almighty power; —his wisdom, clearly deduced from the things that are seen [cf. Rom. 1:20], from the goodly order of the universe; his Trinity in Unity and Unity in Trinity, discovered to us in the very first line of his Written Word, *bara' elohim*, literally “the Gods created,” a plural noun joined with a verb of the singular number, as well as in every part of his subsequent revelations, given by the mouth of all his holy prophets and apostles; his essential purity and holiness; and above all his love, which is the very brightness of his glory [cf. Heb. 1:3].<sup>43</sup>

There stands Wesley's deliberate statement that God is self-disclosed as Trinity throughout Scripture.<sup>44</sup> It forms the justification for the remarkable hymn which Wesley appends to the sermon under consideration.<sup>45</sup> The text begins with three stanzas developing “Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy Name.” The next two stanzas develop the next two petitions—“Thy kingdom come,” “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven”—with a christological and a pneumatological address respectively: “Son of thy Sire's eternal love” and “Spirit of grace, and health, and power.” The sixth, seventh, and eighth stanzas take the remaining petitions of the Lord's Prayer according to a trinitarian sequence: the prayer for bread (addressed to the Father), the prayer for forgiveness (addressed to the “eternal, spotless Lamb of God”), and the prayer for preservation from temptation and deliverance from evil (addressed to the

<sup>43</sup>“Upon our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the Sixth” (1748), III. 7, Sermon 26, in *Works*, Bicentennial Edition, vol. 1, 580-581.

<sup>44</sup>To the point about the plural form *Elohim* being used with singular verbs may be added the point noticed earlier about the composite name *Jehovah Elohim*—which, incidentally, is frequently taken as designating the Trinity in Charles Wesley's “Hymns on the Trinity” (1767), in *The Poetical Works of John and Charles Wesley*, ed. George Osborne (London: Wesleyan-Methodist Conference Office, 1868-1872), vol. 7, 201-348. Another indication of Wesley's perception of the pervasive presence of the Trinity in Scripture is found in his comment in the *Exanatory Notes upon the New Testament* on the words of Jesus at Luke 4:18: “How is the doctrine of the ever-blessed Trinity interwoven even in those scriptures where one would least expect it! How clear a declaration of the great Three-One is there in those very words, *The Spirit of the Lord is upon me!*”

“Giver and Lord of life”). The concluding doxological stanza is addressed conjointly to the Triune God.<sup>46</sup> The stanzas follow.

## I

Father of all, whose powerful voice  
 Called forth this universal frame,  
 Whose mercies over all rejoice,  
 Through endless ages still the same:  
 Thou by Thy word upholdest all;  
 Thy bounteous love to all is showed;  
 Thou hear'st Thy every creature's call,  
 And fillest every mouth with good.

## II

In heaven Thou reign'st enthroned in light,  
 Nature's expanse beneath Thee spread;  
 Earth, air, and sea, before Thy sight,  
 And hell's deep gloom are open laid.  
 Wisdom, and might, and love are Thine;  
 Prostrate before Thy face we fall,  
 Confess Thine attributes divine,  
 And hail the sovereign Lord of all.

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<sup>45</sup>“A Paraphrase on the Lord's Prayer,” in *Works*, Bicentennial Edition, vol. 1, 589-591. The hymn had first appeared in *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (Bristol, 1742), published under the joint names of John and Charles Wesley. In the 1780 *Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People Called Methodists*, it figured in three equal parts—numbers 225, 226, and 227—among the section “For Believers Rejoicing.” Doubtless adjudged too long for regular liturgical use, the hymn was retained in abbreviated form—with loss of the trinitarian structures and disturbance of the sequence of petitions—as hymn 47 in the British *Methodist Hymn Book* of 1933.

<sup>46</sup>This paper has deliberately been kept almost exclusively at the historical level. It will achieve its purpose if it encourages exegetes, historians, and theologians in the Wesleyan tradition to develop a trinitarian hermeneutic in their work. My own systematic developments on the Trinity are found elsewhere, chiefly in “The Doctrine of the Trinity: Where the Church Stands or Falls,” in *Interpretation* 45 (1991), 117-132; “Renewal as a Trinitarian and Traditional Event,” in *Lexington Theological Quarterly* 25 (1991), 117-124; “Trinitarian Worship,” in my *Worship with One Accord: Where Liturgy and Ecumenism Embrace* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 237-250; and “The Ecumenical Rediscovery of the Trinity,” in *One in Christ* 34 (1998), 95-124. A fully systematic proposal of a trinitarian approach to Scripture, by an author in the Pentecostal tradition, will be found in my pupil Telford Work's book, *Living and Active: Scripture in the Economy of Salvation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, forthcoming).

III

Thee, sovereign Lord, let all confess  
That moves in earth, or air, or sky,  
Revere Thy power, Thy goodness bless,  
Tremble before Thy piercing eye;  
All ye who owe to Him your birth,  
In praise your every hour employ;  
Jehovah reigns! Be glad, O earth,  
And shout, ye morning stars, for joy.

IV

Son of Thy Sire's eternal love,  
Take to Thyself Thy mighty power;  
Let all earth's sons Thy mercy prove,  
Let all Thy bleeding grace adore.  
The triumphs of Thy love display,  
In every heart reign Thou alone,  
Till all Thy foes confess Thy sway,  
And glory ends what grace begun.

V

Spirit of grace, and health, and power,  
Fountain of light and love below,  
Abroad Thy healing influence shower,  
O'er all the nations let it flow.  
Inflame our hearts with perfect love,  
In us the work of faith fulfil,  
So not heaven's host shall swifter move  
Than we on earth to do Thy will.

VI

Father, 'tis Thine each day to yield  
Thy children's wants a fresh supply;  
Thou cloth'st the lilies of the field,  
And hearest the young ravens cry.  
On Thee we cast our care; we live  
Through Thee, who know'st our every need;  
O feed us with Thy grace, and give  
Our souls this day the living bread.

## VII

Eternal, spotless Lamb of God,  
 Before the world's foundation slain,  
 Sprinkle us ever with Thy blood;  
 O cleanse, and keep us ever clean!  
 To every soul (all praise to Thee)  
 Our bowels of compassion move,  
 And all mankind by this may see  
 God is in us—for God is love.

## VIII

Giver and Lord of life, whose power  
 And guardian care for all are free,  
 To Thee, in fierce temptation's hour,  
 From sin and Satan let us flee;  
 Thine, Lord, we are, and ours Thou art;  
 In us be all Thy goodness showed,  
 Renew, enlarge, and fill our heart  
 With peace, and joy, and heaven, and God.

## IX

Blessing, and honour, praise, and love,  
 Co-equal, co-eternal Three,  
 In earth below, and heaven above,  
 By all Thy works be paid to Thee.  
 Thrice holy, Thine the kingdom is,  
 The power omnipotent is Thine;  
 And when created nature dies,  
 Thy never-ceasing glories shine.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>47</sup>This paper has deliberately been kept almost exclusively at the historical level. It will achieve its purpose if it encourages exegetes, historians, and theologians in the Wesleyan tradition to develop a trinitarian hermeneutic in their work. My own systematic developments on the Trinity are found elsewhere, chiefly in "The Doctrine of the Trinity: Where the Church Stands or Falls," in *Interpretation* 45 (1991), pp. 117-132; "Renewal as a Trinitarian and Traditional Event," in *Lexington Theological Quarterly* 25 (1991), pp. 117-124; "Trinitarian Worship," in my *Worship with One Accord: Where Liturgy and Ecumenism Embrace* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 237-250; and "The Ecumenical Rediscovery of the Trinity," in *One in Christ* 34 (1998), pp. 95-124. A fully systematic proposal of a trinitarian approach to Scripture, by an author in the Pentecostal tradition, will be found in my pupil Telford Work's book, *Living and Active: Scripture in the Economy of Salvation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, forthcoming).



# THE VOICE OF WISDOM: A CREATION CONTEXT FOR THE EMERGENCE OF TRINITARIAN LANGUAGE

by

Laurie J. Braaten

There seems to be an agreement among many biblical scholars that if the concept of the Trinity is biblical, it is only loosely so. As members of the confessing church, New Testament and (especially) Old Testament scholars face a difficult question: How could a group of first-century monotheistic Jews give birth to a movement that confessed that the one God revealed in the Hebrew Scriptures is now manifest in three persons?

A typical answer to this question is exemplified by David Yeago who finds origins of Trinitarianism in a cultic setting, i.e., the recognition of the deity of the Son arose in the context of Christian worship. At least the hymnic material clearly confesses that the God of Israel is self-identified with the human being Jesus.<sup>1</sup> Using Phil. 2:6ff. as an example, Yeago observes that the New Testament church essentially confesses in worship that “God has so utterly identified himself with Jesus, and Jesus has been so inextricably associated with God, that *it is not possible to turn to the God of Israel without at the same time turning to Jesus.*”<sup>2</sup> Further, “the relationship between YHWH and Jesus which the church hymns (*sic*) in her worship

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<sup>1</sup>David S. Yeago, “The New Testament and the Nicene Dogma,” in *The Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Classic and Contemporary Readings*, ed. Stephen E. Fowl (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1997), 89.

<sup>2</sup>Yeago, 90 (emphasis in original).

must *always have been* intrinsic to YHWH's identity."<sup>3</sup> That we do not have a completely developed doctrine of the Trinity in the New Testament is evident. But, he continues, while we may lack a correspondence in *conceptual terms* between the New Testament christological confessions and Nicea, we do have a similarity of *judgments* as to the identity of the Father with the Son. The New Testament witness concludes, he argues, that Phil. 2:6ff. and the formulations of the Nicene Creed "say the same thing."<sup>4</sup>

If one accepts these conclusions, the question still remains: If the church came to recognize that the identity of Jesus with the God of Israel had *always* been intrinsic to Yahweh's identity, how could it make this radical departure from what it had previously been taught about the oneness of God? Setting aside obvious prooftexting and the fanciful allegorical exegesis that is sometimes employed to demonstrate a hidden revelation of the Trinity throughout the Christian canon, are there substantial texts or traditions which are capable of bearing the weight of a revelation of God in two or even three persons? In other words, to say that the Trinity is somehow present in the confessional formulas of the New Testament is one thing; to say the Trinity is found in the Old Testament is quite another. And that is remarkable considering that the latter was essentially the Bible of the early church.

One solution to this conundrum has been found in the recognition that Jesus is frequently identified in the New Testament with Wisdom. The New Testament presentation of Jesus in terms of Wisdom is well known in New Testament circles. This identification is found in material as disparate as the Gospels and the liturgical texts in the Epistles. Pauline texts explicitly call Jesus "the Wisdom of God" (1 Cor. 1:24, 30; cf. 2:7; Col. 2:3). It is widely acknowledged that the pre-existence Logos Hymn of John's prologue is influenced by the description of personified Wisdom found in Proverbs and the deuterocanonical Wisdom literature.<sup>5</sup> Many of the pre-existence hymns and christological formulations in the Pauline corpus and General Letters may have the same background.<sup>6</sup> The Synoptic Gospels

<sup>3</sup>Yeago, 91 (emphasis in original).

<sup>4</sup>Yeago, 93-95.

<sup>5</sup>The evidence is conveniently summarized in Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII* Anchor Bible, vol. 29. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Garden City: Doubleday, 1966), see Appendix II, "The Word," 519-24.

<sup>6</sup>Phil. 2:6-11; Col. 1:15-20; Eph. 2:14-16; Heb. 1:3; 1 Pet. 1:20; 3:18, 22. Elisabeth Fiorenza argues that these texts have a Wisdom influence rather than

present Jesus as a Wisdom teacher and even go so far as to present him as the embodiment of Wisdom.<sup>7</sup> This is so ubiquitous in the New Testament that there is clear evidence here for a widespread “Wisdom Christology” in the early church.<sup>8</sup> This raises the question, Why was it so important, apparently necessary, for the church to articulate its understanding of the Christ event in terms of Wisdom, especially since there does not appear to have been a “Wisdom Messianic expectation” in the Judaism of the time? It hardly seems possible that this borrowing, adaptation, and application of Wisdom language was merely due to some superficial formal correspondences, and hence a massive example of proof texting. The church seems to have seen some intrinsic or at least deeply analogous relationship between Wisdom personified and the person of Jesus that contributed to its widespread identification of Jesus with Wisdom. If that is indeed the case, what may a study of Old Testament Wisdom contribute to the New Testament understanding of the person and work of Christ, and of God as Triune?

This paper is an exploratory attempt to answer this question. I will summarize the biblical presentation of personified Wisdom, primarily as it is found in Proverbs, with only brief reference to the deuterocanonical books.<sup>9</sup> Next, I will treat the roles and functions of Wisdom in general and how this provides a meaningful context for understanding the social

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that of a unified gnostic redeemer myth as was once widely held. See “Wisdom Mythology and the Christological Hymns of the New Testament,” in *Aspects of Wisdom in Judaism and Early Christianity*, ed. Robert L. Wilken (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975), 17-41.

<sup>7</sup>This identification is especially evident in the sayings source, Q. James M. Robinson sums up the evidence which shows a development in Q in terms of its portrayal of Jesus first as an emissary of Wisdom, then as the only emissary, and finally Jesus is identified with preexistent Wisdom, or Sophia. Matthew continues this process by intensifying the identification of Jesus with Wisdom where originally Jesus was only viewed as an emissary, see Matt. 11:18-19 (//Luke 7:33-35=Q), and Matt. 23:34 (//Luke 11:49=Q). See “Jesus as Sophos and Sophia,” in *Aspects of Wisdom*, especially pp. 9-11. See also the thorough categorization of the wisdom sayings of Jesus according to their genre in Leo G. Purdue, “The Wisdom Sayings of Jesus,” *Forum* 2 (1986): 3-35.

<sup>8</sup>See the useful study by Hartmut Gese, “Wisdom, Son of Man, and the Origins of Christology: The Consistent Development of Biblical Theology,” *HBT* 3 (1981): 23-57.

<sup>9</sup>Space limitations prohibit a thorough study of personified Wisdom in Sirach and Wisdom of Solomon. Mention of them is essential, however, since the New Testament appropriation of Wisdom was mediated through the deuterocanonical development attested in these books.

and religious context for personified Wisdom. I will conclude with some implications of this study for our understanding of the Triune God.

### The Voice of Woman Wisdom

In the opening chapters of Proverbs (1:20ff.), the reader suddenly and unexpectedly confronts Wisdom personified. Woman Wisdom<sup>10</sup> stands in the busiest parts of the city summoning and appealing to all who pass by to listen to and accept her teaching. Her summons and warnings remind us of the voice of Yahweh, heard through a prophetic figure speaking the very words of God:

- 23 Give heed to my reproof; I will pour out my thoughts to you;  
     I will make my words known to you.  
 24 Because I have called and you refused,  
     have stretched out my hand and no one heeded,  
 25 and because you have ignored all my counsel and would have none of my reproof,  
 26 I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when panic strikes you,  
 27 when panic strikes you like a storm, and your calamity comes like a whirlwind,  
     when distress and anguish come upon you.  
 28 Then they will call upon me, but I will not answer;  
     they will seek me diligently, but will not find me.  
 29 Because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the LORD. . . .<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>The Hebrew noun for wisdom (*chokmah*) is feminine, which is the primary reason Wisdom is personified as female. Such feminine personifications are not unusual in the Hebrew Bible. They are also found in reference to the land, or earth, Zion and Samaria (and a number of other cities), and even Israel, who is otherwise portrayed as masculine. It is outside the scope of this study to discuss extensively the difficult problem of the origins of Woman Wisdom in Israelite thought. A more fruitful line of inquiry is found in examining her postexilic context and function, which will be explored later in this paper. Although the noun in this passage is vocalized as a plural in the MT, it no doubt reflects an archaic singular form of the feminine noun termination *\*-at* (cf. Prov. 9.1; 24.7; Ps 49:4[3]). See R. B. Y. Scott. *Proverbs and Ecclesiastes*. Anchor Bible, vol. 18. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Garden City: Doubleday, 1982), 39.

<sup>11</sup>Prov. 1:23-29, NRSV.

This same Wisdom is a gift of Yahweh for those who diligently seek her (Prov. 2:1-15). Once obtained, Wisdom guides one in the good life in community with God and neighbor. She grants life, moral discernment, prosperity and saves one from death, represented by Woman Stranger, Wisdom's nemesis (Prov. 2-3). In fact, the reader is depicted as a young man being wooed by two women who have very different motives behind their offers of love. The first, Woman Wisdom, is a tree of life (3:18) offering riches and the good life lived in harmony with social, familial, and religious values (3:1-18). The second, Woman Stranger, is an adulteress who promises pleasure but disrupts these community values. She leads her victim to the realm of the disembodied dead, sheol, where they are cut off from everything good.<sup>12</sup>

But more than a prophet is found here! Immediately after we find that Wisdom is a tree of life (3:18), reminiscent of the Yahwistic creation account of Gen. 2-3, we encounter an incredibly brief notice in 3:19-20 that reminds us of the Priestly account of Gen. 1: "Yahweh by wisdom founded the earth; by understanding he established the heavens; by his knowledge the deeps broke open, and the clouds drop down the dew" (NRSV). Other texts give a similar account of Wisdom's role in creation. For example, in Psalm 104:24 Yahweh is said to make all his works "by wisdom."<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, in this text Wisdom seems to be synonymous with the divine creative or sustaining work by the spirit or breath of God. Ps. 104 relates the founding of the world, by wisdom, with God's continuing work of sustaining of the world and all its inhabitants, plants, animals, and humans. This sustaining work of God's creation is through the *rûach*, God's breath or spirit. "When you send forth your spirit, they are created; and you renew the face of the ground" (v. 30, NRSV, the wind/spirit is also mentioned in vv. 3-4). This idea is more fully developed in the deute-

<sup>12</sup>Prov. 2:16-19; 6:23-35; 7:7-23; 9:13-18; etc. The "loose woman" depicted in these texts is a foil for Woman Wisdom. She is presented in both real and symbolic terms (would the original readers have made such a distinction?) with several related titles. I simply refer to her as "Woman Stranger." William P. Brown sees her functioning as "necrophilia personified" in *The Ethos of the Cosmos: The Genesis of the Moral Imagination in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 311. Interpreters note how the two women use similar language in their appeals to the unsuspecting young man, calling for the man's discernment before choosing. See Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Sage, Priest, and Prophet: Religious and Intellectual Leadership in Ancient Israel*, Library of Ancient Israel. (Louisville: Westminster / John Knox, 1995), 41-48.

<sup>13</sup>Heb. *b<sup>e</sup>chokmah*, my translation.

rocanonical texts. In Sir. 24:2-3 Wisdom “came forth from the mouth of the Most High, and covered the earth like a mist,” an allusion to the wind/spirit of God brooding over the waters of creation in Gen. 1:2. In the Wisdom of Solomon, Wisdom is “a breath of the power of God . . . a spotless mirror of the working of God . . . she renews all things” (7:25-27). Wisdom is the word (*logos*) by which God created and then rules over creation. She is also God’s holy spirit (9:1-3 NRSV). The latter book appears to have been influenced by Proverbs and supplemented by the Stoic concept of the world-soul.<sup>14</sup>

Proverbs has not yet had the last say on the relationship between Wisdom and creation. In chapter 8, Wisdom once again appeals for an audience from the highways and byways of life, promising the ability to exercise moral discretion, to rule justly, and to live in prosperity. Here the reader discovers the basis of her claims to grant successful living: She is Yahweh’s firstborn daughter, present with Yahweh before the foundation of the cosmos. Having spent time ever playing at her parent’s side, now Wisdom offers to join with the human race in playful creativity. The parallels between this passage and the creation tradition preserved in Gen. 1 are many. The text is well-known and played a major role in the christological debates of the early church.<sup>15</sup> It is worth closer scrutiny:

22 Yahweh procreated<sup>16</sup> me at the beginning<sup>17</sup> of his way<sup>18</sup>  
the first of his acts of long ago.

<sup>14</sup>See Roland E. Murphy, “The Personification of Wisdom,” in *Wisdom in Ancient Israel: Essays in Honour of J. A. Emerton*, ed. John Day, et. al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 226-29.

<sup>15</sup>See, e.g., Robert W. Jenson, *God According to the Gospel: The Triune Identity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), 76.

<sup>16</sup>Heb. *qnh*, KB, s.v. It appears in its archaic Northwest Semitic form as \**qny*, meaning “create, give birth to,” hence “procreate.” When used of gods, male or female, it often bears both meanings in relation to the creation of the cosmos, creatures, or humans, with little or no distinction between create and procreate. The context calls for both meanings here. Yahweh, as the divine parent, has procreated Wisdom. The verb can also be translated “get, acquire,” sometimes the exact nuance is difficult to determine. Notice how all three meanings (create, give birth to, and acquire) come into view in the wordplay on the term and the name “Cain” in Gen. 4:1. Some suppose that two roots are represented by this homograph. The generative meanings of this word were preserved in liturgical texts and formulas in ancient Israel (Gen. 14:19, 22; Exod. 15:16; Deut. 32:6; Ps 139:13). For summaries of the evidence see Norman C. Habel, “‘Yahweh, Maker of Heaven and Earth’: A Study in Tradition Criticism,” *JBL* 91 (1972): 321-37; Frank Moore Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the*

- 23 Ages ago I was knit together,<sup>19</sup> at the first, before the beginning<sup>20</sup> of the earth.  
 24 When there were no depths I was brought forth,<sup>21</sup>  
     when there were no springs abounding with water.  
 25 Before the mountains had been shaped, before the hills, I  
     was brought forth—<sup>22</sup>  
 26 when he had not yet made earth and fields,  
     or the world's first bits of soil.  
 27 When he established the heavens, I was there,  
     when he drew a circle on the face of the deep,  
 28 when he made firm the skies above, when he established  
     the fountains of the deep,  
 29 when he assigned to the sea its limit,  
     so that the waters might not transgress his command,  
     when he marked out the foundations of the earth,

*History of the Religion of Israel* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), 15-16, 69; and Dennis J. McCarthy, "'Creation' Motifs in Ancient Hebrew Poetry," *CBQ* 29 (1967): 92 (the latter has a historicizing tendency when dealing with the creation texts). The translation of this passage is my adaptation of the NRSV.

<sup>17</sup>Heb. *re'shîl*, see Gen. 1:1.

<sup>18</sup>Heb. *drk*. Yahweh's creation is a cosmos, a divine order which includes an ethos, or "way" upon which humans are challenged to walk and depend. Prov. 9:1 depicts this as Wisdom's "house" (Prov. 9:1; cf. LXX *oikos*, from which we get the *ecu/o* prefix). See Brown, *Ethos and Cosmos*, 285; and Norman C. Habel, "The Symbolism of the Way in Proverbs 1-9," *Int* (1972): 131-57.

<sup>19</sup>Heb. *nskty*, reading the root as *skk* (see *BHS*), literally "woven, shaped," descriptive of God's creating of mortals in the womb in Ps. 139:13 and Job 10:11. See Gale A. Yee, "The Theology of Creation in Proverbs 8:22-31," in *Creation in the Biblical Traditions*, ed. Richard J. Clifford and John J. Collins, CBQMS 24 (Washington D.C., Catholic Biblical Association, 1992), 89, n. 8. There is perhaps an allusion by word play (syllipsis); the same (unvocalized) consonants can represent the root *nsk*, which is used in Ps. 2:6 to connote the installation (by libation) of God's messiah, who on the solemn day is declared to be begotten as God's son. More will be said about the connection between wisdom and messianism later.

<sup>20</sup>Heb. *mer'osh*, related to *re'shîl* in v. 22, see note there.

<sup>21</sup>The verb *\*chyl* means "bear, give birth to," literally "writhe" in birth pangs. Here it is passive, and evidently refers to Yahweh as bearer (mother) of Wisdom, cf. Deut. 32:18; Ps. 90:1-2; and Isa. 45:9-11 for uses of this verb with Yahweh as subject. See McCarthy, "Creation Motifs," 93; and Julia A. Foster, "The Motherhood of God: The Use of *chyl* as God-Language in the Hebrew Scriptures," in *Uncovering Ancient Stone: Essays in Honor of H. Neil Richardson*, ed. Lewis M. Hopfe (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 93-102.

<sup>22</sup>See note on v. 24.

- 30 then I was beside him growing up,<sup>23</sup> and I was (his)  
*delight* day by day,  
**playing**<sup>24</sup> before him always,  
 31 **playing** in his inhabited earth<sup>25</sup>  
 and *delighting* in the human race.<sup>26</sup>

Who is this person, who earlier seemed to be the personification of God's Wisdom teaching, but now seems to take on an existence of her own as God's child? Many answers have been given to this question. In a hymn to Wisdom dependent on this passage, Sirach places her in the divine council, evidently speculating on the meaning of the plural in Gen. 1:26 where Elohim says "Let us create humankind in our own image."<sup>27</sup> Some propose a goddess cult, others speak of a hypostasis of Yahweh. Since a Wisdom goddess cult has not been discovered in Israel,<sup>28</sup> it is perhaps safest to think in terms of a personification, or reification of Yahweh's creative and sustaining activity. In doing this, however, we cannot help but notice how the relationship between Yahweh and reified Wisdom seems to push the limits of monotheistic language. Wisdom's divine role is best explained in terms of her assigned *functions* in this text. The first

<sup>23</sup>Heb. *'amôn*, a notoriously difficult word to translate, see the commentaries. M. Fox has offered convincing evidence for the rendering given above, see M. V. Fox, "'Amôn, Again." *JBL* 115 (1996): 699-702.

<sup>24</sup>Heb. *m<sup>e</sup>sacheqet*, "playing, dancing, laughing."

<sup>25</sup>Heb. *b<sup>e</sup>tebel 'artsô* is difficult to translate, but likely refers to the earth or land as the dwelling space of God's creatures, and sphere of God's creative work, cf. Job 37:12-13; KB s.v. *tbl*.

<sup>26</sup>Vv. 30-31 have been arranged and emphasized to display their chiasmic structure.

<sup>27</sup>Sir. 24:2; cf. Wisd. 9:2-4 which recounts how God created by the word // Wisdom who sits by God's throne. The divine council, i.e., the "sons of El" or "hosts of heaven" is well-known in Canaanite and biblical tradition, see, e.g., Deut. 32:8 (Qumran and LXX, see NRSV); 1 Kgs. 22:19-23; Isa. 6:1-7; Jer. 23:18; Job 1-2; Pss. 82:1, 6; 89:5-7[6-8]; cf. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*, 186-90. In later Jewish and Christian tradition these gods were interpreted as angels.

<sup>28</sup>The possibility of a goddess background and the ancient Near Eastern parallels for Woman Wisdom is a topic that has been thoroughly discussed elsewhere. While there are some who see a goddess reflected in these texts, others observe that there is no evidence for such a Wisdom cult in Ancient Israel. See the summary of Judith M. Hadley, "Wisdom and the Goddess," in *Wisdom in Ancient Israel*, 234-43. Hadley argues against an active goddess cult being reflected in Prov. 8, but speculates that Woman Wisdom compensates for the suppression of the goddess cults of an earlier day, 242-43.



we have already mentioned: The reader is guaranteed of Wisdom's efficacy by her cosmic birthright. Born as the daughter of God before the foundation of the cosmos, she was present and apparently assisted in creation. Higher credentials can scarcely be found.

Wisdom's second function is related to her first. Since she has been intimately involved in creation from the beginning, what she teaches about the cosmos, and what the cosmos teaches about her, and ultimately about God, are grounded in the divine order and ordering of the universe. Perdue develops this theme as follows:

[Woman] Wisdom becomes the voice of God in creation, ordering and sustaining the world from the beginning (Genesis 1, Psalm 33) and revealing the character and will of the creator. The cosmos was affirmed as "good," that is, a righteous and beneficent order, revealing many of its mysteries and even its trustworthy creator to those who respond to Wisdom's call.<sup>29</sup>

Humans are placed in the world as co-creators of their corporate destiny. Wisdom is God's aide for the task. In a way, therefore, Woman Wisdom is an embodiment of human wisdom. Through the mediating work of Wisdom humans are shapers of both their own destiny and participants in the shaping of the destiny of the rest of creation.<sup>30</sup> As Gale Yee expresses it:

Creation is the divine establishment of order in the cosmos for the purposeful existence for human beings and other living things. . . . Through the mediation of Woman Wisdom (the personification of divine and human wisdom), God and humanity become co-creators in the ongoing task of keeping the created world order stable.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>Leo G. Perdue, "Cosmology and the Social Order in the Wisdom Tradition," in *The Sage in Israel and the Ancient Near East*, ed. John G. Gammie and Leo G. Perdue (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 467.

<sup>30</sup>The chiasmic structure of vv. 30-31 emphasize Wisdom's role as mediator. See Gale A. Yee, "The Theology of Creation Proverbs 8:22-31," 88-89. It is very plausible to view the roles and functions assigned Woman Wisdom as borrowed from the biblical portraits of various women of authority or influence, see Claudia V. Camp, *Wisdom and the Personification of the Feminine in the Book of Proverbs*, Bible and Literature Series 11 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985), 79-147.

<sup>31</sup>Yee, 93-94. W. P. Brown deals extensively with the notion of human responsibility for shaping an ethic out of the domain of the ethos which God has inextricably bound with the structure of the cosmos. See *The Ethos of the Cosmos*, 10-12, *passim*.

In the presence of Wisdom, God established an orderly world which keeps his commands (v. 29), thus securing it from the power of chaos,<sup>32</sup> and making it safe for all its inhabitants. This same Wisdom is now an aide to humans who can maintain and sustain that order by continuing to choose the path of life and avoiding the powers of chaos, represented by Woman Stranger.

Third, Wisdom not only shares divine authority, but she also has a delightful role in participating in, administrating and mediating God's playful<sup>33</sup> oversight of the inhabited world. Wisdom is not a harsh disciplinarian externally imposing her laws on creation. Wisdom appeals to the intrinsic worth and goodness of creation as a *place* where God and humans can find *common ground*. Wisdom finds equal delight in her parent and in the world with humans. She is the playful daughter and fun loving older sister (Prov. 7:4) who takes her parent and siblings by the hand and says, "let's go out and play." On the playground<sup>34</sup> of creation, the formative activity of play involves diverse, yet linked participants. The earth (playground and participant), God, and humans join Wisdom, all delighting together in the works of God and their place in the created order. Here their play is a shared *recreation* that builds character and is mutually beneficial as long as all parties agree on the rules of their game.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>32</sup>The sea is a well-known symbol of chaos, which God restrains and enlists in the service of creation, see Gen. 1:2; Pss. 74:13; 89:9[10]. I am indebted to W. P. Brown's discussion of chaos and community, *The Ethos of the Cosmos*, especially 286-91.

<sup>33</sup>This reference to the mediating work of play is considered by many to be a key contribution of the Wisdom Movement to biblical theology. See Samuel Terrien, "The Play of Wisdom: Turning Point in Biblical Theology," *HBT* 3 (1980): 125-53. W. P. Brown remarks that "Like the Priestly Sabbath rest, Wisdom's play in the cosmos marks the completion and purpose of creation" (*The Ethos of the Cosmos*, 227).

<sup>34</sup>Consistent with the idea of the ethos as an *oikos* or house (a term also suggested by Wisdom building her house in Prov. 9:1; cf. 24:3), W. P. Brown refers to the play space as "Wisdom's playhouse" (*The Ethos of the Cosmos*, 281). While I recognize the suitability of this term, I use "playground" to emphasize the importance of the "inhabited earth" as the narrower domain of Wisdom's mediating activity (v. 31). She goes from playing before God to playing in "his inhabited earth." Notice that whether at God's side or on the earth where humans and the rest of creation reside, both domains belong to the Creator.

<sup>35</sup>See the remarks of W. P. Brown concerning the formative nature of play, *The Ethos of the Cosmos*, 277-78.

This mediating function of wisdom is a major key to understanding the significance of Wisdom personified. At this point a short discussion of the function of wisdom in ancient Israel will help to clarify this mediatorial role.

## The Creation Context of Wisdom

Wisdom is sometimes used as a catchall for a movement and/or body of literature that is diverse in thought, form, and content. It is not evident to everyone why wisdom has a place in the canon. Many have ignored it, essentially decanonizing it by act, if not by proclamation. The “problem” with Wisdom Literature is that it lacks the Salvation-History orientation that so many Christian interpreters cut their hermeneutical teeth on. As Roland Murphy expresses it, wisdom is a “typical approach to reality” whose most striking literary feature “is the absence of what one normally considers typically Israelite and Jewish.”<sup>36</sup> As a result, wisdom literature is often denigrated as “secular” or lacking in religious value.<sup>37</sup> Recently there has been a resurgence of interest in wisdom thought as biblical scholars have been challenged to reevaluate their historiocentric categories of interpretation. At the same time, there has been a renewed interest in creation theology, another stepchild in biblical and theological studies. Both are now viewed as integral to the Yahwistic faith of the Hebrew scriptures.<sup>38</sup> That wisdom and creation have shared the same fate is not accidental, in fact they are intrinsically linked *by nature*. Murphy

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<sup>36</sup>Roland E. Murphy, *Tree of Life: An Exploration of Biblical Wisdom Literature*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. with supplement (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 1.

<sup>37</sup>For a short summary of the marginalization of wisdom biblical studies, see Roland E. Murphy, “Wisdom Literature and Biblical Theology,” *BTB* 24 (1994), 4-5.

<sup>38</sup>A few of these works are cited in this paper. The reasons for the marginalization of creation theology are diverse. Many note the twentieth-century reaction against the *Kulturreligion* cultivated by National Socialism. Others point out that there has been an influential anticeation bias in the Western Church from an early day, first emerging in its gnostic form. See H. Paul Santmire, *The Travail of Nature: The Ambiguous Ecological Promise of Christian Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985). The situation was exacerbated by Francis Bacon’s intentional program to desacrilize and so exploit nature by means of the newly merged science and technology. See Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution* (San Francisco: Harper, 1980, reprinted with new Preface, 1990), especially chapter 7, “Dominion over Nature,” 164-191. Although anticeation tendencies have been somewhat corrected in recent years, the older views are still very influential.

expresses this relationship between wisdom, creation, and Yahwism succinctly. "Wisdom does not re-present the actions of God in Israel's history; it deals with daily human experience in the good world created by God. There are hidden connections between Yahwism and wisdom."<sup>39</sup> We will now turn to a summary of some of these connections.

The first connection between Wisdom and creation is that Wisdom teaches a way to live grounded in the cosmic order established and sustained by Yahweh. Proverbial wisdom teaches lessons gained from life experience, an experience that comes from long exposure to God and the divinely established order. An Israelite might say that experience is the best teacher because God is present in the experience. This experience is not limited to learning correct ethical behavior. Wisdom supplies the requisite skill necessary for forging a livelihood out of the raw materials of the cosmos, whether it be to rule a kingdom, design edifices, or work in metals.<sup>40</sup>

Second, since Wisdom is grounded in the cosmic order of things, it is understandable that the creation, or nature as we often term it, reveals wisdom. Nature proverbs and fables are not just heuristic devices or clever illustrations—they teach something about the created order, and ultimately something about the workings of God.<sup>41</sup> Further, the lessons that they teach have not just been put there for the sake of the human

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<sup>39</sup>Murphy, *Tree of Life*, 1, cf. chap 8, especially 118-26. It is beyond the scope of this study to review the debate about the place of wisdom in the canon or its connection with creation theology. For a convenient summary, see Leo G. Perdue, *Wisdom & Creation: The Theology of Wisdom Literature* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 19-48. For two noteworthy, but very diverse endeavors to reassert the significance of creation in biblical theological studies, see Claus Westermann, *Blessing in the Bible and the Life of the Church*, trans. Keith Crim, *Overtures to Biblical Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978) and Terence Fretheim, "The Reclamation of Creation. Redemption and Law in Exodus" *Int.* 45 (1991): 354-65. The latter notes that interpreters have too long defined creation in terms of redemption. He argues for defining redemption in relation to creation, as attested, among other things, by the canonical order of the first two books of the Bible.

<sup>40</sup>NRSV translates *chokmah* as "skill" in 1 Kgs. 7:14; Exod. 36:8, see 31:3, 6; Bezalel's skill (v. 6) includes "wisdom" (v. 3, NRSV "ability") granted by "the spirit of God" (my translation); cf. Murphy, *Tree of Life*, 116.

<sup>41</sup>Prov. 6:5,6-11; 7:21-23; 25:14; 26:2; 30:24-31; Job 12:7; 38-41. In 1 Kgs. 4:33 Solomon's speaking of "trees . . . animals, and birds, and reptiles, and fish" undoubtedly refers to parables and fables; cf. Murphy, *Tree of Life*, 112-15. This diverse list may reflect a scribal custom of observing and listing natural phenomena.

creatures.<sup>42</sup> They are there because God cares about the creation, sustains it, and the creation responds back appropriately. The sage can appeal to creation because at times creation “got it right,” it knows how to respond to the Creator’s commands—if only humans could do the same!<sup>43</sup> Wisdom does not guarantee, however, that one will magically succeed in all undertakings or that one will know all there is to know about God by observing and following the cosmic order, or that the cosmic order is always transparent. Even the book of Proverbs makes this point. For those who miss it, Job makes it loud and clear!<sup>44</sup>

The third aspect of Wisdom grows out of the second. If Wisdom is the revelation of God and God’s way in creation, then the study of creation in and of itself is a worthy task. Many wisdom texts seem to allude to lists of natural phenomena based on comprehensive study of the created order.<sup>45</sup> The nature proverbs and the creation theophany at the end of Job seem to rely on intimate and detailed study of creation. While proverbial wisdom may make use of such study to offer moral lessons in clearly formulated truths, the Joban theophany leaves the readers with a sense of

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<sup>42</sup>This point is made well in the Joban theophany, Job 38-40, see Gene M. Tucker, “Rain on a Land Where no one Lives: The Hebrew Bible on the Environment” *JBL* 116 (1997): 3-17. Tucker notes that while humans still seem to have a special role in the biblical narrative (written by humans), “this special human role emphasizes responsibilities, not rights,” 16.

<sup>43</sup>Sages were not the only ones who appealed to creation. Isaiah opens his vision with Yahweh’s appeal for the cosmos (represented by “Heaven and Earth”) to serve as witnesses in his case against God’s rebellious sons who have violated the cosmic order by disobedience to Yahweh. Their guilt is evident by an appeal to other creatures in the created order—even domestic animals know how to honor their master (Isa. 1:2-4). Psalm 19 shows the parallel between God’s responsive cosmic order (vv. 1-6), and a wholehearted devotion to God’s moral order as revealed in torah (vv. 11-14). The purveyors of wisdom, prophecy, and the cult were not separated by uncrossable boundaries, see Blenkinsopp, *Sage, Priest, Prophet*, 2-3.

<sup>44</sup>Proverbs’ frequent support for the poor and warnings to the wealthy indicate that there was no thought of an automatic association between riches and divine favor or poverty and godlessness. See Prov. 13:23; 14:20-21, 31; 16:8; 17:5; 19:1-7; 22:22-23; 28:6, 11; 29:13-14.

<sup>45</sup>See Gerhard von Rad, “Joseph xxxviii and Ancient Egyptian Wisdom,” in *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays*, trans. E. W. T. Dicken (London: SCM, 1966, original essay, 1955), 281-91. Cf. Murphy, *Tree of Life*, 153-54, 171; and Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Wisdom and Law in the Old Testament: The Ordering of Life in Israel and Early Judaism*, rev. ed. Oxford Bible Series (New York: Oxford, 1995), 35-36.

the awe and mystery before God and the created order, moving them to gaze at the Other with wonder, worship, and humility.

The cosmic origin of wisdom also means that all truth, if it is indeed truth, is God's truth. The wisdom tradition freely borrowed and adapted materials from other cultures, peopled by worshippers of other gods, and presented these materials as thoroughly Yahwistic. While this borrowing process is found often in the Bible, nowhere is it so intentionally evident as in the wisdom literature. Not only do we find wholesale borrowing of ancient material from places like Egypt, but the writer frequently tells us the source! Thus we have proverbs from Egypt and Arabia and the story about a man from Uz (Edom?) named Job.<sup>46</sup> The reverse was also the case: if the Israelites found Wisdom, then the nations were eager to come and learn from them. Solomon, renowned for his wisdom, had the rulers of the nations seeking out his wisdom expressed in proverbs and songs, most of which were centered on "nature wisdom."<sup>47</sup>

Of course, many of the cultures that Israel borrowed from also related their wisdom to the work or inspiration of their own deities. Israel handled this by stripping the borrowed tradition of any references to gods that had not already been identified with Yahweh (such as the El deities). This material would be considered indirectly related to Yahweh, who as supreme God and Creator appointed the "sons of God" to govern the nations.<sup>48</sup> The process was made complete when the material was made to refer specifically to the Yahwistic tradition by the phrase "the fear of Yahweh is the beginning of Wisdom."<sup>49</sup> Such borrowing and adaptation was natural in a culture where there is an awareness that the creation, indeed the entire cosmic order is the handiwork of the one supreme deity who founded and sustains it by Wisdom.

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<sup>46</sup>The dependence of Prov. 22:17-24:22 (and elsewhere) on the Egyptian "Instruction of Amenemope" (*ANET*, 421-22) is well known. Proverbs also cites "The words of Agur son of Jakeh of Massa" (30:1) and "The words of Lemuel, king of Massa, which his mother taught him" (31:1, translations RSV). See Murphy, *Tree of Life*, 23-27, 165-66.

<sup>47</sup>1 Kgs. 4:29-34 [5:9-14]; 10:1-11, see Murphy, *Tree of Life*, 2.

<sup>48</sup>Deut. 32:8-9; Ps. 82:1; see note 27 above on the divine council.

<sup>49</sup>Prov. 9:10 and often. James A. Sanders argues that the process of adapting outside literature into the canon is grounded in the hermeneutical axiom that God is creator of all peoples. The resignifying process of the biblical writers was to depolytheize, monotheize, Yahwize, and Israelitize; see *Canon and Community: A Guide to Canonical Criticism*, Guides to Biblical Scholarship (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 48, 56, *passim*.

The fourth function of Wisdom is to convey God's power of righteous rule and blessing to creation through the King, God's chosen mediator. The background for this is found in the idea that righteousness and justice are the foundation of God's heavenly throne, with which are associated the divine attributes of steadfast love, faithfulness, and righteousness.<sup>50</sup> These effluents sustain the cosmos through God's loving care and bestowal of fertility and blessing, which is nothing less than the establishment of the kingdom (rule) of God on earth.<sup>51</sup> The King, God's anointed one ("messiah") and son, is given the task to mediate this sphere of blessing by shaping, maintaining, and ordering creation according to the Heavenly King's wishes.<sup>52</sup> Wisdom enables the king to rule justly over all his subjects, even those esteemed as insignificant. Solomon's well-known prayer for Wisdom is a prime example of this type of thinking: "Give your servant a listening heart to rule your people, to discern between good and evil; for who can govern this your great people?" God's answer was, "Because you have asked . . . for yourself the discernment to hear justice, I now do according to your word. Indeed I give you a wise and discerning heart. . . ."<sup>53</sup> Solomon's wisdom to administer justice is immediately illustrated in the case involving a dispute between two prostitutes. These socially marginal women could hardly expect any deliberating body to hear their case, much less the king. Why should the king waste his time with such "in house" bickering between two whores? Yet before the Creator they have equal standing with the rest of God's creatures.<sup>54</sup> Solomon, equipped with a wise and discerning heart, "hears the justice" God's wisdom has instilled in him and creation, and is enabled to render a just set-

<sup>50</sup>See Ps. 89:14-16[15-17], cf. Prov. 20:28.

<sup>51</sup>See especially Pss. 145 and 147. Note that God's loving rule is for all creatures, not just for the sake of humans. See further references in the next note.

<sup>52</sup>This idea is found in two related types of psalms: the enthronement and kingship psalms (broadly conceived here) which celebrate the rule and sustaining power of Yahweh over all creation (Pss. 96-99; 144-149) and the royal psalms which celebrate the inauguration and representative role of the king in establishing that order first in his own land (which include subduing the enemies, the historical manifestation of chaos), and then abroad (Pss. 2; 20; 21; 72; 101). Occasionally the two forms are mixed, especially in times of distress when the community appeals to the kingship of Yahweh to restore cosmic order through the king, messiah, or through the reestablishment of the cult (Pss. 89; 74; 132).

<sup>53</sup>1 Kgs. 3:9, 11-12, my translation.

<sup>54</sup>See Job 31:13-15; Prov. 14:31; 17:5 for the wisdom perspective of the equality of all people before their Creator.

tlement. While much of Solomon's reign is shrouded in controversy, the positive examples of his wisdom were long remembered and are responsible for his becoming the patron saint of the wisdom movement.<sup>55</sup>

How do our findings help us to clarify the roles and functions of Woman Wisdom in her ancient Israelite context? In the Hebrew scriptures, Woman Wisdom appears most clearly in Prov. 1—9, which is the post-exilic introduction to the book as a whole. It is generally agreed that a major *literary* role of Woman Wisdom is to enhance the divine authority of the wisdom teaching in this section of Proverbs.<sup>56</sup> The *social* function of Woman Wisdom, however, is to empower the households in the post-exilic community. Social power, especially as it related to land ownership, was grounded in family identity and stability. As various groups struggled to define who would and would not be included as landed members of the post-exilic community, strong households were needed to sort out the claims, lend support to the ingroup, and instill the personal and communal values of justice and fair play necessary for the maintenance of the social order. In the book of Proverbs it is the parents, both father and mother, who are charged with shaping the values of household and community. There was still a need, however, for a divinely sanctioned guarantor of the social order to fill the void left by the davidic king, God's "son." Left without Yahweh's chosen mediator of just rule and blessing, the community now looked to another chosen mediator, Woman Wisdom, God's firstborn daughter.<sup>57</sup> In other words, she subsumes the mediatorial func-

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<sup>55</sup>The remainder of Solomon's reign is a study in contrasts. While he mediated great blessing and prosperity to the country, it is also clear that much of it was not due to God's blessing but was gained by Solomon's oppressive policies toward his own subjects. Apparently he fell into the trap of those who appeal to the cosmic order to justify their decisions and so absolutized his own goals and greed. In the end he built monuments to his own name and impoverished his people and land through heavy taxation, a civilian draft, enslavement of the native population, and selling of some prime real estate of the country. The heart that once listened to justice (1 Kgs. 3:9ff.) turned after other gods—gods whose concerns were apparently not about justice (cf. 1 Kgs. 11:9).

<sup>56</sup>For a treatment that deconstructs the text according to the quest for power of the sages' patriarchal discourse, see Carol A. Newsom, "Woman and the Discourse of Patriarchal Wisdom: A Study of Proverbs 1-9," in *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel*, ed. Peggy L. Day (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989), 142-60.

<sup>57</sup>For the social role of Woman Wisdom in the post-exilic Judahite community, see Claudia V. Camp, *Wisdom and the Personification of the Feminine*, 234-54; and the brief discussion in W. P. Brown, *The Ethos of the Cosmos*, 304-307. In a similar vein, Leo G. Perdue argues that personified wisdom was used by the



tions of the king in the cosmic structure established by Yahweh. Woman Wisdom, who invites all people to hear and be taught (Prov. 8:4ff), teaches how to live successfully by the same power she grants to “kings . . . rulers . . . and nobles, all who govern rightly” (vv. 15-16, NRSV).

As we saw earlier, that Wisdom was personified as female was partly because of the feminine gender of the noun “Wisdom” in Hebrew. But that she *could* be presented as female in a patriarchal culture not only says something about the possibility for women to participate and be affirmed in such authoritative roles, but also about the importance of women for the continued maintenance of the social order in the post-exilic community.<sup>58</sup> Her role as God’s mediator of rule and blessing is nothing less than messianic, in the true biblical sense of the word. It could be objected, however, that she does not carry the full power and authority of an intermediary since she is only a literary figure, and not flesh and blood like her messianic predecessors. Perhaps the most one can say is that she embodies the teaching of the sages and metaphorically expresses divine immanence in creation.<sup>59</sup> Or is there reason to believe otherwise?

Woman Wisdom might be more “real” than is immediately evident. It is now generally agreed that the depiction of the “woman of means,”<sup>60</sup> the conventional scribes as a means of claiming divine legitimacy for their broader power group and to promise safety for Judahite households. See “Wisdom Theology and the Social History in Proverbs 1-9,” in *Wisdom, You are my Sister*, ed. Michael L. Barré *CBQMS* 29 (Washington, D.C., Catholic Biblical Association, 1997), 78-101.

<sup>58</sup>See especially Camp in this regard, *Wisdom and the Personification of the Feminine*, passim. Newsom thinks otherwise. She claims the text is men’s speech “talking about women and women’s speech.” The purpose of this speech is for men to maintain the traditional patriarchal social order (“Woman and the Discourse of Patriarchal Wisdom,” 142, 144ff.). While her study makes many salient observations, her final conclusions do not take into consideration the evidence for the authority of women offered by Camp in *Wisdom and the Personification of the Feminine* and in “Wisdom as Root Metaphor: A Theological Consideration,” in *The Listening Heart: Essays in Wisdom and the Psalms in Honor of Roland E. Murphy, O. Carm.*, ed. Kenneth Hogland *et. al.*, *JSOTSS* 58 (Sheffield: Sheffield Press, 1987), 45-76. Newsom makes no mention of either work.

<sup>59</sup>See Perdue, “Social History,” 100. This is no problem for those who claim that Woman Wisdom is an Israelite goddess. In that case she might not be flesh and blood, but she would at least be considered as “real” and not “just” literary.

<sup>60</sup>Heb. *’eshet chayil* occurs only here, Prov. 12:4 and Ruth 3:11. *chayil* means “power, capacity, nobility, courage, valor,” KB, s.v. KJV “virtuous woman” contains this idea well, unfortunately the meaning of “virtue” has changed in common parlance. The NRSV translation “capable wife” is inadequate to express the full significance of this phrase.

so-called “good wife” at the end of the book (Prov. 31:10-31), is none other than a portrait of Woman Wisdom. Once reviewed, the evidence is convincing. The attributes and descriptions of the two women are the same, the exhortation to the reader to find and embrace her are identical. The literary shape of the book, with a Wise Woman figure framing it in Prov. 1-9 and 31, lends additional support to the theory.<sup>61</sup> Does this association now “demote” the woman of means into the realm of a fictional literary figure? I would argue that it does not. Although the parallels between Woman Wisdom and the woman of means now seem obvious, the latter appears so much in human form that the reader misses the connection unless specifically pointed in that direction. She came to her own people, and they knew her not, she dwelt among them—she even made guest appearances in our churches every May—and yet we failed to see her as the only begotten daughter of God. We missed her identity because she emptied herself of her divine origin and took on human form, even the form of a servant. The relationship between Woman Wisdom and the woman of means might be compared with the dual identity of Woman Stranger. The latter is symbolic of the powers of chaos, but the Israelite may encounter her bodily in the form of a temptress next door. So it is with the woman of means. She is Woman Wisdom, daughter of God, the personification and mediator of Yahweh’s cosmic order. Yet she would be found in the woman who embodies Wisdom’s values. She is indeed both real and ideal, the incarnate image of divine Wisdom, transforming those who accept her offer of life.<sup>62</sup>

### Wisdom Implications for Trinitarian Language

I now suggest some applications to Trinitarian studies. These are meant to be exploratory, suggestive, and provocative. It is my hope that they may at least promote further discussion on the relationship between the Bible and church tradition, especially as it relates to Trinitarian studies.<sup>63</sup>

I begin with some general observations. It should be evident by now that Woman Wisdom does indeed provide a model for speaking about

<sup>61</sup>See Thomas P. McCreesh, “Wisdom as Wife: Proverbs 31:10-31” *RB* 92 (1985): 25-46.

<sup>62</sup>Using KJV language, in Prov. 12:4 (and Ruth) she is a “virtuous woman,” in Prov. 31 she becomes “Woman Virtue,” an alias of Woman Wisdom.

<sup>63</sup>For a study of Wisdom analogous in scope and approach to my own, see William Riley, “Perceiving the Cosmos: Wisdom Literature as a Source of Creation Theology,” *Proceedings of the Irish Biblical Association* 13 (1990): 42-57.

God and the divine immanence in terms of a plurality of persons within the parameters of a thoroughly monotheistic tradition. One of the ways it was able to do so was to ride the coattails of the firmly established messianic tradition, in which the king was installed as the offspring of God, the mediator of divine order and blessing to the cosmos. I argue that it is also evident that, when the church applied this "Wisdom Christology" to Jesus, this was more than just a convenient way to talk about plurality and unity in the Godhead. The church believed, or intuited, that the messiahship of Jesus manifested itself and could be articulated in terms of the roles and functions of Woman Wisdom.<sup>64</sup> This challenges the church today to seriously consider the implications of this borrowing, *even if the early church was not aware of the full import of the tradition it was adopting*. It is the nature of canonical tradition to be multivalent.<sup>65</sup> It is the task of each generation to discern the new and perhaps hitherto unexplored implications of their received canonical witness.

The resignification of the Woman Wisdom tradition could be used as a model to support the theological formulations found in the ecumenical creeds. This study has argued that international wisdom was adapted and resignified, incorporated into Israelite tradition through appeal to Yahweh as the Creator and Woman Wisdom as mediator. Woman Wisdom was then creatively resignified in the deuterocanonical works through reflective inner canonical adaptations and incorporation of stoic thought. This reformulation was in turn resignified by the early church when it identified Woman Wisdom with the incarnate Son of God. But that should not be the end of the process. The church is called to continue to resignify and adapt the tradition through inspired and reflective interaction with the biblical witness *and* wisdom. The ecumenical creeds attest to this process.<sup>66</sup> But neither should the process stop there. In the effort to give

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<sup>64</sup>Regarding the use of Wisdom material in the Christ hymn in Colossians, Hartmut Gese makes the strong assertion that "it is manifest that a sapiential theology of creation provides fully and completely the basic structure without which the Christ event could not be grasped," in "Wisdom, Son of Man, and the Origins of Christology," 48.

<sup>65</sup>James Sanders, *Canon and Community*, 21-45, *passim* for a discussion of the interplay between multivalent traditions and the process of resignification.

<sup>66</sup>Sanders sees the entire process, from the biblical canonical adaptations to formation of the creeds as monotheizing. "Just as the heavenly council was a result of ancient Israel's effort to montheize over against foreign pantheons of the Iron Age, so the trinitarian formula was a result of early Christianity's brave efforts to monotheize in the Hellenistic-Roman period," 59.

church tradition its long-overdue recognition, some may be trading one form of fundamentalism for another. Further discussion and retraditioning of the Trinitarian creeds must not simply start with finding new ways to explain these creeds as they now are, but must be a reflective interaction between the creeds and the biblical witness they claim to support and protect. This relationship should be mutual, which means that the creeds are not untouchable deposits of faith. The faith “once and for all delivered to the saints” occasionally needs to be repacked and forwarded to a new address. Some suggestions for where I think we need to do this are among those developed below. We now turn to look at what a Wisdom christology might teach us about the Holy Trinity, and ways we can retradition our faith and practice.

First, the voice of Wisdom points us to God the Father almighty, Creator of heaven and earth, of things seen and things unseen. Christ, like Woman Wisdom, came not to bear self- testimony, but to give testimony to the divine parent. This should cause us to pause before we too quickly skip to the second person of the Trinity to begin the theological task at hand. Our discussions about God, creation, and salvation begin with the Creator, not with Christ or the Holy Spirit. Starting with or focusing excessively on Christ can result in focusing excessively on ourselves and our inner spiritual state. The result is that we replace theology with anthropology, sociology, and psychology. Starting with the Creator puts our focus on the Other who created the cosmos and calls us to find our place within it and for the sake of it. Despite the church’s recent efforts to be Trinitarian, it appears to me that we are still basically christomonistic in our theology, worship, and teaching.<sup>67</sup> This christomonism is a contributing factor in our lack of concern for the creation and can even provide ideological support for those who erroneously claim that ecological

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<sup>67</sup>This is often institutionalized. George E. Tinker laments the christomonism in the statement of purpose of his denomination, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, in “The Integrity of Creation: Restoring Trinitarian Balance,” *The Ecumenical Review* 41 (1989), 529. I have incorporated some of his concerns in this section. In my own denomination the Articles of Faith begin with a statement on “The Triune God” (a single sentence), then they proceed to independent and longer articles on the Son and Spirit. The statement about God the Father is incorporated into the article about the Trinity. Furthermore, God’s role as Creator is articulated as “creative and administrative,” a far cry from the “Creator of heaven and earth” of the ecumenical creeds (see The Church of the Nazarene, *Manual/1997-2001* [Kansas City: Nazarene Publishing House, 1997], “Articles of Faith” I-III).

concerns are unchristian because God loves people and not the earth with its animals, plants, etc. God's creation is intrinsic to the biblical understanding of who God has revealed the divine self to be.<sup>68</sup> It is often said in Trinitarian discussions that "one can't speak of the Father without speaking of the Son." While I don't deny the truth of this, the more broadly-based biblical expression would be "one can't speak of the Creator without speaking of the creation."

Second, Woman Wisdom cries to her children to be more gender inclusive in their God-talk, including the articulation of the Creator's name. While the dominant names and titles for God were rooted in masculine imagery, the ancient Israelites thought nothing of applying feminine language to God side by side with the masculine—and this was in a very patriarchal culture. The birthing of Wisdom is one example; the personification of God's teaching and order as God's daughter is another. While there are good biblical grounds for referring to God as Father, there are equally good grounds for rejecting "Father" as being God's *only* or *intrinsic* name to the exclusion of all others. It would be a mistake to abandon the name altogether, but some middle ground is worth pursuing. Appeals to the Bible for the exclusive use of Father cannot bear their own exegetical weight. Those making such claims often proceed by suppressing the voices of pluralistic biblical traditions in favor of what is claimed to be the one true voice.<sup>69</sup> Such arguments are difficult to sustain exegetically, which is why I suspect that final appeals often take refuge in the tradition. It should also be noted that the divine name "Father" (or "Mother") has a long and significant canonical connection with "Creator," and is not just about the personal bond of love between the individual's soul and God. There are many occasions in the church's traditional worship, proclamation, and teaching for preachers and teachers of the Gospel

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<sup>68</sup>In discussions concerning the revelation of God's name and its relationship to the Trinity, one seldom hears the observation that God has very clearly and intentionally announced the divine name to God's people and that it is printed throughout much of the Bible. That name, Yahweh, is likely based on a verbal form connoting God's creating activity or presence. See Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*, 60-75.

<sup>69</sup>Jenson appeals to the "historical fact" that "Jesus addressed God" as "Father" to support his claim that Father is "not merely our linguistic device" but "is *constitutive* for God himself," *Triune Identity*, 107 (emphasis his). This appears to me as an interpretive move based on selective use of biblical and historical evidence.

to bring in or point out feminine names, titles, and functions for God; one hardly needs to be innovative.

A third implication deals directly with Christ as the Wisdom of God. Wisdom proclaims and embodies God's work of ordering and sustaining creation, the bringing of order out of the chaos that disrupts and threatens life. While this theme is transparent in the christological hymns of John and Colossians, it is also hidden as a pearl of great price in the ministry and teaching of Jesus in the synoptic Gospels. The Wisdom sayings of Jesus predominately point to the Kingdom or rule of God.<sup>70</sup> This is in agreement with the Gospel witness of the central theme of the preaching of Jesus: he came proclaiming the coming of *God's* kingdom. This is the rule of God mentioned in the kingship psalms, expressed as the establishment of the cosmic order through God's offspring, the davidic anointed king. This has been both personified and mediated in the wisdom tradition by Woman Wisdom. The ministry of Jesus resignifies, announces, and inaugurates this order as the focal point of his mission and message.

In Jesus' ministry, forgiveness of sin, exorcisms, nature miracles and healings are all means to this end: restoring and ordering the cosmos back to God's creation purposes. The primary goal is the mediation and instillation of God's rule, or kingdom, not redemption narrowly conceived as individualistic forgiveness of sin and freedom from guilt.<sup>71</sup> "Forgive us our trespasses" follows a much more important concern in the Lord's prayer. When Jesus taught his disciples to pray "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven," he was praying that God would reveal and incorporate the cosmic order of heaven into the ethos of creation, where the disciples could respond as co-creators in the divine work. This might even have something to do with holiness, the reclamation of the whole created order whose eschatological fate seems inextricably bound up with our own—at least that seems to be the structure of Paul's

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<sup>70</sup>Leo G. Purdue, "The Wisdom Sayings of Jesus," 3-35.

<sup>71</sup>Krister Stendahl makes similar observations about the church's focus on forgiveness, which he attributes to our psychological framework. "What makes this sort of quest so central. . . is that it is related to the fact that we happen to be more interested in ourselves than in God or in the fate of his creation." See *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles and Other Essays* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976), 24. Is it possible that at times the same sort of self preoccupation and maybe even a bit of self promotion underlie not only our battles over the correct formulation of the doctrine of entire sanctification, but also in our anthropocentric and individualistic articulations of it, no matter what doctrinal school we identify with?

argument in Romans.<sup>72</sup> An individual and even corporate preoccupation with inner sin and guilt often detracts from the more important and broader scope of God's work. Whether expressed as an obsession with the details of the order of salvation, or introspective concern over our inner spiritual state, the results may be the same. It just may be that a greater articulation and embodiment of faith and worship resides with those who seek justice in the world, revel in the gifts of creation, and work well at ordering the cosmos in their "secular" vocations.

Similar observations could be made about the third person of the Trinity. According to most wisdom (and many other biblical) texts, the primary role of the Spirit is as the hidden inner working of the Creator sustaining and recreating the cosmos. The Spirit's work with the individual must be placed in this context, as the Romans passage just mentioned seems to confirm.

If we see Christ as the Wisdom of God, then Christ also reveals something about the cosmos. We see the creation as the beneficent order established by God, and this is our fourth implication. If Creator and creation are inextricably linked, then the creation bears witness to the Creator, and the revelation of God reveals something about creation. The revelation may be of the beneficent order and the God who sustains it, and who invites all creatures to delight and play in it, as in Proverbs. Or it may be of the reserved yet playful God who sometimes orders the cosmos in ways only comprehensible to the divine mind, as in Job. Whichever one it is, Christ is the mediator, the firstborn child of God who knows that the heavenly and earthly domains can be connected by joyful play or awestruck reflection on the mystery of the created order.

The witness of God's cosmic order also reveals something about our place in it as members of a community broader than the human race. This lesson is essential in our quest to stop the ecological degradation of "this fragile earth, our island home."<sup>73</sup> We are not here just to exploit creation for our "needs"—however they happened to be defined at the moment.

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<sup>72</sup>See especially Rom. 8:18ff., where creation is personified as groaning for its promised release. This concludes Paul's long discussion (Rom. 5-8) about believers overcoming the corporate powers of sin and death, about righteousness and sanctification (Rom. 6-7), by walking in the Spirit (Rom. 8) of God or Christ (see 8:9-11).

<sup>73</sup>From "Eucharistic Prayer C" in the 1979 edition of *The Book of Common Prayer*, 370.

Rather, we are here to be dues-paying members of the creation community. As Riley says, we discover that our “human dominion”

. . . is found in the wider context of humanity as a creature among creatures. The Wisdom tradition knows that, as creature, humanity must observe, study and ponder their co-creatures in order to understand themselves; such reflection also moves humanity on from a dangerous anthropocentric view of the cosmos toward a world-affirming theocentric view. Knowing that we are part of created reality rather than above it and aloof from it brings into prominence that aspect of responsibility which is inherent in humanity’s domination of the rest of nature.<sup>74</sup>

A fifth implication of our study has to do with the international scope of Wisdom. Wisdom is a model for us of the freedom to expand our understanding of God by hearing the truth that others have found in God’s good creation. This gives support to the dialogue between science and religion, as well as between religion and other fields such as the arts, literature, and the social sciences. It also might mean listening to other religious traditions that have not been so biased against creation as much of the Western church has tended to be. It just may be that our minds and mouths have been so resistant to glorying in the fullness of the divine work that stones have been raised up elsewhere to sing the hymns of praise and glory to the Creator. This is not to suggest that we should uncritically accept all opinions as God’s truth, or incorporate idolatrous nature worship into our liturgies. Rather, we should evaluate them in light of a broader biblical understanding of creation and incorporate them into our understanding of God and the cosmos by a “canonizing” and resignifying process similar to the one outlined above in note 49.

The international domain of Wisdom also has implications for our missionary preaching, a sixth implication of our study. The common ground that the biblical message has with many traditional religions and preindustrial cultures is the importance of creation. Rather than start with the “bad news” that the people are sinners and so need forgiveness, a more theocentric approach would be to introduce them to the Creator

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<sup>74</sup>Riley, “Perceiving the Cosmos,” 50.



whose light they have already beheld, in however small a way.<sup>75</sup> I fear that the usual approach is just the opposite. We not only try to convict of sin, but we also try to convince people that their sense of connection with and respect for the creation is idolatrous nature worship.<sup>76</sup> If the missionary is successful in “converting the soul to Christ,” it may involve replacing the “pagan” views of creation with a western consumer model that sees creation primarily in terms of resources to be plundered for the proliferation of “goods.” So a love for God’s creation is replaced by a love for Lord Mammon, the convert is persuaded to trade one form of idolatry for another, and the latter state of the person may be worse than the first. The irony is that in some cases the “sinners” may have had a more biblical understanding of creation than the saints who were trying to teach them the Bible way of salvation. Here is another case where the Christian might do well to listen, learn, and adapt from the wisdom the Creator has placed in creation. The reflective Christian may not only learn something new and important about the Creator and creation theology, but may also learn how to live more lightly on the earth.

But what if nature worship *is* very clearly being practiced by the potential convert? I suggest that, rather than attempt to eradicate it, we try to transform it by associating it with a more biblical view. The creation is not upheld by minor ancestral deities, rather the entire cosmic order is embodied and sustained by God in Christ, through the Spirit, who leads us to worship the true Creator. The missionary comfortable in creation theology might even take as a model the Lukan Paul in Acts 17:16ff. At the Areopagus, Paul started not by condemning the Athenians for their sinful idolatry, but from an observation of how religious he perceived them to be. His message then began with observations about worshipping

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<sup>75</sup>Theologian George Tinker, who is Osage-Cherokee, observes that his Native American peoples seem to associate the attempts of missionaries to convict of sin with their collective experience of subjugation, genocide, and institutionalized impoverishment (i.e., reservations). He observes that their culture already cultivates a relationship with creation and the interrelatedness of all things, which would offer a much better starting point for proclaiming the good news than one’s personal guilt. This way of proclaiming the Gospel, Tinker says, is more Trinitarian since it takes seriously the ecumenical creeds by starting with the first article, see “The Integrity of Creation: Restoring Trinitarian Balance,” especially 529-531.

<sup>76</sup>We don’t need a call to the mission field to verify this sentiment. Many good and God-loving folk in the pews of our churches are convinced that to confess a love of creation is synonymous with New Age nature worship.

the true Creator, during which a “creation” text from *their* philosophers served an important role! Once he established common ground, he used the biblical tradition to correct their false expressions of worship.

Most of the suggestions above could be worked out in our communal life as believers without adding anything new to our box of theological tools. The plurality of voices are already in the Bible for those who would discern and articulate them. The liturgical forms are present, from the familiar “Our father who art in heaven” to the now less widely known “I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth” of the Apostles’ Creed. All we need is a listening heart to hear the voice of Wisdom.

# **“WHERE THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS”: GOD AND THE CHURCH IN THE BOOK OF ACTS**

by

**Richad P. Thompson**

The chorus by Stephen Adams, which so many local churches sang over and over again in the 1970s and 1980s, says:

Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is peace.

Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is love.

There is comfort in life's darkest hour,

There is light and life; there is help and power  
in the Spirit, in the Spirit of the Lord.<sup>1</sup>

To be sure, this chorus like most choruses does not articulate deep theological insights or understanding of the Spirit or the Trinity. Yet, in this chorus's simplicity and maybe even in its inadequacies, a basic image emerges that one should not minimize. It is an image of the Spirit, found in the midst of human existence.

John Wesley's understanding of the inseparable relationship between the Holy Trinity and the Christian life was, in his mind, grounded in the Scriptures. That is to say, at the heart of Wesley's reading and interpretation of Scripture was soteriology, which links God and humanity.<sup>2</sup> Of

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<sup>1</sup>Copyright 1974, 1983, Steve Adams Music/ASCAP.

<sup>2</sup>See Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1994), who stresses the role of a soteriological focus in John Wesley's writings.

course, the biblical-critical methods that Wesley employed in the eighteenth century are not the same methods appropriated in contemporary critical studies of the Bible. Thus, while Wesley's soteriological vision may still provide a theological perspective to the respective Christian movements that trace their heritages back to Wesley, a fresh examination of key biblical texts may also contribute to a developing Wesleyan understanding of the relationship between the Trinity and the Christian life.

For many in the Wesleyan tradition, a natural place to begin such an examination is the New Testament book of Acts. Wesleyan believers have frequently gone to this book in defining their faith, theology, and common experiences. As Robert Wall stated:

Few stops in the *Wirkensgeschichte* of Acts are as provocative and productive as those of the Wesleyan and especially Pentecostal communities of interpretation. In these locations, Acts is interpreted by a pattern of salvation that has taken shape over generations of shared experiences and traditions, where the deeper logic of the Christian gospel coheres around the witness and role of the Holy Spirit for empowering the church's evangelical mission. Wesleyans and Pentecostal believers find their own stories in this biblical narrative, which both confirms and constitutes us as God's people.<sup>3</sup>

Another way of putting it is this: the book of Acts has become meaningful for these believers because of their *experience* of reading the Acts narrative itself—a reading process in which the reader and the text converge and meaning is evoked.<sup>4</sup> These believers have found a commonality between many of the Acts stories and their own stories, and this discovery of common stories is as significant to their interpretation as any specific theological affirmation that might be harvested from the plot in Acts. Thus, when one looks to Acts (or any other biblical book) for answers to theological questions or for the theology of that book, one must recognize the fallacy in the assumption that Luke had an idea or theological point to communicate and then created a narrative to carry it.<sup>5</sup> One cannot merely

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<sup>3</sup>Robert Wall, "Purity and Power According to the Acts of the Apostles," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 34:1 (Spring 1999): 64-65.

<sup>4</sup>Cf. Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), 275.

<sup>5</sup>Cf. Beverly Roberts Gaventa, "Toward a Theology of Acts: Reading and Rereading," *Interpretation* 42 (1988): 150.

extract Lukan statements or descriptions about God and then assert to have articulated adequately something about Lukan theology, since such theology “is intricately and irreversibly bound up with the story he [Luke] tells and cannot be separated from it.”<sup>6</sup> One may even take this one step further: theology is also inseparable from the reading process and experience themselves. Any attempts to work with the theology of Acts must grapple with that text as a narrative—a narrative with interwoven characters, subplots, and themes that invite a reader to see, to hear, and to experience. To understand and interpret the Spirit language in Acts, one must examine those descriptions within the *texture* of that narrative.<sup>7</sup>

This paper seeks to reexamine the critical relationship between God and the church as presented in the New Testament book of Acts. By appropriating literary-critical methodology, the narrative role of the Holy Spirit is assessed in selected Lukan descriptions of the church (with attention given to Acts 1–7).<sup>8</sup> A central question that is explored is not merely *what* the Lukan narrator writes about the Holy Spirit and the church, but also *how* such descriptions function within the Acts narrative. Thus, this paper includes the following three parts: (1) an examination of Lukan descriptions of the Holy Spirit within the Acts narrative with specific attention to theological and christological elements of those descriptions, (2) an examination of Lukan descriptions of the church within the Acts narrative, and (3) initial conclusions about the narrative relationship between God and the church in Acts, including possible implications for the Wesleyan tradition.<sup>9</sup>

## 1. Lukan Descriptions of the Holy Spirit within the Acts Narrative

The central role of the Holy Spirit in the Acts narrative has long been recognized.<sup>10</sup> The comment has often been made that the title for this New Testament book should be “The Acts of the Holy Spirit.” The

<sup>6</sup>Gaventa, “Toward a Theology of Acts,” 150.

<sup>7</sup>See Vernon K. Robbins, *The Tapestry of Early Christian Discourse: Rhetoric, Society and Ideology* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 1–43.

<sup>8</sup>This paper is limited mostly to Acts 1–7 for two reasons: (1) these first chapters “set the stage” for the remainder of the narrative and (2) a smaller section helps to keep a clearer focus on the divergent materials.

<sup>9</sup>Unless noted, all New Testament quotations are my own translations.

<sup>10</sup>See William H. Shepherd, Jr., *The Narrative Function of the Holy Spirit as a Character in Luke-Acts*, SBLDS 147 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994), 1–41, who argues that the Holy Spirit as a narrative *character* has been ignored.

question, therefore, is neither, “Does the Holy Spirit play an important role in Acts?” nor merely, “What does the book of Acts state about the Holy Spirit?” Rather, the question before us is this: “What *function* does the Holy Spirit play in the book of Acts?” Since the Holy Spirit is *not* an obvious, “on-the-narrative-stage” character that all readers would readily identify in the selected scenes *without the narrator’s assistance*, both the blatantly explicit references to the Holy Spirit (i.e., the narrator’s direct naming of the Spirit as an actor) and the more subtle references through reliable characters (through whom the narrator may provide more implicit commentary) suggest that such a question is an important one. In an attempt to answer that question, one must briefly examine those descriptions of the Holy Spirit within the narrative context of Acts. For the purposes here, this examination will focus specifically on the narrative associations between the Spirit and the activities of God or Jesus or both, and on those narrative elements associated with the Holy Spirit.

From the beginning of the Acts narrative, the Lukan narrator makes it clear that the reader is to link together the activities of God, Jesus, and the Spirit. Obviously, the narrative does not offer descriptions of these activities in a detailed or fully trinitarian manner but as conceptual “seeds” regarding the Trinity—seeds that subsequent theological reflection would potentially cultivate and nourish. The narrator begins with a brief prelude that reviews the Lukan gospel and, in particular, the period of forty days between the resurrection and ascension of Jesus (Acts 1:1-5), the latter of which Luke alone among the New Testament gospel writers describes. Not only does Luke summarize about Jesus “giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles” (1:2; NRSV), which seems to reflect images found earlier in Luke 3-4 (e.g., Luke 3:21-22; 4:1-2, 14), but the Lukan Jesus also describes the Spirit as “the promise of the Father” (Acts 1:4), which is probably a genitive of source using the same language used previously in Luke 24:49 to suggest that God is the one who would send the promise or the Spirit. Here at the start of this second volume, the subtle yet clear suggestion is that the reader should recognize the workings of God not only in Jesus but also in the promised Spirit that would soon appear. In other words, Luke does not begin with a *pneumatological* perspective nor a *christological* one; rather, he begins with a *theological* perspective from which the rest of the narrative is presented.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>See, e.g., Acts 10:38: “God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power.”

The most explicit references that link God, Jesus, and the Spirit are found in the speeches or sermons in Acts, which allow the Lukan narrator to provide implicit commentary without intruding into the narrative. The examples of Peter's three speeches in Acts 2–4, Stephen's speech in chapter 7, Peter's speech or sermon at Cornelius's house in chapter 10, and Paul's sermon at the synagogue of Pisidian Antioch (13:16–41) all point to God as the one acting on behalf of his people and as the one whose plans are fulfilled. God, who has given promises to his people and who has acted in the past on behalf of his people, is also presented as the one who has acted with regard to Jesus and who is at work in the present. Specifically, God is the one who raised up Jesus, who was killed by crucifixion and from the dead. Note the similarities and emphases of the following passages:

“*this one . . . you crucified and killed, whom God raised up*” (2:23–24);

“*this Jesus God raised up*” (2:32);

“God . . . has glorified his servant Jesus, whom *you* handed over and rejected. . . . *You* rejected the holy and righteous one . . . and killed the author of life, whom God raised from the dead” (3:13–15);

“. . . let it be known to you all and all the people of Israel: it is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth whom *you* crucified, whom God raised from the dead, that this one stands healthily before you” (4:10);

“The God of our ancestors raised Jesus whom *you* killed by hanging him on a tree; *this one* God exalted at his right hand as author and savior” (5:30–31);

“*this one* God raised on the third day” (10:40); and

“But God raised him from the dead” (13:30; cf. 13:33, 34).

A consistent emphasis throughout these speeches and sermons, then, is that God raised Jesus from the dead. In other words, God did not resurrect just *anyone*, but *this one* who had died in such a despicable way—*this one* whom God's people, the Jewish people, rejected and killed. While what had happened to Jesus is described as “according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God” (2:23; NRSV), there are no images of religious

sacrifice—no images of Jesus taking the sin of all humanity upon himself. Such images are not found in the christology of these passages. Rather, the stark contrast appears to have been left hanging for the reader: the one betrayed, rejected, humiliated, crucified, and killed by others is precisely the one in whom God's activity was and is found.

This christological depiction, then, is dependent on or contained within a theological perspective that views the crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus through the larger sphere of God's past and continuing activity. Central to the argument is Acts 2:33: "Therefore, because he [i.e., Jesus] has been exalted to the right hand of God and has received, from the Father, the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this which *you* both see and hear." This statement suggests that *Jesus* has received the promise, which is the *Holy Spirit*,<sup>12</sup> precisely because of what *God* has done. Yet Jesus himself had told the disciples to wait for this promise, the Holy Spirit (cf. 1:4). Thus, the one who *instructed* the disciples to wait for the promise is the one who now has *received* that promise. Given these reasons, the Lukan Peter offers his explanation for what has happened in the Pentecost scene. What has happened is the fulfillment of the divinely promised outpouring of the Spirit upon Israel, precisely because *Jesus* (i.e., the crucified, raised, and exalted Lord and Christ; see 2:36) has received that promise by virtue of God's activity and has now poured out<sup>13</sup> the Spirit<sup>14</sup> upon them. Thus, the narrator has provided implicit commentary for the reader through Peter's speech, thereby interpreting the Pentecost events from a theological perspective that *embraces* both christological and pneumatological aspects. In other words, one cannot speak of a Lukan pneumatology without also addressing issues of Lukan christology and theology. And one cannot speak of a

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<sup>12</sup>This interprets the genitive as a genitive of apposition. Cf. Luke T. Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Sacra Pagina 5 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1992), 52, who interprets it as an exegetical genitive, since the Holy Spirit is the content of the promise (see Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4).

<sup>13</sup>Note that the same word is used in Acts 2:17, 33, thus linking God's activity and Jesus' activity.

<sup>14</sup>The demonstrative pronoun in Acts 2:33 usually is translated more generically, which seems to suggest that "this thing" that has happened, not the Holy Spirit, is what they "both see and hear" (2:33). Of course, the Holy Spirit is not depicted here as visible or audible. However, two points may be argued in understanding this pronoun as referring to the Holy Spirit: (1) the apparent literary connection with 2:17 suggests that this refers to the pouring out of the Spirit, and (2) this interpretation is grammatically plausible.



Lukan understanding or depiction of God without also addressing issues of the depiction of the Holy Spirit in Acts.

What one may note regarding the depiction of the Holy Spirit in Acts, though, is that the Lukan narrator consistently associates the activities of the Holy Spirit with the witnessing activities of the earliest Christians. One scene stands out as an example. When Peter and John were arrested (after the healing of the lame man at the temple and Peter's subsequent speech that proclaimed the risen Jesus as the one through whom the healing occurred) and interrogated by the Jewish council, their bold response (4:12) created a sense of astonishment (4:13) within the council. The Lukan narrative provides inside information to the reader by stating that the council members recognized that these two apostles "had been with Jesus" (4:13).<sup>15</sup> But what the council members recognized ironically confirms what Luke *already* had explicitly laid out for the reader when, as Peter began to address the council's question—"By what power or by what name have *you* done this?"—Peter is described as "filled with the Holy Spirit" (4:8). The potential intratextual connections that the reader may make here are rather apparent, given the words of Jesus included at the beginning of Acts: "But you will receive *power* when the *Holy Spirit* has come upon you and you will be my *witnesses*" (1:8; emphasis added). Here the reader finds that Peter, when asked about the power by which he has done such things, is "filled with the Holy Spirit" and proceeds to proclaim the gospel or serve as a witness regarding what had happened to Jesus—descriptions of Peter that are reminiscent of the so-called "thesis statement" of Acts. This particular scene, then, provides the reader with something like a paradigm by which the reader may evaluate other explicit statements about the activity of the Holy Spirit<sup>16</sup> and scenes of witnessing believers.<sup>17</sup> The activity of the Spirit, given this scene and others like it, is consistently described with regard to the witnessing or proclaiming activi-

<sup>15</sup>The description of these two apostles as those who "had been with Jesus" (Acts 4:13) is reminiscent of the Lukan description of Peter's first denial of Jesus, when the accusation was that Peter was "with" Jesus (Luke 22:56). While Luke characteristically uses this preposition *sun* to connote "togetherness," the synoptic parallels (Matt 26:69; Mark 14:69) use the more common preposition *meta*.

<sup>16</sup>E.g., Acts 4:31; 5:32; 7:54-57; 8:29, 39; 9:17, 31; 10:44; 13:2, 4, 9, 52; 19:6, 21.

<sup>17</sup>E.g., Acts 5:27-32; 7:54-57; 8:26-40; 10:34-43; 13:16-43; and most other scenes of Paul's ministry.

ties of obedient believers.<sup>18</sup> Thus, these explicit descriptions of the Spirit tend to give credence to the believers' activities and validate them as empowered by the Spirit to witness and proclaim the gospel to others.<sup>19</sup>

## 2. Lukan Descriptions of the Church Within the Acts Narrative

Many persons have argued that the Pentecost scene in Acts 2 describes the birth or beginning of the Christian church. To be sure, the coming of the Spirit as described there gives rise to the Christian movement and thus the Christian church. However, one reason in particular argues in part against that assessment: the whole narrative section of Acts 1–7 occurs within the context of Judaism. The believers are Jewish, and it may well be that these believers were at the Temple in Jerusalem when the extraordinary phenomena described in Acts 2 occurred.<sup>20</sup> The explanation that Peter gives for the phenomena (2:14–36) undeniably insists that what has happened is the fulfillment of God's promise to *Israel*, the people of God (2:17–20; cf. 10:36–38). The later debates in three different meetings of the Jerusalem church leaders (11:1–18; 15:1–35; 21:17–26) all deal with various aspects of that promise's fulfillment and, more specifically, of the *recipients* of that promise.<sup>21</sup> The issue, then, has little to do with understanding what has happened as being the fulfillment of God's

<sup>18</sup>See Acts 5:32: "And we are witnesses of these words, as is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him."

<sup>19</sup>The guidance often ascribed by Luke to the Holy Spirit typically is associated with activities of proclamation (see, e.g., Acts 8:39; 13:2; 16:6–7). In 16:7, the designation is not the Holy Spirit but the Spirit of Jesus.

<sup>20</sup>Cf. Kirsopp Lake, "The Communism of Acts II. and IV.–V. and the Appointment of the Seven," in *The Beginnings of Christianity*, ed. F. J. Foakes Jackson and Kirsopp Lake, 5 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1933), 5:140; and David John Williams, *Acts*, New International Biblical Commentary 5 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1990), 39–40. Contra I. Howard Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1980), 68; and Rudolf Pesch, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, 2 vols., Evangelisch-katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament 5 (Zürich: Neukirchener Verlag, 1986), 1:103.

<sup>21</sup>I.e., questions arise regarding both the fulfillment of the divine promise and those to whom that fulfillment applies. Does the fulfillment apply only to Jews? or also to Gentiles? The narrative sections of Paul's travels (Acts 13–20) describe his ministry consistently as starting in the Jewish synagogue, where both Jews and Gentiles come to believe. However, the two last major scenes or narrative units leading up to the third Jerusalem meeting—in Corinth (18:1–17) and Ephesus (19:1–41)—depict Paul as ministering *outside* the synagogue after opposition, which may offer some clues for understanding the rumors about Paul that the Jerusalem leaders reported.

promise. Rather, the issue has *everything* to do with who the recipients of that promise may be. That is to say, the issue is not about the promise but about the identity of God's people, those who receive God's promise. In the Acts narrative, it seems as though the Lukan narrator consistently describes these recipients in certain ways that contrast with how the narrator describes others whom the reader would also expect to be among the recipients (such as the Jewish religious leaders).<sup>22</sup> Thus, one finds some basic elements of the description of the believers or the church<sup>23</sup> that set those persons apart as perhaps a new Lukan depiction of what it means to be the "people of God."<sup>24</sup>

One basic element of the Acts description of the believers or the church is unanimity and unity. Throughout Acts 1–7, the Lukan narrator typically and explicitly describes the believers as united, as having agreement or unanimity among themselves, and as together.<sup>25</sup> Prior to the Pentecost event, the believers obey Jesus' instructions and return to Jerusalem, where "*these all* were constantly devoted *together* to prayer" (1:14) and were gathered together when the extraordinary phenomena occurred (2:1-4). Following the Pentecost event, the Lukan narrator explicitly summarizes about the believers' typical activities<sup>26</sup> by, among other things, alluding to images associated previously with togetherness, unity, and God's activity.<sup>27</sup> After the initial opposition by Jewish religious leaders, Peter and John gathered together with the believers and prayed to God (4:23-31), with the result that "they all were filled with the Holy Spirit

<sup>22</sup>See Dionysius, *On the Style of Demosthenes* 21.

<sup>23</sup>One should note, however, that the designation "believers" is the designation of choice for the Christians rather than "church" in Acts 1–7. Thus, the Lukan narrator is not designating a group or institution that is separate from or precisely distinct within Judaism.

<sup>24</sup>Israel is not divided by the gospel/promise, however, but is divided by the rejection of the gospel/promise by those who do not believe. Contra Jacob Jervell, *The Theology of the Acts of the Apostles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 34-43.

<sup>25</sup>See, e.g., Acts 1:12-14; 2:1-4, 42-47; 4:23-37; and 5:12-16.

<sup>26</sup>This idea of typical behavior is reflected in the use of the imperfect tense in the summary sections rather than the aorist tense that one finds in the literary context both prior to and after the summary section.

<sup>27</sup>See, e.g., Acts 1:12-14; 2:1-4. See Richard Paul Thompson, "Christian Community and Characterization in the Book of Acts: A Literary Study of the Lukan Concept of the Church" (Ph.D. dissertation, Southern Methodist University, 1996), 191-93.

and continually spoke the word of God with boldness" (4:31). Even the summary section of Acts 4:32-37, contrasted with the subsequent scene involving Ananias and Sapphira (5:1-11), presents the believers as having "one heart and soul" (4:32)<sup>28</sup> and as having "great grace upon them all" (4:33). Thus, what one finds in the Lukan description of the church is that element of togetherness and unity which is directly linked to God's divine presence and activity through the Holy Spirit.

A second basic element of the Acts description of the believers or the church is the dynamic of fellowship and sharing. What is unique about this element of the Lukan depiction of the believers is that one discovers this dynamic only in explicit summary statements. That is, the narrator does not *show* the reader or present a scene in which the reader may see or discern such actions or dynamics at work. Rather, the narrator has stepped out onto the narrative stage and *tells* the reader directly about the typical qualities of fellowship and sharing within the church. These explicit statements, like those direct descriptions of the Holy Spirit, stand out in the Acts narrative as significant emphases and textual clues for the reader and the ongoing evaluation of the plot. Here the church is described in idealistic or utopian ways. That is, the Lukan narrator takes some colors for his description of the believers' typical behavior from the palette of Greco-Roman friendship traditions.<sup>29</sup> For example, the believers are depicted as devoted to the *koinonia* (2:42), a noun frequently associated with the bond between friends as "partners"<sup>30</sup> which, as the articu-

<sup>28</sup>The latter part of that expression referring to "one soul" borrows imagery from Greco-Roman friendship traditions to express explicitly the communal relationship that united these believers. See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 9.8.2; Plutarch, *On Brotherly Love* 478c; and Iamblichus, *Life of Pythagoras* 168; cf. Plato, *Republic* 5.462c. For additional references, see Pieter W. van der Horst, "Hellenistic Parallels to Acts (Chapters 3 and 4)," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 35 (1989): 46; and Jacques Dupont, "La communauté des biens aux premiers jours de l'Eglise (Actes 2,42.44-45; 4,32.34-35)," in *Études sur les Actes des Apôtres*, *Lectio divina* 45 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1967), 513-14.

<sup>29</sup>Cf. Alan C. Mitchell, "The Social Function of Friendship in Acts 2:44-47 and 4:32-37," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 111 (Summer 1992): 255-72; Jacques Dupont, "L'union entre les premiers Chrétiens dans les Actes des Apôtres," in *Nouvelles études sur les Actes des Apôtres*, *Lectio divina* 118 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1984), 296-318; Luke T. Johnson, *The Literary Function of Possessions in Luke-Acts* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1977), 1-5.

<sup>30</sup>See, e.g., Plato, *Republic* 4.449c; and Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 8.9.1-2, 9.8.2; *Politics* 2.1.8-2.2.9. Cf. Mitchell, "The Social Function of Friendship in Acts 2:44-47 and 4:32-37," 260-63.

lar form suggests, apparently refers to the communal bond between the believers themselves.<sup>31</sup> They routinely provided for the needs of other believers by selling certain possessions or properties so that the proceeds may be used to meet those needs (2:45; 4:32, 34-37). Thus, the expression “all things in common” (2:44; 4:32) concisely describes the prevalent attitude within the church, with the result that there was “no needy person among them” (4:34). They even shared meals together (2:42, 46)<sup>32</sup> and had “grace toward all the people” (2:47).<sup>33</sup> While Luke does not explicitly mention the reasons for such sharing and fellowship, the implicit association of this communal dynamic and the promised coming or gift of the Holy Spirit suggests that the bases for such customary behavior are the grace and presence of God within the church.

A third basic element of the Acts description of the believers or the church is the seemingly unstoppable proclamation of the gospel message. Corresponding to the theme or plot element of witnessing is the image of the unstoppable character of the believers as witnesses. The apparent barrier of different languages could not stop them from proclaiming the gospel on the day of Pentecost. The initial opposition by the Jewish leaders (4:1-22) could not stop Peter and the others from proclaiming the good news as boldly and powerfully as ever (cf. 4:13, 29, 31, 33). Even the apostles’ imprisonment, due to the jealousy of the Sadducees, only resulted in an angel releasing them and sending them back to “tell the people in the temple the whole message of this life” (5:20), while the Jewish leaders appear as bumbling fools when they find none of their prisoners the next

<sup>31</sup>Dupont, “L’union entre les premiers Chrétiens,” 298-99; and Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 58.

<sup>32</sup>I take the expression “breaking of bread” as a reference to table fellowship. While eucharistic images seem obvious, such images still seem to be contextualized here by the common meal, rather than by an early Christian ritual. The construction (Acts 2:42) creates two pairs of related activities, as the parallel expressions suggest: “to the teaching of the apostles and to the fellowship”; “to the breaking of bread and to the prayers.” Thus, these two grammatical pairs connect “worship”-related activities and fellowship-related activities. See Thompson, “Christian Community and Characterization,” 173-76.

<sup>33</sup>This participial phrase in Acts 2:47 does not, as most translations suggest, refer to goodwill *toward* the believers but grace *from* them to the people. See T. David Andersen, “The Meaning of *Echontes Charin Pros* in Acts 2.47,” *New Testament Studies* 34 (1988): 604-10; and Thompson, “Christian Community and Characterization,” 187-90.

morning.<sup>34</sup> The leaders' rage, threats, and floggings only add fuel to the fire of the apostles' passion for proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ. Gamaliel's advice to the Jewish council ironically confirms what the reader would see: "if it [the activity of the apostles] is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them—in that case you may even be found fighting against God" (5:39; NRSV). Once again, what one finds in the Lukan description of the church is based on God, as the Holy Spirit enables the believers to proclaim the gospel wherever they are found.

But why *these* descriptions? If the church could be described differently, then why are *these* descriptions included and not others? How do *these* descriptions function within the Acts narrative, with all the other characters, images, actions, themes, and other narrative elements that provide the multiple strands or threads that *together* make up the rope we call the plot? When one examines the different characters or character groups in Acts, one readily identifies a group that is consistently depicted antithetically to the believers in chapters 1–7: the Jewish religious leaders. One may summarize the contrasts between the believers and the Jewish religious leaders as presented in Acts as follows:

1. The believers enjoy the presence of God through the Holy Spirit; the religious leaders are never described with regard to God's presence and act like God's opponents.
2. The believers are united together by the Holy Spirit; the religious leaders are united together by jealousy and opposition.
3. The believers bring unity to the Jewish people because of the fulfillment of God's promise to Israel; the religious leaders are increasingly divisive to the Jewish people.
4. The believers care for the needs of others; the religious leaders are self-serving or jealous of all the positive things happening around the believers and end up guilty of murder.
5. The believers cannot stop proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ; the religious leaders never stop trying to silence that proclamation.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>See Richard I. Pervo, *Profit with Delight: The Literary Genre of the Acts of the Apostles* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 21–23.

<sup>35</sup>See Richard P. Thompson, "Believers and Religious Leaders in Jerusalem: Contrasting Portraits of Jews in Acts 1–7," in *Literary Studies in Luke-Acts: Essays in Honor of Joseph B. Tyson*, ed. Richard P. Thompson and Thomas E. Phillips (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1998), 343.

One possible reading of these contrasting portraits of Jews in Acts 1–7 identifies these descriptions as contrasting images of the people of God—contrasting images that continue to play out through the Acts narrative. The discrepancy between these two pictures may be perceived on two levels: the social level, which would include communal relations and other social behavior; and the religious level, which would include matters of God’s presence, empowerment, and blessing.<sup>36</sup> While both images are of Jewish groups, the contrasts may raise anew the question of what it *really* means to be the people of God. The Acts narrative does not provide explicit resolution of this question.<sup>37</sup> However, the contrasting images seem to function something like two character groups that reflect a thesis and antithesis within the work.<sup>38</sup> In such a reading, one may conclude that, in the early chapters of Acts, the Jewish believers (i.e., the church) embody the ideals of a people who belong to God and among whom *is* God. Thus, the LXX designation for God’s people (*ekklesia*) is transferred to the believers. And these images function paradigmatically in the ongoing reading process—in evaluation and reevaluation, in interpretation and reinterpretation—of subsequent scenes and characters, including the increasingly diverse images of the church, which is made up of Jewish and Gentile believers.<sup>39</sup>

### 3. The Narrative Relationship Between God and the Church in Acts, Including Possible Implications for the Wesleyan Tradition

In the Ananias and Sapphira scene (Acts 5:1-11), the Lukan narrator describes the response to what had happened as “great fear” (5:5, 11).

<sup>36</sup>Thompson, “Believers and Religious Leaders in Jerusalem,” 343.

<sup>37</sup>This may also explain why so many different interpretations of the Lukan concept or depiction of Israel exist within contemporary scholarship.

<sup>38</sup>See Dionysius, *On the Style of Demosthenes* 21: “He does not set out each separate pair of actions in finicky detail, old and new, and compare them, but carries the whole antithesis through the whole theme by arranging the items in two contrasting groups.”

<sup>39</sup>This does not suggest, however, that this image of the Jewish believers in Jerusalem remains consistent throughout Acts. I argue elsewhere that the two portraits of churches in Acts 11 (i.e., the Jerusalem church in 11:1-18 and the Antioch church in 11:19-30) and then the scene in Acts 21:17-36 present the Jerusalem church in ways that link those believers to the larger general image of the Jewish people when the issues regarding Gentiles as either recipients of the same promise or as equal partners within the church (i.e., as part of God’s people). See Thompson, “Christian Community and Characterization,” 306-24, 430-37.

While most versions of the New Testament confirm the validity of this translation, one may also argue that, given the use of this same term in Acts 2:43 to describe the “awe” of the believers, perhaps something like “awe” is also implied here. But by what are the believers “awed” (or, of what are they “fearing”)? Perhaps the comments from Peter may provide some assistance:

“Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit?” (5:3; NRSV)

“You have not lied to us [to men] but to God.” (5:4; NRSV)

“How is it that you have agreed together to put the Spirit of the Lord to the test?” (5:9; NRSV)

Not only do these three comments or questions seem to interchange the designations “God,” “Holy Spirit,” and “the Spirit of the Lord,” they also seem to identify *God* and the *church*, so much so that Ananias’s and Sapphira’s attempts of deception are not merely directed to human beings but to God.<sup>40</sup> Could it be that here is expressed an overwhelming sense or realization of God’s identification with the church rather than a fear that compels one not to do something like these two had done?<sup>41</sup> The assertion that the portrayals of God and the church in the opening chapters of Acts are consistently intertwined does not exaggerate the narrative evidence, since the existence of this group of believers and their activities are dependent upon the activity of God. One may even go so far as to suggest that, in reading these chapters of the Acts narrative, descriptions of God are *also* descriptions of the church, and depictions of the church are *also* depictions of God, who is acting through the Holy Spirit among and through the church.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>40</sup>Cf. Robert L. Brawley, *Centering on God: Method and Message in Luke-Acts*, Literary Currents in Biblical Interpretation (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1990), 178; Ernst Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary*, trans. Bernard Noble and Gerald Shinn (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971), 237; Daniel Marguerat, “La mort d’Ananias et Saphira (Ac 5.1-11) dans la stratégie narrative de Luc,” *New Testament Studies* 39 (1993): 221; and Gerhard Schneider, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, 2 vols., Herders theologischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament 5 (Freiburg: Herder, 1980, 1982), 1:372.

<sup>41</sup>See F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, rev. ed., New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 107; and William S. Kurz, *Reading Luke-Acts: Dynamics of Biblical Narrative* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1993), 82, who argues for this negative example idea.

<sup>42</sup>The designation “church,” in this context, refers to those believers in whom God is found and working. See also notes 23 and 39 above.



Given this cursory reading of the opening sections of Acts, what then may one offer regarding the narrative relationship between God and the church that may also be offered to the ongoing Wesleyan conversations about the Holy Trinity and the Christian life? While neither (a) pretending to be exhaustive of the possibilities in reading Acts nor (b) suggesting that the Acts narrative depicts a clear trinitarian understanding of God nor (c) risking the hazards of a “Bible person” wading into the deep end of the systematic theological pool of trinitarian doctrine and debate, I would like to offer three basic observations, based on this portion of the biblical witness.

First, a Wesleyan/biblical understanding of God needs to place the present activities of the Holy Spirit within the larger context of God at work throughout history. One may rightly note that the Holy Spirit among the persons of the Trinity draws the most attention from the reader as the Book of Acts is read, but one must also recognize the Lukan portraits of the Spirit as consistently painted with theological and christological hues. A focus only on the Lukan pneumatological perspective tends to overemphasize the Spirit with reference to power and to deemphasize the Spirit with reference to the Spirit’s purpose and role in God’s *whole* plan of saving humanity.<sup>43</sup>

Second, a Wesleyan/biblical understanding of God needs to identify the creative work and presence of God in the establishment and development of his people, i.e., the community of faith. The Acts narrative tends to depict the activities of God with reference to the community of faith. While such a statement should not imply that God never works on an individual’s behalf, we must recognize that the Acts narrative consistently and repeatedly depicts the Holy Spirit—the fulfillment of God’s promise—as present and active *within the Christian community of faith*. The portrayals of the believers as worshiping together, caring for one another, sharing life together, and supporting one another—all within the obvious context of a community of faith created and empowered by God through the Holy Spirit—support what Randy Maddox suggests was a conclusion of John Wesley: “the inappropriateness of any model of spirituality that relied on the individual pursuit of holiness.”<sup>44</sup> Given the images of the church in Acts along with Wesley’s concern for the necessity of the *social*

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<sup>43</sup>See Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 140.

<sup>44</sup>Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 209; 353 n107.

dimension of holiness, we cannot dislodge discussions of the church from our discussions of holiness and of the Holy Trinity.

Third, a Wesleyan/biblical understanding of God needs to recognize the ongoing redemptive work of God through his people in offering grace to society. The primary activity of the Holy Spirit in Acts is the empowerment of the church to serve redemptively within society. While the community of faith is created by God through the Holy Spirit, the narrative describes the believers most frequently as witnesses or as those who “have grace toward all the people” (Acts 2:47). One may rightly argue that a Wesleyan understanding of God must include the ongoing offer and provision of grace through the church and her evangelistic mission. However, both the Acts narrative and the social dimension of Wesley’s ministry suggest that one must not bracket from such theological discussions the outward-moving, redemptive work of God through his people, through whom such a mission will arise that will not only influence or change others but will in turn influence or change the church.

So what about Stephen Adam’s chorus? *Is* there peace, where the Spirit of the Lord is? *Is* there love? comfort? light and life? help and power? Although one may not wish to endorse this whole set of lyrics just yet, this reading of the book of Acts suggests that where one finds the Spirit at work, there *is* the church. There one also may find love, life, power and other such things as the present activity of God within the human existence of his people.

# THE TRANSGRESSION OF THE INTEGRITY OF GOD: THE TRINITY AND THE HALLOWING OF THE FLESH

by

Craig Keen

As historians of ideas are quick to point out, philosophy in the Western world was for millennia *the* driving force moving all serious intellectual labors. A thinker thought hard not in the first place to discover courses of action likely to have cash value in a world where success is all about counting. Hard thinking was worth the trouble because of the intrinsic value of the love of and quest for wisdom. Even disciplines that in our time have become proud of being non-philosophical were born for the sake of knowing the good, the true, and the beautiful: biology, physics, psychology, astronomy, music, rhetoric, mathematics, among them. It is for this reason that so many fields have attached themselves to the Ph.D. degree. To have a Ph.D. degree in biology, e.g., once meant that years of education had fitted one to teach the particular mode of loving wisdom that is peculiar to the study of living things.

That philosophy has become one among many disparate compartments within the so-called modern “university” shows how far it has fallen. But in its heyday philosophy had no rival. To think unrelentingly in any field was to philosophize; and since all fields were grounded in the good, the true, and the beautiful, to philosophize in *any* one of them was to be on the way to philosophizing in *every one* of them. To philosophize was finally to think comprehensively: to leave out nothing, no stray entity, no stray flash of light, no stray quantity or quality; but to bring every-

thing, however ephemeral or unobtrusive, into its stronghold; to establish everything on solid ground. Philosophy in its most unrelenting and revered form was metaphysics; and metaphysics in its most unrelenting and revered form was ontology, the concerted inquiry into what it is to be.

Of course, there is an earlier history to all of this, a history that *begins*—a history with a *first* philosopher. However, what has characterized this history from before the time of Heraclitus and Parmenides to our own time—which make no mistake is the history of the very soul of the West—is a dogged insistence on unity. This is *one* sphere with a center, *one* city with a wall and a standing army, *one* tower with a foundation. That foundation may be called simply “the One” or “the Logos” or “matter” or “form” or “substance” or “spirit” or “praxis” or “will” or “the will to power” or “energy” or “creativity”; but it is also not at all uncommonly called “God.” For anything to be deemed real, it must be grounded on this ground. Unless it rests here, unless there is no question of parentage, unless differences are ultimately resolved in this identity, this “same,” then “the falcon does not know the falconer” (Yeats), the world is not the world,  $A \neq A$ .<sup>1</sup>

The name of Jesus began to be attached to this foundational *modus operandi* as his story was translated into the propositions of second-century defenders of the faith. A century earlier the same thing had happened to the stories of the ancient Hebrews. Of course, “Jesus,” as a human, all too human, name, is ambiguous. Human life is irregular, fraught with accidents. It lacks the necessity of strict identity. It could have been otherwise and sooner or later it *is* otherwise: human beings die. Fortunately, however, this name “Jesus” is attached to no ordinary human being. This Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. This Jesus is God with us. In this Jesus the whole fullness of deity was pleased to dwell. And so, what came to be increasingly important from the second century on were not the accidents of this history, but the Supreme Being who is *shown* to be supreme particularly here.<sup>2</sup> Thus, the name of Jesus became a password for entry into the kind of foundational thinking that the Greeks and then the Romans had been practicing for centuries; and, of course, when one gains entry, a password is no longer needed. It is now the One God—the Supreme Being—that matters.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>See Schüssler Fiorenza’s critique of “the logic of identity” and “the Man of Reason” (1992, 139-144, 150-158; cf. 186-194).

<sup>2</sup>Of course, the Supreme Being is uniformly supreme *a se*. There is no more and no less to a Supreme Being.

<sup>3</sup>This is not to say that any of this ever became unambiguous. Indeed, it is above all the point of this essay to argue that in the doctrine of the Trinity that

And what of this Supreme Being? The greatest intellects of the Christian era gave their time and enormous powers to its conception. They built an idea by comparison to which all that had preceded it paled, an idea that laid claim to the tested philosophical heritage, mining that heritage for usable materials, putting those materials to use.<sup>4</sup> But these great intellects also remembered the strong language used of Yahweh and Abba in the holy scriptures. And so, they translated anthropomorphic doxologies that recounted the mighty deeds, the watchful care, the extravagant love, and the untiring faithfulness of that God into metaphysical propositions about omnipotence and omniscience and benevolence and immutability. "God," it is well argued, is a pure unity;<sup>5</sup> the highest, unchangeable being and good from whom all else that is and is thus good is created *ex nihilo*;<sup>6</sup> thus lacking no power, containing all things, untouched and undefiled by its creatures' "wretchedness," inherently

figures so large in Christian tradition there moves an energy that calls the integrity of the Supreme Being into question. However, it seems no exaggeration to say that for centuries there was in the history of Christian thought a steady movement from the flesh and blood earthiness of the New Testament Jesus to the ethereal Perfection of perfections that stands at the apex of a great hierarchy of beings.

<sup>4</sup>"Like the treasures of the ancient Egyptians . . . which on leaving Egypt the people of Israel . . . surreptitiously claimed for themselves . . .—similarly all the branches of pagan learning contain not only false and superstitious fantasies and burdensome studies . . . but also studies for liberated minds which are more appropriate to the service of the truth about monotheism to be found in their writers. . . . We can see, can we not, the amount of gold, silver, and clothing with which Cyprian . . . was laden when he left Egypt; is not the same true of Lactantius, and Victorinus, of Optatus, and Hilary, to say nothing of people still alive, and countless Greek scholars?" (Augustine 1997, 64-65 [2.40.60]; see also Gregory of Nyssa n.d.a., 193 [7.1])

<sup>5</sup>"God therefore must . . . be a simple intellectual existence, admitting in himself of no addition whatever, so that he cannot be believed to have in himself a more or a less, but is Unity, or I might say, Oneness throughout, and the mind and fount from which originates all intellectual existence or mind." (Origen 1973, 10 [1.1.6])

<sup>6</sup>"The Supreme Good beyond all others is God. It is thereby unchangeable good, truly eternal, truly immortal. All other good things derive their origin from him but are not part of him. That which is part of him is as he is, but the things he has created are not as he is. Hence if he alone is unchangeable, all things that he has created are changeable because he made them of nothing. Being omnipotent he is able to make out of nothing, i.e., out of what has no existence at all, good things, both great and small, celestial and terrestrial, spiritual and corporeal. . . . Therefore, all good things throughout all the ranks of being, whether great or small, can derive their being only from God. Every natural being, so far as it is such, is good. There can be no being which does not derive its existence from the most high and true God." (Augustine 1953a, 326 [i])

compassionless, without need, though needed by all else;<sup>7</sup> “absolutely perfect” and thus without rival;<sup>8</sup> loving itself first and only then loving the reflection of itself and its perfections in its creatures;<sup>9</sup> the One without which there is no even fragmentary creaturely perfection: no goodness, truth, beauty, life, wisdom, blessedness, intelligibility.<sup>10</sup>

The world of beings stands in relation to this Supreme Being as a system of more or less goodness, truth, and beauty; of more or less being

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<sup>7</sup>“Therefore, O Lord God, thou art more truly almighty just because thou canst do nothing through lack of power, and nothing has power against thee. . . . Yes, thou art compassionate according to our sense, but not according to thine. For when thou lookest upon us . . . , we feel the effect of thy compassion, . . . and yet thou art not compassionate, because thou art not affected by any share in our wretchedness. . . . [Thou] art not in place or time, but all things are in thee. For nothing contains thee, but thou containest all things. . . . And thou art life and light and wisdom and blessedness and eternity and many such goods, and yet thou art only the one and supreme good, wholly self-sufficient, in need of nothing—while all things need thee for their being and their well-being.” (Anselm 1970, 77 [vii], 78 [viii], 87 [xix], 88 [xxii])

<sup>8</sup>“God is absolutely perfect, lacking no perfection. If, then, there are many gods, there must be many such perfect beings. But this is impossible. For, if none of these perfect beings lacks some perfection, and does not have any admixture of imperfection, which is demanded for an absolutely perfect being, nothing will be given in which to distinguish the perfect beings from one another. It is impossible, therefore, that there be many gods.” (Thomas Aquinas 1955, 158 [42.3])

<sup>9</sup>“Whoever loves something in itself and for its own sake consequently loves all things in which it is found: for example, he who loves sweetness for itself must love all sweet things. But God wills and loves His own being in itself and for its own sake, as shown above. Every other being, however, is by way of likeness a certain participation of His being, as appears from what has been said. It remains, then, that God, in that He wills and loves Himself, wills and loves other things.” (Thomas Aquinas 1955, 246 [75.4]; cf. 152-153 [38], 204-205 [60], 277-282 [91])

<sup>10</sup>“Thee I invoke, O God, the Truth, in, by and through whom all truths are true; the Wisdom, in, by and through whom all are wise who are wise; the True and Perfect Life, in, by and through whom live all who live truly and perfectly; the Beatitude, in, by and through whom all the blessed are blessed; the Good and the Beautiful, in, by and through whom all good and beautiful things have these qualities; the Intelligible Light, in, by and through whom all intelligible things are illumined; whose kingdom is this whole world unknown to corporeal sense; whose kingdom gives the Law also to these mundane realms; from whom to be turned is to fall; to whom to be turned is to rise; in whom to abide is to stand fast; from whom to depart is to die; to whom to return is to revive; in whom to dwell is to live; whom no [one] loses unless [she] be deceived; whom no [one] seeks unless [she] has been admonished; whom no [one] finds unless [she] has been purified; whom to abandon is to perish; to reach out to whom is to love; to see whom is true possession.” (Augustine 1953b, 24 [1.3])

(Augustine 1953a, 327). Every entity has its place in this great class system. The divine Ground gives every entity what integrity it has. It is the divine Ground that makes this a system. Entities stand together only because each stands on the absolutely unshakeable solid-rock Foundation without which no entity could be at all (cf. Augustine 1963, 434 [14.12.16]). To rise in the direction of this One is to rise away from insecurity, wretchedness, disease, disorder, disintegration, evil. It is to rise toward security, blessedness, rest, wholeness, integrity, goodness; in short, it is to rise toward purer and purer, greater and greater, higher and higher *being*. To rise in the direction of this One is to find *oneself*, what one was created to *be*; it is to find one's *home*, where one was created to *reside*. The God who is an inherent Integrity—who in perfect self-sufficiency is untouched by all and each—this God effortlessly grants to its creature (if the proper conditions are met) an integrity undisruptively derivative from its own, an integrity that makes the creature *untouched* as its “heavenly Father” is *untouched*. However, even the creature who is plummeting into the dark abyss of disintegration, who has turned its petals and leaves away from the nourishing rays of the bright sun, who has braced itself against the pull of the *actus purus*, who has closed its mouth to the medicine of immortality, even this creature yet participates in the integrity of the Supreme Being—to the extent that it *is*.<sup>11</sup>

### The Abasement of God

How different this orientation upward is from everything one reads of the history of Jesus in the Gospels. When the Gospel of John, for example, speaks of the incarnation of the word (1:14), it directs the reader's attention to a movement downward. The word “flesh” in John's prologue carries with it a heavy Hebrew ancestry.<sup>12</sup> In the Hebrew scriptures flesh (*basar*) most commonly signifies human frailty, weakness, helplessness, ephemerality, vulnerability, mortality. *God*, on the other

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<sup>11</sup>Feminist theologians have very effectively critiqued such hierarchical thinking. See, e.g., Ruether (1993), 53-54, 85-92, and *passim*; and Schüssler Fiorenza (1992), 114-120.

<sup>12</sup>There are several shades of meaning of the word flesh (*basar*) in the Old Testament. It can signify skin and muscle, tissue and organs, what clothes the bones. It can signify the body as a whole. It also can signify the relationship between human beings. One's brother or even the human being as such is one's own flesh. However, even here it is not inappropriate to understand human vulnerability to be implied (Wolff 1974, 26-29).

hand, is never spoken of as flesh,<sup>13</sup> God is not flesh; flesh is not God (Schnackenburg 1995, 290).<sup>14</sup>

This is not to say that “flesh” as such is evil. Even as frail and vulnerable and exposed to the constant threat of death, even as radically other than God, the human is flesh precisely *in relation to God*.<sup>15</sup> The life, the soul, of the flesh is “God’s breath.” Indeed, human being is human being not in itself, but *vis-à-vis* God, *coram deo*. In this sense “flesh is [the human’s] situation before God” (Schweizer 1971, 123).<sup>16</sup> Yet this does not in any sense diminish its difference from God. God’s sustenance holds flesh to what it is not and cannot be. Thus for this flesh to be held together with this God is for its difference from God to be intensified. God is consistently above. We are consistently below. Isaiah’s encounter with God in the temple highlights the human condition (Isaiah 6). In the face of God one can shout “woe is me!” or one can shout “here am I, send me,” but one cannot aver “there is between God and us a common essence.”

Therefore, with the affirmation in the prologue of the Gospel of John that “the word became flesh,” the tension between fallible human being and God is heightened enormously. God does not cease here to be Wholly Other in relation to the flesh and yet this God *dwells* with us *as* the flesh that is this Jesus Christ (Brown 1966, 33).<sup>17</sup> The movement here is a descent from above to below, from the sufficient to the insufficient, from

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<sup>13</sup>“Before God in his holiness . . . [the human being] as *basar* is not only one who is frail, but also one who is liable to sin and for whom, therefore, the voice of the living God is unendurable (Deut. 5:26): ‘For who is there of all flesh, that has heard the voice of the living God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as we have, and has still lived?’ Under the scorching wind of God’s judgment all *basar* withers like grass (Isa. 40:6). . . . Thus even in the Old Testament *basar* does not only mean the powerlessness of the mortal creature but also the feebleness of his faithfulness and obedience to the will of God.” (Wolff 1974, 30-31)

<sup>14</sup>Schnackenburg adds this: “The absolute term *flesh* is not merely a circumlocution for *human being*. . . but in Johannine thinking an expression for what is earthly and limited, frail and transitory (6:63), the typical, purely human way of being, so to speak, in distinction to everything heavenly divine, divinely spiritual.”

<sup>15</sup>Thus *basar* is not used of a corpse (Wolff 1974, 29).

<sup>16</sup>Schweizer continues: “When he is viewed in this way, he can no longer be split up into a divine part and an earthly part [as in Platonism]. If there is a distinction, it can only be between God and man, heaven and earth.”

<sup>17</sup>“Here, however, the element of the flesh that is sinful, inclined toward sin, or imprisoned by sin (I John 2:16) is not present” (Schnackenburg 1995, 290).



the immortal to the mortal, from “to be” to “not to be.” Yet this movement does not lead simply to a kind of external relation in which the integrity of opposing poles remains intact. God and flesh touch—explosively.

One finds this tensile movement at play throughout the Gospel narratives. Jesus—“the one who will save his people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21)—begins his short life a poor peasant girl’s helpless baby, a baby of uncertain legitimacy (Matthew 1:18). He is from the first homeless (Luke 2:7). His parents have no power, no property, no prestige worthy of note (Luke 1:46-55). He is brought up. He grows (Luke 2:40). He presents himself to a wild man, living and working at the margins of proper society, to be baptized, “to fulfill all righteousness” (Matthew 4:15), as he says. He is moved by a Spirit other than his own out into the waste land where he is to suffer (Mark 1:12). He hungers and thirsts (John 4:6-9). He is thrust into the flame of the temptation to lay hold of power and property and prestige (Luke 4:2-13). He gathers around himself a motley crew of misfits and laborers and political radicals and Roman collaborators and women (Luke 6:14-16).<sup>18</sup> He touches the sick, the blind, the lame, the poor, lepers, prostitutes, the demon-possessed, corpses (Matthew 8:1-3; 21:31-32; Luke 4:18; 6:20, 24; 7:22; 8:26-42; 14:12-14, 21). He touches them and they touch him (Luke 8:42-48). Indeed, in a system in which the holy and the unholy are separated by an untransgressible line, to touch them is to be touched by them and to be touched by them is to touch them.

Of course, this Jesus is acutely aware of his *heavenly* Father. It is his Father that he makes known. And yet he looks to his Father as an *Other* who is incomparably free in relation to everything creaturely; an *Other* who cannot be exploited by anyone, however propertied, powerful, prestigious, or pure; an Other who “for human beings is new, surprising, and challenging . . . totally different from what people imagine and want to be true. It is this very God, in his grandeur, superiority over the world, and incomprehensibility to human beings, that Jesus proclaims” (Schnackenburg 1995, 314). This is the oddity of Jesus above all else. He proclaims and he performs and he *is* Immanuel, God with us. Yet God with us is no less God, Wholly Other.

<sup>18</sup>“Jesus raised women above an androcentric view and placed them on the same level as men. He masterfully breaks through the barriers of contemporary Jewish society: we have only to think of his intervention for the sinful woman, who invaded a dinner for men, or the women whom he received into his following.” (Schnackenburg 1995, 207; see also de Jonge 1988, 63-64, 102-103)

In the life and ministry of Jesus one comes to us who is what we are, who has what we have. But also in the life and ministry of Jesus One comes to us who is in every respect what we are not and cannot be, what we have not and cannot have. Things do not stay in their place in or about this Jesus. There is a concurrence of what cannot concur. What cannot touch, touch. Thus Jesus violates the standards of propriety and shocks and disturbs those whose identity it is to preserve and defend the integrity especially of things holy. "The extraordinary appearance of Jesus is based on the fact that he is God's representative and agent, who brings the otherness of God close to humankind; he is the man who goes against all human standards" (Schnackenburg 1995, 315).

In the Gospel stories the urgency of Jesus' message and of his broader ministry has everything to do with the imminence of God's coming rule and reign. Jesus' urgency is offensive, because the God he announces is offensive.<sup>19</sup> This Wholly Other God is on the move, breaking into this closed world from beyond it, like a bombshell hurtling down from above. Jesus moves because God is moving. The coming of this *basileia* is what Jesus is about to such a degree that he proclaims it no less with his hands and feet than with his throat and lips. He goes where the *basileia* is going. He goes where God is going. It is his unbridled faithfulness and obedience that make him finally transparent to the coming of this God.<sup>20</sup> Thus one can equally well say that the reign and rule of God go where he goes, that *God* goes where he goes. To look to him is to look to the God who is coming. To touch him is to touch and to be touched by the Wholly Other God who is coming.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>"The religious message that Jesus Christ brought can be understood in its aspect of confrontation with earthly, human thinking as the pervasive concern of the Gospels. . . . [He] is always the stranger, the one misunderstood in many ways, the messenger from God witnessing to a completely different kingdom, who lifts up as an urgent appeal the otherness of God and his claim on human beings closed up within themselves. This center of Jesus' religious message is recognizable in all the Jesus pictures and christological designs and is independent of the historically conditioned interests of the evangelists." (Schnackenburg 1995, 314)

<sup>20</sup>"Who is Jesus? Simply *the kingdom of God in person*" (Moltmann 1994, 7).

<sup>21</sup>"The particular dynamic of Jesus' message of the *basileia*, then, is that the rule of God is imminent but that it also emerges from its futurity as present. . . . Jesus in fact claimed unheard of authority for his own person, even if his attitude . . . can be understood in terms of the content of his eschatological message. As he maintained that in his ministry the coming rule of God was present already to the salvation of those who received his message, he knew that he was not only in

How radical this is emerges most disturbingly only with the passion narratives. That Jesus was a constant affront to the given order meant (far before the last week of his life) that he was on a collision course with the powers of his world.<sup>22</sup> And yet even the successful plots to put his life to an end do not separate him from the coming of God. He enters boldly into Jerusalem, he chooses his last week; it is not thrust upon him by high priests and governors as if their actions robbed him of his destiny.<sup>23</sup> His feet and hands proclaim the coming of God all week long. Where he goes this week, God goes. What he touches this week, God touches. What touches him this week, touches God. The passion of Jesus is the passion of the Wholly Other.

As troubling as it is to consider such a transgression of the integrity of God, saying that this is God's passion week is an extension of the testimony that is spoken all over the Gospel narratives that the *basileia* is coming and it is coming for the poor and diseased and outcast and frail, that it is coming for the lost and forgotten, that it is coming for the dying and the dead and the damned. The orientation of the Gospel narratives is downward. Jesus is in those narratives nothing but a drawing near to God that goes precisely where God goes; but this Jesus, "though he is in the form of God, empties himself, taking the form of a slave; humbles himself and becomes obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:6-8, altered slightly). The movement is from God outward. It is from exaltation to debasement.

### Jesus As God's Outgoing Love

It is still tempting to defuse the passion of Jesus by means of atonement theory: God is just and cannot simply forgive the infinite debt of sin that humans owe. Sin requires a punishment of the offensive human race,

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agreement with God but that he was also the mediator of the inbreaking of the rule and forgiving love of God. With this awareness he was not afraid to oppose freely the tradition that was sanctified by God's revelation to Moses, trusting that in the process he was in harmony with the will of God. It is not surprising that in this regard he caused offense to devout Jews and that his person became the subject of violent controversies between adherents and opponents." (Pannenberg 1991, 330, 334)

<sup>22</sup>See Schnackenburg 1995, 314-315.

<sup>23</sup>This is particularly to be seen in Luke 9:51: "When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem." On this passage see Fitzmyer (1970, 827-828), Green (1997, 402-404), Marshall (1978, 405), and Tannehill (1996, 168-169).

a punishment that balances God's books. The theandric Jesus is punished as a human, making his punishment just; and he is punished as God, making his punishment adequately large. The scales are balanced. Everything rises back into place. The great hierarchy of being is intact.

C. S. Song has recently called such customary atonement thinking into question. The ministry of Jesus is not about the restoration of the status of a vindictive, abstractly just God. It is about the outgoing love of the God he calls "Abba." When even early on in his story Jesus turns not away from, but *to* sinners, and "mixes with them," he is already "intent to 'incarnate,' to 'make flesh,' this [Abba] God of his in his life and work" (Song 1990, 77). His journey to the cross is his journey of mixing with the lost. Sin is not heaped on him as punishment, forcing God to turn away so as not to look upon what would only defile the Holy One. Rather, God goes with him to the cross. Even if it were to be accepted, Song says, that on the cross the sins of the whole world are piled on Jesus, there is no reason for the love of his heavenly *Abba* to leave him there alone. The love of *Abba* is a love which on the contrary "must be working with full force," especially here.

[Instead] of turning away from Jesus on the cross, should not *Abba*-God be "running to Jesus, putting arms round him, kissing him"? . . . Jesus, whose body is to be broken and whose blood is to be shed, is not just a sign. He is more than a sign. The metaphor of God's passing over at the sign of the lamb's blood does not apply to Jesus. God did not pass over Jesus on the cross; God was with him. God did not leave Jesus behind; God . . . remained with him even on the cross. (Song 1990, 77, 213)

If God is with us when Jesus touches the man lowered through the roof on a bed, touches him through and through (Luke 5:17-26), then God is surely with us when the body of Jesus is broken and his blood is shed, when death, sin, and the devil touch *him* through and through.

Song does not dispute the notion that Jesus was crucified "in the place of" sinners. He freely agrees that "God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died *huper* us" (Romans 5:8), that "the blood of the covenant" was "shed *huper* many" (Mark 14:24). But this preposition *huper* does not in Song's work connote "for" in the sense "instead of." Rather it affirms "on the side of," "in solidarity with." "[Jesus] certainly was a strong spokesperson in behalf of the marginalized

people. But finally he was found in their company, on their side and in solidarity with them” (Song 1990, 216).<sup>24</sup>

Jesus, in short, is the crucified people! Jesus means crucified people. To say Jesus is to say suffering people. . . . By people I mean those women, men, and children whose company Jesus enjoyed, with whom Jesus liked to eat and drink, to whom, Jesus declared, God’s reign belongs. (Song 1990, 216)

Immanuel touches and is touched by crucified people. There is no longer any debasement so low that the Exalted One must push it away to keep itself clean, to keep itself exalted. It is precisely the Crucified whose name is exalted above every name.

To understand Jesus Christ one must understand him as the place where forsaken death and holy life concur. Thus it is not only on Good Friday that the significance of Jesus takes place. Furthermore the full weight of Good Friday is by no means felt until the following Sunday. The *mysterium tremendum* and not only the *fascinans* of “Holy Week” is above all an event happening on and about Easter morning. When the women make their way to the tomb, when the men travel along the Emmaus Road and then sit to break bread with the stranger they happened to meet, when a week later Thomas is invited to close the hands and side of the one who stands before him behind closed doors, the one who is encountered is yet the Crucified One. He has not gotten better. He has not been resuscitated. His stripes are not healed. His body yet carries the cross. Its curse cuts through him, body and soul. He remains the lamb slain. His life ended when he breathed out his last prayer. Minutes, hours, and days are not added to his span. He remains what he was on “Good Friday,” defined by the final punctuation mark of the bloody end of that bloody day. The death and damnation he touched and that touched him are yet all over his cut and broken body. And it is *this* which is exalted. It is this name that is raised above every name. It is this ignominy that is to

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<sup>24</sup>“By ‘people’ I do not mean people in general. . . . In fact I do not know what people in general means. It is an abstraction; but people are not abstraction. It is not a common noun; people with flesh and blood are a proper noun, a noun with a particular name and a special identity. . . . By people I mean those men, women, and children, in Jesus’ day, today, and in the days to come, economically exploited, politically oppressed, culturally and religiously alienated, sexually, racially, or class-wise discriminated against.” (Song 1990, 216)

the glory of God the Father. It is this resurrection that is the hallowing of the flesh.<sup>25</sup>

It is because the resurrected Jesus has not “gotten better” that he is the savior. Were his resurrection his healing, were he in his appearance before Thomas a human being without wounds, were the sin that he became blotted out, were his name that is now above every name no longer the debased name, then he would be the savior only of those healed, unscathed, sinless, only of those who have gotten better; the debased, the sinner, the wounded would be left to rot. But this is *not* what happens. The history that Jesus *is* reaches its defining end when he breathes his last. It is that forsaken history which is raised, which is transfigured, which is transformed bodily by the Spirit of God. The binary opposition between good and evil—the opposition known so well by Adam—prevails through Good Friday and conquers Jesus there. This is the opposition of health vs. disease, life vs. death, “without sin” vs. sin, exaltation vs. debasement, master vs. servant, first vs. last, God vs. flesh. In the concurrence of Good Friday and Easter Sunday that binary opposition bursts open like the belly of a dragon slain from within.

### The “Dunamis” of the Trinity

This is finally what the christological and trinitary thinking of the early church yields. The Creeds of Nicea and Chalcedon emerge from the adamant conviction that only that is saved which God assumes; that God must become what we are (without ceasing to be what God is), if we are to become what God is (without ceasing to be what we are).<sup>26</sup> Salvation is in

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<sup>25</sup>“His resurrection qualifies the one who has been crucified as the Christ, and his suffering and death as a saving event for us and for many. The resurrection ‘does not evacuate the cross’ (1 Cor. 1:17), but fills it with eschatology and saving significance. From this it follows systematically that all further interpretations of the saving significance of Christ’s death on the cross ‘for us’ must start from his resurrection. Furthermore, when it is said at length that only his death has a saving significance for us, that means that his death on the cross expresses the significance of his resurrection for us and not, vice versa, that his resurrection expresses the significance of his cross. The resurrection from the dead qualifies the person of the crucified Christ and with it the saving significance of his death on the cross for us, ‘the dead.’ Thus the saving significance of his cross manifests his resurrection. It is not his resurrection that shows that his death on the cross took place for us, but on the contrary, his death on the cross ‘for us’ that makes relevant his resurrection ‘before us.’” (Moltmann 1974, 182-183)

<sup>26</sup>See among many places Kelly (1978), chapters 9 and 12. Athanasius (1980) is illustrative; as is Gregory of Nyssa (n.d.a., 179 [5.4]). It is, however,

this theological milieu *theosis*. Salvation is sanctification. Salvation is the binding of God's creatures to the God who comes unconditionally to them and binds all that God is to all that they are.<sup>27</sup> The salvation of the crucified Jesus—the binding of God to the crucified Jesus in his resurrection from the dead—is the salvation of all those who are in fellowship with him, for he, “the word become flesh,” is already in fellowship with them.<sup>28</sup> Flesh is here made holy because God touches it and it touches God.

This is a difficult thought to think not only for us. It was difficult for the early church to think as well. Thinking it moved the church over the early centuries of its history to the affirmation of the doctrine of the Trinity. That is, it is because of what it was compelled to say of God's work in Christ, of God's assumption of the flesh, that the church came by the end of the fourth century to say that God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It was not only due to changing social and political conditions and the earlier absence of the peculiar self-interest of Constantine that it took the church so many centuries to come out as decisively trinitary.<sup>29</sup> It was in

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Gregory of Nazianzus who coins the phrase “what has not been assumed, has not been healed” (Meredith 1995, 44).

<sup>27</sup>It is indeed true that the extent to which this entails the entry of God into the sin of the human race is not adequately clarified in the early church. However, when God is understood as in Orthodoxy, of course, to be essentially immortal, the affirmation of God's involvement in human mortality is already near the affirmation of God's involvement in human sin.

<sup>28</sup>“In Jesus Christ there is no isolation of [human being] from God or of God from [human being]. Rather, in [God] we encounter the history, the dialogue, in which God and [human being] meet together, the reality of the covenant *mutually* contracted, preserved, and fulfilled by them. Jesus Christ is in His one Person, as true God, [*human being's*] loyal partner, and as true [*human being*], *God's*. He is the Lord humbled for communion with [human being] and likewise the Servant exalted to communion with God. He is the Word spoken from the loftiest, most luminous transcendence and likewise the Word heard in the deepest, darkest immanence.” (Barth 1960b, 46-47)

<sup>29</sup>Of course, there had been from the beginning passages of scripture, liturgies, baptismal creeds, rules of faith, and the affirmations of particular theologians that had had at least a trinitary flavor. However, phrases were slow in coming that said with some clarity that God is none other than Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It was not until 325, at the Council of Nicea, that the church, despite enormous controversy, declared that what makes the Son God is identical with what makes the Father God: that the Son is *homoousion* to *patri*. And it was not until 381, at the Council of Constantinople, that the church, again despite controversy, declared that the Holy Spirit is fully God, that the Spirit is “to be worshiped and glorified together with the Father and the Son.” That the word *homoousios* is not used of the Spirit in the Constantinopolitan Creed indicates how difficult it was half a century after Nicea to affirm the full deity of that person.

particular due to the difficulty of saying and thinking that the history of Jesus—the history that the gospel tells—is the event of the God who in coming close remains other. The Son is sent by the Father. The Son is absolutely no less God than the Father who sends him; i.e., the Son is “*homoousion to patri*”: this is the eccentric thought and phrase at the destabilized center of the controversy surrounding the Council of Nicea and of all trinitary discourse.

Thus, in the creed of this council God’s unity is not monolithic. God is one as a complexity, as an outgoing, an othering, a movement the extremes of which are woven together without ceasing to be extremes, i.e., without the neutrality of integrity and identity. The doctrine that takes shape in the fourth century is not an account of two or three gods who share space, one of whom is morphed into human anatomy and physiology, one of whom flits about human beings fairy-like whispering eternal secrets (cf. Schnackenburg 1995, 292). Nor is it an account of a monad who awakens a dormant memory of the divine in finite beings by the attractive power of its own utterly perfect goodness, truth, and beauty. It is an account of the entry of the Holy into what is not and cannot be holy—an entry which unmakes that old order that would keep the Holy out—and opens a path of holiness for those hitherto even hopelessly far gone. And yet in all this, the Holy One remains holy, other. There is no diminution of the Wholly Other in the sending of the Son.

Nor is there any distraction from this Christological tension when pneumatology moves into the heart of trinitary discourse after the Council of Nicea. The decentering movement of the Other is a hallowing of the world only if at once there are, first, an outgoing fellowship of God with the lost and, second, an outgoing fellowship of the lost with God. The doctrine of the Son speaks to the first side and the doctrine of the Spirit speaks to the second side of this duplexity. Thus the Cappadocians’ constant theme is that the Son is the one *through* whom the Father works reconciliation with the world; and the Spirit is the one *in* whom the Father’s work through the Son occurs. Thus it is the Spirit who “glorifies the Father and the Son”; by whom “whatever is good, coming from God. . . through the Son, is completed”; who unites us to God; who sanctifies; who “perfects grace”; i.e., without whom there is no faith in the Son (Gregory of Nyssa n.d.a., 84, 130, 132 [1.36; 2.14, 15]; n.d.c., 319-324; n.d.d.,



329; n.d.e., 334, 338).<sup>30</sup> In other words, the Holy Spirit is to be understood to be God because without the Spirit the work of God in Christ stops short. The Spirit carries those for whom Christ died into the hallowing work of Christ. *God is with us* in Christ. By the Spirit *we* are *with God* in Christ. For the Cappadocians it is impossible to approach or acknowledge the Father and the Son except by the Spirit. Yet, when the Father and Son are acknowledged by the work of the Spirit, one participates in the trinitary movement—in the Spirit, through the Son, to the Father.<sup>31</sup>

That means that theosis, deification, sanctification, salvation, is a participation in what is essentially other; it is a movement from one's own center as a creature to the moving eccentricity of the Trinity: in the Spirit, through the Son, to the Father. The Cappadocians' understanding of the interpenetration, the perichoresis, of the trinitary persons is not as speculative as it is devotional (Meredith 1995, 32, 107-108; cf. Gregory of Nyssa n.d.a., 228 [10.4]). The Father is in the Son and the Spirit, the Son is in the Father and the Spirit, the Spirit is in the Father and the Son; no trinitary person is separable from the other two. This is simply the way it happens. One knows the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit. One knows Father, Son, and Spirit perichoretically. And so, to say, as Gregory of Nazianzus says, that "unity, having from all eternity arrived by motion at duality, found its rest in trinity" (1954, 161 [3.2]) is to speak out of a theotic relation to that Trinity. Furthermore, trinitary/theotic "rest" is one which stirs with life. Thus, for Gregory of Nyssa, knowing this God is a "never-ending search for God and aspiration to likeness with him. . . . Such a stretching-out must from the nature of the case be in principle

<sup>30</sup>"It is the Spirit in whom we worship, and in whom we pray. . . . Look at these facts: Christ is born; the Spirit is the forerunner. He is baptized; the Spirit bears witness. He is tempted; the Spirit leads him up. He works miracles; the Spirit accompanies them. He ascends; the Spirit takes his place. [The Spirit is] sanctifying, not sanctified; . . . the creator-spirit, who by baptism and by resurrection creates anew; . . . that guides, talks, sends forth, separates . . . ; that reveals, illumines, quickens, or rather that is the very light and life; that makes temples, that deifies . . . ; that does all things that God does. . . ." (Gregory of Nazianzus 1954, 201, 211-212 [5.12, 5.29])

<sup>31</sup>"Basil . . . writes, '[S]ince we show that we are not capable of glorifying God on our own, only *in* the Spirit is this made possible.' Whereas the Father is made visible in the Son, the Son can be recognized only *in* the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is the enabler of worship; only by the Spirit can we say 'Jesus is Lord!' (1 Cor. 12:3)." (LaCugna 1991, 120; see Kelly 1978, 258-263)

insatiable" (Meredith 1995, 77).<sup>32</sup> The theosis that the Spirit works, then, is a movement that transgresses the integrity of the creature precisely as the creature participates in the Trinity, i.e., in the Spirit, through the Son, to the Father, an unfathomable abyss (Gregory of Nazianzus 1954, 189-191 [4.17-20]; Gregory of Nyssa n.d.a., 69, 97, 99, 103, 146, 198 [1.26, 42; 2.3; 3.5; 7.4]; n.d.e., 332).

It is perhaps the Christological notion of the *enhypostaton* that best clarifies the disintegrative movement of the Trinity. According to this idea, the hypostatic union of the human and divine natures of Christ happens in such a way that all that Jesus Christ is as the child of Mary is yielded and thus becomes transparent to all that he is as Immanuel. Without the loss of his human nature or his human will, without the loss of his human heart or soul or mind or strength, without the loss of his human ignorance or weakness or vulnerability, i.e., without the loss of his "flesh," Jesus becomes that human life which is the concrete movement of God into the world. His human being is thus decentered, hallowed, sanctified, set utterly aside to God. Simultaneously, however, his *deity* is decentered, abased, emptied, incarnated. Here human being is opened to God and God is opened to human being. The word *enhypostaton* says that all that is human in Jesus takes place "in" the outgoing second person (*hypostasis*) of the Trinity. It is crucially important to understand that this hypostasis is not the substitute of some extra-hypostatic nature, some abstract divine reality out of which Father, Son, and Spirit are expressed. The divine nature occurs nowhere else than as the trinitary hypostases, the trinitary persons. To say that the hypostasis of the Son assumes "the flesh" is really to say that *God* enters into that fallibility. The closure, the quarantine, that is suggested by the idea of the Supreme Being who cannot be affected is transgressed by the doctrine of the *enhypostaton*; for in order for human being to enter radically into the outgoing person of the Son, God must be open.<sup>33</sup> This is the implication of the Creeds of Nicea

<sup>32</sup>Cf. Gregory's account of the wound of love (Meredith 1995, 81).

<sup>33</sup>"The hypostasis is not a product of nature: it is that in which nature exists, the very principle of its existence. Such a conception of hypostasis can be applied to Christology, since it implies the existence of a fully human existence, without any limitation, 'enhypostatized' in the Word, who is a divine hypostasis. This conception assumes that God, as personal being, is not totally bound to [God's] own nature; the hypostatic existence is flexible, 'open.' . . ." (Meyendorff 1987, 77)

and Chalcedon, the implication of the incarnation. God and the flesh touch.<sup>34</sup> Thus the human hypostasis of Jesus is hallowed and the hypostasis of every human being whom the Spirit unites with him is hallowed. The incarnation as a sanctifying participation is an event which opens God to human being and human being to God.

The notion of participation implies not only openness in the divine being but also a dynamic, open and teleological concept of [human being]. Since Gregory of Nyssa, the destiny of [human being] is viewed, in Greek patristic thought, as an ascent in the knowledge of God through communion into divine life. [The human being], therefore, is not conceived as an autonomous and closed entity: [the human's] very life is in God . . . while sin consists precisely in a self-affirmation of [human being] in an illusory independence. (Meyendorff 1987, 211)<sup>35</sup>

<sup>34</sup>This is more than implicit in the official documents that accompany the Definition of Chalcedon in 451. Cyril of Alexandria, who was the theological guide of that council, wrote this of Jesus Christ: "We do not say that the Logos became flesh by having his nature changed, nor for that matter that he was transformed into a complete human being composed out of soul and body. On the contrary, we say that in an unspeakable and incomprehensible way, the Logos united to himself, in his hypothesis, flesh enlivened by a rational soul, and in this way became a human being and has been designated 'Son of Man.' . . . Since . . . the body that had become his own underwent suffering, he is . . . said to have suffered these things for our sakes, for the impassible One was within the suffering body. Moreover, we reason in exactly the same way in the case of his dying. God's Logos is by nature immortal and incorruptible and Life and Life-giver, but since, as Paul says, 'by the grace of God' his very own body 'tasted death on behalf of every person' [Heb. 2:9], he himself is said to have suffered this death which came about on our account." (Cyril 1980, 132-134)

<sup>35</sup>"What is involved in this particular issue . . . is the whole Greek patristic notion of 'participation in divine life,' of deification, as the real content of soteriology, which the Christologies of Athanasius and Cyril meant to preserve. The hypostatic . . . union of divinity and humanity in Christ . . . presupposes an interpenetration of divine and human life. This interpenetration, however, . . . excludes confusion or total absorption of the human by the divine. . . . [The human being] is truly [human] when [she] participates in divine life and realizes in [herself] the image and likeness of God, and this participation in no way diminishes [her] authentically human existence, human energy and will. Now this notion of participation presupposes that God is in not only an immutable and imparticipable essence but also a living and acting person. By assuming humanity hypostatically, the Logos 'becomes' what [the Logos] was not before and even 'suffers in the flesh.' This 'openness' of a hypostatic or personal God to the creature implies that the creature, and especially [the human being], is a *reality*, even in respect to God, since, in a sense, it 'modifies' God's personal existence." (Meyendorff 1987, 210)

The doctrine of the Trinity is thus a very different doctrine from the monotheistic hierarchical ontology that moves to the front and center of the speculation and imagination of the “Christian West.”<sup>36</sup> However, the doctrine of the Trinity was emerging precisely as theologians were “plundering the Egyptians” and unfolding the church’s doctrines and arranging their arguments on the “Egyptians’” hierarchies. Further, the doctrine of the Trinity emerges precisely as the transgression both of the integrity of the integral God those hierarchies are constructed to honor and of the human beings who hope to climb them.<sup>37</sup> It is as if the doctrine of the Trinity were from the beginning a critique of supremacy, even if a critique that remains parasitic upon the very object of its critique.

When the doctrine moves into the heart of modern theological and philosophical discourse with Hegel, it again flies in the face of hierarchical metaphysical thinking. If Hegel’s profoundly influential proposal does not break free from the grip of modern foundational thinking and enlightenment “ultimate reality,” it does at least raise serious questions about it. In Hegel God as Trinity is explicitly an othering movement; God goes out as God’s own other and spends all of cosmic history overcoming this opposition.<sup>38</sup> In the end, for Hegel,  $A = A$  once more, though infinitely more richly than in timelessly abstract mathematics. In other words, for Hegel otherness is finally surrendered to sameness: there is a return of the otherness expended in the creation/incarnation, an absolute return that

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<sup>36</sup>Eusebius, who praises Emperor Constantine’s likeness to the divine monarch in his famous “Oration on the Thirtieth Anniversary of Constantine’s Reign,” resisted signing off on the Creed of Nicea. He was much more comfortable with a monotheistic God than the sociality of a moving Trinity. For example: “Having been entrusted with an empire, the image of the heavenly kingdom, he looks to that ideal form and directs his earthly rule to the divine model and thus provides an example of divine monarchic sovereignty. The King of the universe grants this to human nature alone of all other beings on earth. For the law of imperial power has been defined by the establishment of one sole authority to which all beings are subject. Monarchy by far surpasses all other constitutions and forms of administration; for its opposite, the rule of the many, with equality of privilege for all, is, rather, anarchy and chaos. Therefore, there is one God, not two or three or even more; for, in a word, polytheism is atheism.” (Eusebius 1982, 51; see also 48, and *passim*; and Kelly 1978, 231, 235-236.)

<sup>37</sup>The word “hierarchy” is coined by Pseudo-Dionysius (Rorem 1987, 1). But even here there is ambiguity. Whatever is said is unsaid apophatically by Dionysius. Yet there is no question that he thinks of the order of things as ascending and that he thinks in terms of higher and higher (see Pseudo-Dionysius 1987, 66-67).

<sup>38</sup>See, e.g., Hegel 1977, 17-19.

balances the books and turns a profit, even if the costs are excruciatingly high. Yet, on the other hand, inasmuch as this return suggests the thought of an other than God to which God goes, the stage is set by Hegel for a consideration of the doctrine that is more unsettling to the modern exacerbation of Western constructionism.

It is Karl Barth who makes the move that Hegel could not make. Although early inclined to find the kingdom of God hidden in the private human soul, Barth learned from the social injustice of the modern industrial age, from the insane nationalistic violence of World War I, and from theologians spanning from Luther and Calvin to Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky to St. Paul that there is nothing implicitly divine in this world.<sup>39</sup> However, the idea of God's radical difference is even less for Barth than it is for the early church an abstraction about the aseity of God. God, according to Barth, is *known* to be radically other precisely because God is *revealed* that way (Barth 1975, 315-316).

For Barth, God's revelation (*die Offenbarung*)<sup>40</sup> is insuperably God's own act. There is no revealer (*der Offenbarer*)<sup>41</sup> other than God. There is no recognition of revelation except by the God who works that recognition (*das Offenbarsein*).<sup>42</sup> Therefore, revelation is never reducible to a possession of those to whom it comes (Barth 1957a, 225), it is never able to be cut loose from the God who *freely* gives it. As such it is purely occurrent. It is present, but present in such a way that it never becomes "a past fact of history," a manipulable and dissectible thing (Barth 1957a, 262). Thus even as God comes closest, comes most concretely, comes "here and now," that coming is no less open to God's freedom. Yet this is good news, for it is the otherness of God's revelation that is liberating. Of course, were revelation simply to stand opposite us, quarantined as a closed integrity, it would be utterly irrelevant and inconsequential. Further, were it to come to reside in us as something proper to us, as our

<sup>39</sup>"If I have a system," he wrote in the preface to the famous second edition of his *Epistle to the Romans*, "it is limited to a recognition of what Kierkegaard called the 'infinite qualitative distinction' between time and eternity" (Barth 1933, 10). For a discussion of the relation of the *Römerbrief* to Barth's later work see McCormick 1995, 14-23 and *passim*.

<sup>40</sup>From the adjective *offen*, meaning "open." *Die Offenbarung* means "openness" in a very strong sense.

<sup>41</sup>That is, "the one who opens."

<sup>42</sup>This word is most often translated as "revealedness" or "being revealed." Its point is that revelation is completed, fulfilled.

property, we would perhaps be well funded, but we would be prisoners of our own propriety, our own sameness, our own identity. However, revelation is an openness in which by its own sufficiency we participate. The openness of revelation enters into us, by grace through faith, and *we* are opened (Barth 1957b, 94-95). And since knowing God is nothing other than participation in God's revelation, one freely knows God to *be* free, occurrent, active, alive.<sup>43</sup> In other words the event of revelation is for Barth an event in which God truly enters into what God is not and does so in such a way that God is there as an other. God opens, God is openness, God is open here and now.

All of this is the way Barth says "Jesus Christ." "We should still not have learned to say 'God' correctly," he writes, "if we thought it enough simply to say 'God'" (Barth 1957b, 5). In other words, the three letter word "God" is not for Barth a generic term for any object of exceptionally intense reverence. Rather, "God" here is that which happens as one is drawn in a very particular way into the very particular history of Jesus. It is in this sense that, because all that *is known* of God and, therefore, all that *can be known* of God is what is known of God in the history of Jesus, that what is known there is what one must say God *is*. Further, the God in this place is "One which in virtue of its innermost being, willing and nature does not stand outside all relationships, but stands in a definite relationship *ad extra* to another" (6). That is, everything that this God *is* goes out as Jesus Christ. There is no hidden divine essence that is untouched by this outgoing. God specifically as God is entry into what is essentially other than God. The movement of God into the world cuts all the way through God "as a spontaneous *opus internum ad extra* of the trinitarian God" (25).

God is not *in abstracto* Father, Son and Holy Ghost, the triune God. [God] is so with a definite purpose and reference; in virtue of the love and freedom in which in the bosom of [God's] triune being [God] has foreordained [God's own self] from and to all eternity. (79)

What cuts all the way through God according to Barth is "the specific relationship which [God] has established with [human being] in Jesus Christ" (78), viz., the election of human being "to participation in

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<sup>43</sup>And so, "with regard to the being of God, the word 'event' or 'act' is *final*, and cannot be surpassed or compromised" (Barth 1957a, 263; cf. 305-307).

[God's] own glory" (94). In Jesus Christ God suffers with suffering human being, God is rejected with rejected human being; in entering into human life as it is plunging into total destruction, God has "tasted damnation, death and hell."<sup>44</sup> In this extreme manner God chooses human being—and chooses it for "participation in the life of God" (413).<sup>45</sup> Indeed this is what the history of Jesus of Nazareth tells. Human being is defined here as that distinctively creaturely existence that is utterly "for God" (Barth 1960a, 70). "To be [human] is to be with God" (139). In other words, for Barth human being is that which with Jesus Christ moves to God, which in gratitude is a being toward God.

It is not enclosed within the circle of its intrinsic possibilities, but opened towards that other and new reality of God its Creator which has broken through to it in [God's] Word, and in that Word as this promise has come to dwell within it. . . . To be summoned is to be called out of oneself and beyond oneself. Because it is God who speaks here, what is said has the right and power to enable the creature to transcend itself. . . . As God comes to it in [God's] Word, it is a being open towards God and self-opening, transcending itself in a Godward direction. (165-166, 168)

The othering movement of God—the giving that holds the Father and Son apart and together; the love that denies that they are either two phases of the same self-identical Supreme Being or two self-identical

<sup>44</sup>The context in which that phrase appears does not file down the edge of that phrase: "In giving [God's own self] to this act [God] ordained the surrender of something, i.e., of [God's] own impassibility in face of the whole world which because it is not willed by [God] can only be the world of evil. In [God's own self] God cannot be affected either by the possibility or by the reality of that will which opposes [God]. . . . But when God of [God's] own will raised up [human being] to be a covenant-member with [God], when from all eternity [God] elected to be one with [human being] in Jesus Christ, [God] did it with a being which was not merely affected by evil but actually mastered by it. . . . God does not merely give [God's own self] up to the risk and menace, but [God] exposes [God's own self] to the actual onslaught and grasp of evil. . . . [God as God] tasted damnation, death and hell which ought to have been the portion of fallen [human being]. . . . [God] elected our rejection. [God] made it [God's] own." (163-164; cf. Barth 1958, 225, 357)

<sup>45</sup>Barth calls this partaking of God "gratitude: "Gratitude is the response to a kindness which cannot itself be repeated or returned, which therefore can only be recognised and confirmed as such by an answer that corresponds to it and reflects it. Gratitude is the establishment of this correspondence" (413).

deities; the hallowing of the flesh that not only drives Jesus into the wilderness and onto the hill outside the city of the great King, but also raises him from the dead and transfigures his crucified body—this is the Holy Spirit. It is this same Holy Spirit that gathers a community together in the hallowed flesh that is Jesus Christ raised, a community that has Jesus Christ as its being.<sup>46</sup>

[The Holy Spirit] does not put the Christian at a point or in a position. [The Holy Spirit] sets [her] on the way, on the march. And it is a forced march, in a movement which never ceases and in which there can be no halting. [The Holy Spirit] does not put anything in [her] hands. . . . [The Holy Spirit] makes [her] a seeker. . . . [Christians are] like a sacrifice which, whether it be small or great, costly or less costly, can only be given unreservedly, can only be presented, can only pass from their own determination to that of the One who demands and receives it, can only cease to belong to those who offer it. The sanctification of [human being], and the *vita christiana* as its result, is that the claim for this claimless self-sacrifice finds a place and authority and power in a human existence. We share in the exaltation of the royal [human being] Jesus as we may and must yield to this claim. (Barth 1958, 376-377)

### **Life in the Spirit, Through the Son, to the Father**

There is little in the doctrine of the Trinity that resonates with hierarchical Western metaphysics, with onto-theology, with the ontology of the Supreme Being. There is a radical relationality to the doctrine that will

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<sup>46</sup>“What the Holy Spirit positively wills and effects—that to which [the Spirit] awakens and calls—is always a human existence that deserves to be called a life to the extent that it is lived in the light of the royal [human being] Jesus, in an attentiveness and movement to [this human being], because the Christian who receives and has the Holy Spirit recognises and acknowledges that this [human being] died for [her] and has risen again for [her], that [this human being] lives for [her], that [this human being] is the Owner and Bearer, the Representative and [Sovereign] of this life, and that in [this human being’s] exaltation [she] too is exalted and set in a living fellowship with God, that in [this human being] [she] is a new creature (2 Cor. 5:17). The Spirit wills and effects that in accordance with [her] being in this One [she] should cleave to [this human being], that [she] should be [this human being’s] disciple, scholar, fellow, companion, follower and servant. [The Spirit] leads [her] to this One, and keeps [her] there, and calls and causes those who are led by the Spirit to this One, and are kept there, and go forward with [this One].” (Barth 1958, 375)



not let simple identities be, but which invites them in no uncertain terms to deny themselves. Of course, the doctrine of the Trinity can fall into a kind of variation of the metaphysics and logic of identity. Champions of the *filioque* have often enough pulled that off. Further, the notion of an immanent Trinity quarantined from an economic Trinity that is seen only imperfectly to represent it cleverly finds its own place for an identity undefiled by the world.<sup>47</sup> Yet the doctrine of the Trinity itself has arisen and still arises out of wonder and gratitude in the face of the sanctification of the unholy, the hopeless, a sanctification in which the Holy and the unholy touch. The God who is Wholly Other opens to God's creatures and they miraculously open to God.

This double transgression of integrity is not the end of the story, however. Were this simply a reciprocal, balanced, meeting of polar opposites, then a new center of identity might be able to be teased out of it, a kind of Hegelian *Aufhebung*. However, there is no reciprocity here, no law of investment and return. The direction is outward. It is a concurrence of giving, of oblation. Furthermore, the sanctification of God's creatures that occurs as the Spirit gathers them into the glorified history of Jesus is no return to the warm amniotic fluid of Eden, no ascent to the upper echelons of sanctity, no passage out of this present evil age. To be hallowed, to be separated to God, is to be separated to the God who in love has already gone and is already on the way precisely to what one has been liberated out of. Thus, to be separated to God, to be holy, is to be separated with God to those whom God loves, the unholy.

It is particularly here that the work of John Wesley is helpful. Wesley was, of course, no speculative theologian. His was a "practical divinity." His written work specifically on the doctrine of the Trinity makes no claim to have solved any trinitary puzzles. He leaves speculation to others and asks for tolerance in regard to the fine points of trinitary debate (Wesley 1978, 204). Yet at the same time he is an exceptionally trinitary thinker. His thought and life are constantly moving to the Father. Holiness is about that move. He contextualizes all that he has to say about holiness

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<sup>47</sup>This is not to advocate a kind of skeptical and disappointed acceptance of a merely economic Trinity. To deny the immanent Trinity is not humility, but both a failure of nerve and a failure of doxology. It is because of what one has been gathered into in the economic Trinity that one's voice must rise to the immanent Trinity. However, such a theology of worship is not a new quarantine of God. Rather the economic Trinity is the hand of the immanent Trinity as it touches this untouchable world. Cf. Rahner 1970.

in the incarnate Son, our prophet, priest, and king, the “out-beaming” from the Father (Wesley 1991b, 314; 1966, 82).<sup>48</sup> And we come to the Son only by the Spirit who draws us (Wesley 1991c, 186-187, 191;

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<sup>48</sup>Wesley is convinced that the whole point of life is Christ. The point is not to achieve conformity to some universal norm of behavior or well-being. It is not to escape the fires of hell and flee to the easy comfort of heaven. It is not to return to the warm womb of Eden. It is Christ. Of course, Wesley is confident that in Christ one encounters the very law of God; the pattern of a happy spiritual life; the way from hell to heaven; the restoration of human being in the image of God. And yet, the primacy of Christ in Wesley is such that these matters are defined in him and not him in them. This can be seen well in his sermon of 1782, *God’s Love to Fallen Man*. The sermon seems on the surface to be concerned with a speculative question: “since the omniscient creator, foreknowing everything, must have known from all eternity that the first humans would fall into sin, why create them?” Wesley’s answer is a strong and somewhat surprising one: that the coming of Christ to lost sinners brings more than could ever have been achieved by the most uncorrupted in the most ideal of circumstances. In the garden across all time—free from sin, living in unbroken fellowship with God and each other, torn by no strife, no pain, no disease, no guilt, no regret—Adam and Eve would never have risen to what descends in the crucified one to those who are otherwise dead to God. It is because of the fall that Christ has come. “If Adam had not fallen Christ had not died” (Wesley 1991a, 477). And what Christ brings is well beyond even the highest imaginable human achievements. There comes in the coming of Christ immeasurably more holiness and happiness (477), greater faith in and love for the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (478), “an unspeakable increase” in our love for our neighbors (479). “In Christ! Let me entreat every serious person once more to fix [her] attention here. All that has been said, all that can be said on these subjects centres in this point. The fall of Adam produced the death of Christ! Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O Earth!” (482-483). Wesley’s argument in this sermon seems so obviously burdened by fallacies that one might be inclined to give it to a first year logic student to dissect and critique. But then again Wesley was himself a logic teacher and perhaps knew what he was saying even when on his death bed he called out “where is my sermon on The Love of God? Take it and spread it abroad; give it to everyone” (Outler 1991, 475). At any rate, logically flawed or not, what Wesley says in this sermon bears witness to the openness of God’s creative act, the openness of human being, the openness of the Father’s love, the openness of the incarnation, the openness of the work of the Spirit. God created not a static perfection, but that which was not what it was to be, that whose definition stretched out into the future. This future is given by the love of God the Father, out of whom the gift of the Son comes; by the love of God the Son, the act of divine self-giving, self-oblation, self-sacrifice; by the love of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit who reveals and applies the giving Father and the given Son, the Spirit who raises the dead, opens their eyes, renews their souls, brings them out of darkness and into God’s own light (478). God here is understood precisely to be *for us* from the foundations of the world. Human being is understood precisely to be *for God* from the foundations of the world. Neither is a closed integrity. The line that might otherwise keep them quarantined from one another is transgressed by the love that happens precisely as Jesus Christ—the hallowing of the flesh.

1991e, 538). Thus, though one does not find anything like a well-developed doctrine of the Trinity in Wesley's works, one does find a consistently trinitary rhythm. The holy life, life renewed in the image of God, is life in the Spirit, through the Son, to the Father.

This hallowed life in Wesley is radically decentered with the freedom of joy and prayer and thanksgiving to the One it is not, but to whom and for whom it was created. A sanctified human life is in Wesley an open place to be filled by the holy God, the God who is love (Wesley 1966, 112-113).<sup>49</sup> It is Wesley's concern with the outgoing trinitary love of God that intensifies in his work the particular decentering of the love of neighbor. Jesus is a love that no one of us can ever hope to equal. Yet moment by moment entry into our prophet, priest, and king brings us into a neighbor-love that leaves nothing intact (Wesley 1966, 83, 117-118).

Wesley would agree with Luther that "a Christian lives not in [herself], but in Christ and in [her] neighbor. . . . [She] lives in Christ through faith, in [her] neighbor through love" (Luther 1957, 34). However, Wesley would take a shorter breath between the two directions of this ecstasy. He is quicker than Luther to affirm that living outside oneself in Christ *is always* immediately a living outside oneself in one's neighbor (cf. Luther 1961, 137). There is for Wesley no faith in God that is not also love for those whom God loves. In that sense it is not unfair to say that for Wesley salvation is by grace alone through faith and love alone (Wesley 1991g, 214).

It is thus a complex single movement for Wesley for a Christian to move to Christ and to his neighbor.

"Beloved, what manner of love is this," wherewith God hath loved us! So as to give his *only Son!* In glory equal with the Father; in majesty coeternal! What manner of love is this wherewith the only-begotten Son of God hath loved us! So as to "empty himself," as far as possible, of his eternal Godhead! As to divest himself of that glory which he had with the Father before the world began! As to 'take upon him the form of a

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<sup>49</sup>"For what is the most perfect creature in heaven or earth in Thy presence, but a void capable of being filled with Thee and by Thee; as the air which is void and dark, is capable of being filled with the light of the sun, who withdraws it every day to restore it the next, there being nothing in the air that either appropriates this light or resists it? O give me the same facility of receiving and restoring Thy grace and good works! I say, Thine; for I acknowledge the root from which they spring is in Thee, and not in me." (113)

servant, being found in fashion as a man'! And then to humble himself still farther, 'being obedient unto death, yea, the death of the cross'! If God *so* loved us, how ought we to love one another! (Wesley 1991a, 479)

The love of God which empties itself and moves into what God is not, into God's other, is precisely the love to which *we* are called. For Wesley life is to be separated, hallowed, to the God that is already on the move in Christ to the marginalized, the poor, the dying, the sinner. Thus, to be separated to God is to be separated with God to one's neighbor. It is not to get, to rise to greatness, to succeed. It is to be emptied in love for the other, "loving our neighbor . . . as ourselves, as our own souls" (Wesley 1966, 81, cf. 17, 19).<sup>50</sup> That is, the love of God which transgresses one's integrity "in a Godward direction" transgresses it again as one's identity is surrendered in and to one's neighbor.<sup>51</sup> It is in this above all that we are most like God in the holy life. Not because we have come to something in ourselves that might be taken as a kind of representation of God. But instead because by the very energy of God we move beyond ourselves as God has in Christ and in the Spirit. No metaphysical hierarchy can get its hands around this free love.

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<sup>50</sup>In other words, for Wesley God works to save the lost. The efficacy of God's work is the stirring of the human being, the energizing of the human being, by the energy of God (Wesley 1991g, 488). "God worketh in you; therefore you *must* work: you must be 'workers together with [God]'" (491). And the work that one does by this movement of the Spirit into one's life is the work of love.

<sup>51</sup>Thus when Wesley imagines God's restoration of creation at the eschaton, he imagines perfect fellowship with the Trinity and with all of God's creatures: "Hence will arise an unmix'd state of holiness and happiness far superior to that which Adam enjoyed in paradise. . . . As there will be no more death, and no more pain or sickness preparatory thereto; as there will be no more grieving for or parting with friends; so there will be no more sorrow or crying. Nay, but there will be a greater deliverance than all this; for there will be no more sin. And to crown all, there will be a deep, an intimate, an uninterrupted union with God; a constant communion with the Father, and his Son Jesus Christ, through the Spirit; a continual enjoyment of the Three-One God, and of all the creatures in [God]." (Wesley 1991d, 500)

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# HOLY LOVE VS. ETERNAL HELL: THE WESLEYAN OPTIONS<sup>1</sup>

by

Al Truesdale

If published statements made by members of the Wesleyan Theological Society in recent years are correct, we can conclude that a characteristic of Wesleyan theology is the belief that God is active *Holy Love*. In fact, not only does God *act* in Holy Love; God *is* in His very triune life Holy Love.<sup>2</sup> When one says, or better yet confesses, “Holy Love,” one confesses “God.” Apart from God’s *being* in this special way, God *is not*. And apart from God being in this way, the world *is not*. Put otherwise, not only is the being of God the being of Holy Love, but the existence of all that is *other than* God is finally an instance of creative, sustaining, and directing triune Love. Additionally, when one says “divine love” one has said “divine grace.” As Theodore Runyon puts it, for Wesley “the nature of grace is love.”<sup>3</sup>

## God’s Essential Nature

Selections from Wesleyan writings in recent years will illustrate my point. For H. Ray Dunning, “the essential nature of God is holy

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<sup>1</sup>This article was the Presidential Address of Dr. Al Truesdale delivered to the Wesleyan Theological Society at its annual meeting convened on the campus of Azusa Pacific University in March, 2000.

<sup>2</sup>This is not the case for J. Kenneth Grider, *A Wesleyan-Holiness Theology* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1994), 109-117. For Grider “God’s basic nature is characterized by holiness.” Love is not God’s essence or nature. Love is “decisional.” It is something that God chooses to do.

<sup>3</sup>Theodore Runyon, *The New Creation: John Wesley’s Theology To ?????* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 27.

love.”<sup>4</sup> Randy Maddox takes us through a careful conceptual delineation of Wesley’s thinking regarding the moral attributes of God. These are the attributes that “define God’s character.” God’s moral attributes converge in two central virtues: justice, and goodness—which means love. Maddox says that, although Wesley used the word “justice” most often, it means the same as “holiness.” To understand what Wesley meant by justice, *fairness* and *preservation* should receive greater emphasis than *judgment* and *condemnation*. Maddox says that, for Wesley, love is God’s “reigning attribute.” Wesley “grounded God’s justice [holiness] in God’s love, while defining God’s love as ‘holy love’ which respects the worth and accountability of the one loved.” The two must never be “separated or counterpoised.”<sup>5</sup>

Likewise, Henry Knight has no doubt about the defining center of God according to John Wesley. For Wesley, God is love, “intimating that this is his reigning attribute, the attribute that sheds an amiable glory on all his perfections.” For Wesley, Knight tells us, love is that “one element of who God is that governs all the rest.” Speaking for himself, Knight adds, “On this I strongly agree.”<sup>6</sup> Similarly, according to Steve McCormick’s reading of John Wesley, God is Love. Love is the supreme ontological predicate, the immediate ground of being for all that exists. Wherever there is existence, God is present in love, which is to say *graciously present*. McCormick interprets Wesley as believing that the Holy Spirit is the active, personal energy of divine love, and that God always acts in the interest of creative and redeeming love. In fact, Christian faith is filled with the energy of God’s love.<sup>7</sup>

If these conclusions are accurate with reference to Wesley himself, and if they are to be taken as normative for Wesleyan theology, then are we not called to test all of the other things we Wesleyans say about God and the world against this central affirmation? For instance, statements

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<sup>4</sup>H. Ray Dunning, *Grace, Faith and Holiness: A Wesleyan Systematic Theology* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1988), 192.

<sup>5</sup>Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley’s Practical Theology* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1994), 53.

<sup>6</sup>Henry H. Knight III, *A Future for Truth: Evangelical Theology in a Post-modern World* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), 143. Knight relies on Wesley’s comments on 1 John 4:8 in *The Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament*.

<sup>7</sup>Steve McCormick, “Theosis in Chrysostom and Wesley: An Eastern Paradigm on Faith and Love,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal*. 26:1, Spring 1991, 38-103.

regarding the relationship between Christ and culture, Christ and the world's religions, ecology, and God and the sciences will have to be assessed in light of God as Holy Love. Nothing escapes scrutiny. In Kierkegaard's terms, we must "think the thought whole."

### **The Doctrine of Eternal Damnation**

I want to attempt to "think the thought whole" with reference to a doctrine that most if not all of the denominations represented in the Wesleyan Theological Society formally embrace. I refer to the doctrine or notion of "eternal damnation" or "hell." I will first make a series of statements that seem to follow necessarily from the affirmation, "God is Holy Love." Then I will ask some questions regarding "eternal damnation" that I think the statements generate. I will look at two possible answers that I think are unacceptable. Then I will examine two proposed answers that I think might be acceptable. I offer the questions for discussion, not because I think that I already have satisfactory answers. Hopefully the inquiry will generate further discussion. I am aware that the doctrine of eternal damnation is not the leading edge of contemporary Wesleyan theology, ecclesiology, and preaching. Nevertheless, the doctrine occupies a place in the articles of religion that our denominations affirm. In each case the doctrine of perdition forms a part of our eschatology. It is present in recent systematic theologies we have written.

John Wesley himself certainly believed that the doctrine of eternal perdition for sinners is a valid part of Christian doctrine. Wesley thought the doctrine of hell to be an "awful truth" of "great importance." Not only should "enormous sinners" consider this "terrible truth," but also the "holiest men upon earth," viz., the Apostles. Hell is "the punishment of those who, in spite of all the warnings of God, resolve to have their portion with the devil and his angels." The duration of their punishment will have no end. "Nothing but eternity is the form of their torment! . . . Suppose millions of days, of years, of ages elapsed, still we are only on the threshold of eternity"<sup>8</sup>

H. Ray Dunning draws no hard conclusions regarding hell. He describes hell as a "dread prospect." But clearly he has no interest in discussing the topic at length, saying only that "separation from God is the most appropriate way to speak of this sad truth." Dunning stresses the

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<sup>8</sup>John Wesley, Sermon 73: "Of Hell," *The Works of John Wesley* 6:381-391, 1872 edition.

severity of Jesus' warning against unrepented sin, and then, borrowing from Ladd, urges us to refrain from "imaginative speculations and descriptions based on noncanonical sources."<sup>9</sup> Kenneth Grider states a less abbreviated and more traditional doctrine of hell. "The finally impenitent, with degrees of punishment meted out to them at the Judgment according to the gravity of their sins, will be dispatched into the eternal punishment of hell. . . . The New Testament speaks clearly about eternal punishment for the wicked dead and no one teaches it more clearly than Jesus."<sup>10</sup>

Article XII ("The Judgment and the Future State") of the Articles of Religion of the United Methodist Church includes the following regarding hell: ". . . the righteous to life eternal and the wicked to endless condemnation"<sup>11</sup> Article XXI ("Destiny") of the Articles of Religion of The Wesleyan Church says in part, ". . . but hell with its everlasting misery and separation from God is the final abode of those who reject this great salvation"<sup>12</sup> Article XII ("Final Destiny") of the Free Methodist Church affirms, "But for the finally impenitent there is a hell of eternal suffering and of separation from God"<sup>13</sup> Finally, Article XVI ("Resurrection, Judgment and Destiny") of the Articles of Faith of the Church of the Nazarene declares that ". . . the finally impenitent shall suffer eternally in hell."<sup>14</sup>

We can conclude from these statements that, according to John Wesley and at least some of the denominations that claim to be his progeny, in hell there is conscious existence that is no longer the object of reconciliation. I suggest that for Wesleyan theology this position is untenable because it contradicts the Wesleyan doctrine of God. The belief that God is Holy Love as we understand this, and the notion of hell as we have stated it, appear to be mutually exclusive ideas.

## Implications and Questions

Let us first develop a series of statements that follow from the Wesleyan understanding of God as Holy Love. Then let us voice some questions the statements generate.

<sup>9</sup>Dunning, 393.

<sup>10</sup>Grider, 544.

<sup>11</sup>*The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church*, 1988.

<sup>12</sup>*The Discipline of the Wesleyan Church*, 1992.

<sup>13</sup>*The Free Methodist Discipline*, 1985.

<sup>14</sup>*Manual, Church of the Nazarene*, 1992.

**First Statement.** Holy Love originates, sustains, and directs the creation (i.e., all that can be said to “exist”). This is true not because of emanation or divine effluence, but because of active Holy Love. The creation “is” because Holy Love at some point began to grant existence to it, and because God continues to give the “to be” to all that exists. To exist is to be “gifted with being.” It means being radically and momentarily contingent. Both potentiality and definiteness are active gifts of Holy Love. In the words of the Apostle Paul, in Christ the world “holds together” (Col. 1:17 NRSV). Absolute non-being (*ouk on*) for any contingent thing would immediately follow from the absence of Holy Love. The Wisdom of Solomon visits this theme: “How would anything have endured if thou hadst not willed it? Or how would anything not called forth by Thee have been preserved?” (“Wisdom of Solomon,” 11:25).

**Second Statement.** For Wesleyan theology, to exist is to be “graced,” not simply in the sense of merely receiving existence, but as the object of divine visitation, reconciliation, and communion. Theodore Runyon reports that for Wesley God’s grace is manifest in creation, forgiveness, and re-creation.<sup>15</sup> Rob Staples agrees: “It is the Creator God who redeems and the redeeming God who creates.” Staples leaves no doubt about the unity of the two: “Creation and redemption are not two separate divine activities disconnected from one another. God in Christ is reconciling *the [created] world*.”<sup>16</sup> Moreover, for Wesleyan theology, all grace is “Christic.” The gracious God engages in Self-expression through the Son who *mediates* as Creator, Sustainer and Redeemer *between* God and humankind—indeed the whole creation. This is true without regard either to time or space, for Christ is indeed the lamb slain from the foundations of the earth (Rev. 13:8).<sup>17</sup> So nothing—certainly no person—simply exists as soteriologically inert or inconsequential. Everything, including all persons, is the object or scene of active, gracious divine visitation and invitation. We call this prevenient grace, the *telos* of which is reconciliation, communion and reflection of the divine image.

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<sup>15</sup>Runyon, 26.

<sup>16</sup>Rob L. Staples, *Outward Sign and Inward Grace: The Place of Sacraments in Wesleyan Spirituality* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1991), 83.

<sup>17</sup>See Karl Barth, *Christ and Adam: Man and Humanity in Romans 5*, trans. T. A. Small, 1957.

**Third Statement.** Following from this, for Wesleyan theology there can be no sharp distinction between ontology and soteriology. To “be” is to be “gifted.” To be “gifted” is to be “divinely visited.” To be “divinely visited” is to be called to creaturely wholeness (a restoration to health) through worship of and communion with God. Immediately, God calls the whole creation into “the healing power of love.”<sup>18</sup> There is no room in the Wesleyan vision of God for creaturely being *apart* from intended *soterios*. The only possible “apart” would be absolute nonbeing (*ouk on*), which is to say no *being* (existence) at all. To avoid this conclusion two options are available. But neither one is acceptable if there is belief that God *is* Holy Love.

*First*, one can argue that it is possible for entities, including persons, to exist without all of them being the object of divine reconciliation and communion. One can even argue that parts of the creation that are not objects of reconciliation are nevertheless sustained by God’s grace, but a grace that has *sustenance only*, not *reconciliation*, as its goal. Consistent with this, one can say that God selects certain parts of the creation for redemption and leaves other parts unredeemed. But one can say none of this if speaking as a true Wesleyan. A *second* option is opened by Kenneth Grider who rejects the notion that love is God’s essence or nature. Instead, love is something God chooses to do. Otherwise, God would be bound by his own nature and love would lose its voluntaristic attractiveness. According to Grider, God’s essence or nature is holiness, not love. God’s basic nature “is to love only creatures who have similar natures. His nature, as holy, is to withhold from fellowship with himself creatures that are sinful and erring. Yet contrary to his nature, He loves the rebels all. . . .”<sup>19</sup> If this is true, if loving “rebels” is contrary to God’s nature, then God may cease to love without in any way violating the divine essence. God could forever sustain those who are in hell while choosing not to love them.<sup>20</sup> They would be the objects of both divine creativity and eternal condemnation while not being the objects of God’s love.

**Fourth Statement.** There is no realm of existence that lies beyond the range of the fourth premise. Unless one is prepared to argue that the nature of God changes from realm to realm, from time to time, or from one

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<sup>18</sup>Runyon, 29.

<sup>19</sup>Grider, 116.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, 116-117.

situation to another—in which case Holy Love would assume subsidiary rather than essential significance—then wherever God is and wherever existence is, whatever exists is the object of active Holy Love. This is the case so long as God is God and *so long as anything exists at all*.

**Fifth Statement.** No form of metaphysical dualism is permissible. This will have to be rigorously observed.

Now for some questions. The doctrine of eternal punishment includes the following. It maintains that those who populate hell *exist* and that they exist as *contingent beings*. Each moment they receive their “to be” from God. Deny this and one lands in the middle of metaphysical dualism. Also, the doctrine of eternal perdition holds to a continuity of consciousness between one’s life on earth and one’s existence in hell. Otherwise the doctrine would become pointless.

Unless there is a flaw in the five premises I have stated, it seems clear that, for the Wesleyan, to exist in hell assumes the presence of the gracious God. This means the presence of active Holy Love. Not only would God be present as gracious creator and sustainer, but also as graciously calling all conscious beings to health. To maintain the doctrine of God, can a Wesleyan defensibly envision any realm of existence in which reconciliation and communion are not the *telos* of God’s presence?

If the Wesleyan vision of God is correct, as we believe it to be, then what must we conclude regarding a state of existence in which God eternally precludes corrigibility and reconciliation? Is not a divinely sealed incorrigibility a contradictory notion for a Wesleyan? Can Holy Love ever cease seeking reconciliation without thereby ceasing to be itself? Nietzsche, you may recall, thought the driving force behind the idea of eternal punishment arises in Christians who have a thinly veiled lust to satiate their resentments.<sup>21</sup>

To say that God never ceases to seek reconciliation wherever there is existence does not require our saying that all finite beings, whether in heaven or hell, will or must at some point embrace the overtures of Holy Love. Whatever (finite freedom) now makes it possible for persons to refuse to reciprocate God’s love will continue to be effective. Rejection of pardon and reconciliation will forever remain the “possible impossibility.”

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<sup>21</sup>Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Francis Golffing (NY: Doubleday Anchor Books. 1956), XIV, XV.

The vulnerability of divine love—the divine risk<sup>22</sup>—will not be withdrawn, for the love of God extended and forced reciprocation are contradictory notions. Reinhold Niebuhr put it correctly, “[Divine] love cannot require a mutual response without losing its character” as love.<sup>23</sup> Theodore Runyon says of Wesley, “Depriving human beings of freedom is neither the nature of God’s grace nor the nature of God’s love. Yet grace does ‘assist’ the human response as the stimulus which calls it forth. This assistance is the prompting of God’s Spirit at work in us, both to communicate grace and to begin the process of renewal.”<sup>24</sup>

## Two Possible Resolutions

There are at least two possible and acceptable ways for Wesleyans to resolve the problem. Up to this point in the discussion, both options agree. But they diverge sharply in how they would resolve the problem. Both options challenge the traditional doctrine of perdition viewed as a deliberate and irrevocable act of divine judgment. But, whereas one option holds that the impenitent finally sink into *nonbeing*, the second option agrees with the articles of religion to the extent that the impenitent exist indefinitely, sustained by the Creator God.

The *first* option is referred to as “conditional immortality” or “annihilationism.” This position holds that since only God can give immortality, only the righteous will receive eternal life. Through a persistent abuse of freedom, the unrighteous will annihilate themselves. The sinful person, in freely chosen self-rule, by turning more and more inward, becomes a smaller and smaller bundle of ego. Finally the self shrinks into nothingness (*ouk on*). Such a person resists to the end the invitations of God. He or she burns out like a meteor hurling through the atmosphere. Existence and potentiality cease. It may be that this “burning out” would occur at death. Or existence may continue, and God may continue graciously to pursue, “even after death, through countless aeons if necessary.”<sup>25</sup>

<sup>22</sup>Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology* (NY: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1958), 73.

<sup>23</sup>Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man: Human Destiny* (N.Y.: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1964), 2:247.

<sup>24</sup>Runyon, 27.

<sup>25</sup>Rob L. Staples, “The Theology of the Final Consummation,” *The Second Coming*, H. Ray Dunning, ed. (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1995). Staples summarizes Stephen Travis’ four supports for conditional immortality. I have abbreviated Staples’ discussion: (1) The Bible does not teach that the soul is



Rob Staples suggests that this option could be acceptable to Wesleyans. He identifies Joseph Beet and E. Stanley Jones as Wesleyans who have found “conditional immortality” attractive. In explaining how “conditional immortality” might be attractive to a Wesleyan, Staples says that “real freedom,” given by God, suggests that we “must be given the option of finally, absolutely, and irrevocably rejecting God.” Drawing upon Stephen H. Travis, Staples discusses four additional arguments in support of “limited immortality.”<sup>26</sup> Staples suggests that this way of resolving the problem would safeguard the doctrine of God as Holy Love. It would also affirm that God always acts toward existence with a view toward redemption. As long as any conscious being exists, God woos. Annihilation would simply be the conclusion of persistently rejecting the overtures of Holy Love.

Importantly, according to this option, God does not choose annihilation. The recalcitrant sinner does. *God does not “quit.”* This position has the strength of the Apostle Paul’s assertion that only for the saints will the mortal put on immortality (1 Cor. 15: 29-56).

The *second* option would reject annihilation and hold that as Creator, God continues to sustain conscious, personal life. God would also continue to pursue the aims of Holy Love. His judgment against election of spiritual death over eternal life would continue wherever and in whomsoever “unfaith” is posited. Alienation would continue indefinitely unless by way of enabled response, repentance and reconciliation were to occur. Forever the Creator would sustain conscious life, not to punish, but to promote reconciliation.

What might make the second option more attractive than the first? A significant fault of the first option might be that *nonbeing* finally triumphs over the Creator. Admittedly, in the first option God does not elect *nonbeing* (*ouk on*) for anyone. But does it not appear that nonbeing, rather than the Creator, speaks the last word? Would it not be that *that* over which God triumphed when he began to create the heavens and the earth would now end the possibility for reconciliation? Does the first option *permit*

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naturally immortal; (2) The biblical images such as “fire” indicate destruction; (3) “Eternal punishment” indicates the result not the temporal duration of punishment; and (4) An everlasting punishment would involve an eternal cosmological dualism (p. 271). Taken from Stephen H. Travis, *Christian Hope and the Future* (Downer’s Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1980), 134-5.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid.

nihilism to supplant the potential for meaning and health? While the gracious God would not actively quit, God's options would be forever restricted. On the other hand, one might argue that the second option permits sin to triumph over God.

The second option would ask of the first, If it is true that only God can give "existence," can the creature intentionally and successfully eliminate that gift? If only God can grant existence, then would it not be true that only God can withdraw it? If we were to follow the first option and place the possibility of withdrawing "existence" or "being" under creaturely control, would we not assert something about God that is unacceptable? As in the first option, so in the second, "*love never quits*." But the meaning of the statement has changed.

Wesleyans, it seems, could adopt either of the two options. There are probably additional and perhaps superior ones that need to be explored.

## Conclusion

Is it time for Wesleyan theologians to give careful and sustained attention to the range of soteriological possibilities their theology supports? Is it time to enlarge what we mean by "the renewal of creation?"<sup>27</sup> Do we need to reexamine the meaning of "the optimism of grace?" To whom should we apply Barth's instructions, instructions similar to ones John Wesley often gave to the Methodists: "On the basis of the eternal will of God we have to think of *every human being*, even the oddest, most villainous or miserable, as one to whom Jesus Christ is Brother and God is Father . . ."<sup>28</sup> What limits could justifiably be placed on Runyon's claim that a consistently Wesleyan theology will present God's Spirit as at work "everywhere in the world?"<sup>29</sup> If these questions were to be pursued to their end, how might doing so affect our prayers and our preaching? How might the pursuit impact what we anticipate regarding the extent of the Kingdom of God? And how might such efforts influence the way we read the Scriptures?

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<sup>27</sup>Runyon, 7-25.

<sup>28</sup>Karl Barth, *The Humanity of God* (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1969), 53.

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, 33.

# VIOLENCE AND THE TRINITY: A WESLEYAN READING OF MILBANK'S AUGUSTINIANISM<sup>1</sup>

by

Anthony D. Baker

“... making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit  
in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3).

The title of this paper is loaded with personage: three persons are mentioned in the subtitle and three in the title proper. The latter will be the subject of much of text below. I begin with a few comments about the persons in the subtitle.

John Milbank's work has been the subject of much discussion since his 1990 publication of *Theology and Social Theory*. His thought in general is greatly indebted to Augustine, so much so that he has referred to himself as a “critical Augustinian.”<sup>2</sup> This is not to say that he is a “specialist” on the writings of Augustine; indeed, very little of his work deals primarily with Augustine. He has published works on such disparate thinkers as Kierkegaard, Aquinas, Gregory of Nyssa, and Giambattista Vico,<sup>3</sup> and on a wide range of political and ecclesiological subjects. In

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<sup>1</sup>I am grateful to Michael Hanby and Professor Milbank for their critical readings of earlier versions of this paper, and also to Craig Keen for reading and responding to countless emails along the way.

<sup>2</sup>See the title in the reference list below of Milbank 1997a.

<sup>3</sup>For Kierkegaard, see Milbank 1996; Aquinas is the subject of the recent essay entitled “Intensities” (Milbank 1999); Gregory of Nyssa is the subject of the eighth chapter of *The Word Made Strange* (Milbank 1997c, 194-216); Vico was the subject of Milbank's Ph.D. thesis, which was published as a two volume set in 1992.

bringing his indebtedness to Augustine into focus, we will be considering several of his publications and making certain connections to one of their central sources—Augustine’s *De Trinitate*. We will be making Milbank’s Augustinianism explicit, even when he himself does not.

To propose a *Wesleyan* reading of Milbank is simply to say that in the present essay we will be looking for signs of resonance between Milbank’s theology and Wesleyan “perfection.” This, however, is already a loaded proposal: Milbank himself was a Methodist for the first twenty years of his life.<sup>4</sup> His parents, in fact, criticized Britain’s United Methodist churches for what they perceived to be a “weak doctrine of sanctification.” Both of them claim heritage in the twentieth century Holiness Movement. His mother’s family, originally of the Scottish working class, was Nazarene. Her father became a Nazarene minister and later the superintendent of the Church of the Nazarene throughout the British Isles. Milbank’s paternal grandfather was a co-founder of the International Holiness Mission, a mid-century charismatic sect based in South London that eventually merged with the Church of the Nazarene. John often attended this grandfather’s church on Battersea Rise and describes it as “a strange and exotic world.” When, at the age of 20, he began migrating toward the liturgies of the Church of England, he was not at all oblivious to the fact that “Wesley himself was a high Anglican.” Milbank’s lineage, then, is rooted deeply in holiness churches and, by his own admission, the theme of “perfection” is implicit in all of his writings.<sup>5</sup> By engaging in a Wesleyan reading of Milbank’s Augustinian theology, we are on two fronts seeking out and exposing with text what is already lurking in the margins.

### **Violent Times and Spaces**

The critiques of modern and ancient thought that we investigate below converge on at least one point: they identify ways of thinking characterized by the less-than-perfect. We begin with a presupposition: the word “perfection” implies fullness or a condition in which nothing is

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<sup>4</sup>The biographical details contained in this paper are taken from various correspondences with Milbank, dating from the spring of 1999 to the present.

<sup>5</sup>According to Milbank, the perfection motif in *Theology and Social Theory* was one that he recognized only retrospectively as a Wesleyan element, and one which conflicts with many memories of his actual experiences in Methodist and Nazarene churches. For this reason, what I am proposing must necessarily maintain a degree of hesitancy.

excluded. In grammar, the "perfect" tense is used to describe a completed action. None of the essential parts have been left out. For Wesley, of course, Christian perfection was a doctrine about the unlimited reaches of the grace of God.<sup>6</sup> Wesley also believed that the *ecclesial body* was the recipient of this grace, as there is, finally, "no holiness but social holiness" (quoted in Runyon 1981, 42). We might say, then, that perfection would be embodied most "perfectly" by a society of believers from which no one is walled off or excluded. And yet, as we shall see, such a beginning makes a search for perfection difficult indeed. Where can we find traces of such a society?

It is no surprise, then, that perfection is an embattled theme in modern theology. Consider, for example, the case of Immanuel Kant. While the theology of his day was fascinated with the possibilities of a natural theology within Newton's calculable universe, Kant understood that even laws of causality as apparent as gravity require a dogmatic leap if we are attempting to prove them through the senses (1929, 21-2). That is to say, against the "law" that objects tend to move toward the earth because of a universal force that pulls them, one could suggest that the stars push them down, or even that the phenomenon of falling objects is due to coincidence rather than necessity. Whatever the counter-hypothesis, it would be impossible to disprove without a leap from sensual perception into a transcendent, "supersensible" realm (24-5). However, rather than fall into a universal skepticism, Kant set out to create a space beyond the realm of sensibility in which one could speak of such unperceivable notions as "self," "world," and "God" (1950, 103). This space he named "reason."<sup>7</sup>

Briefly, he believed that we come to perceive *that which is* as an object before us within space and time, the latter being ahistorical, a priori categories. These perceptions, then, are organized by categories of understanding—likewise a priori. Once understood, we can say what our per-

<sup>6</sup>Of the many possible references, see question 19 of "Further Thoughts on Christian Perfection" in *A Plain Account*: "Now surely sanctification is one of 'the things which are freely given us of God.' And no possible reason can be assigned why this should be excepted . . ." (1966, 87).

<sup>7</sup>"On the one hand, in the explanation of natural occurrences, including the actions of rational beings, I leave to the mechanism of natural necessity the right to ascend from condition to condition *ad infinitum* while, on the other hand, I hold open for speculative reason the place which for it is vacant, i.e., the intelligible, in order to put the unconditioned in it. . . . This is the moral law" (1993, 50-1). "Therefore, the concept of God is one which belongs originally not to physics, . . .but to morals" (147). See Wood 1978, 20-4.

ception *is*, and, for instance, that it is a cause or an effect of something else (1929, 22-3; 1950, 8-9). The understanding, however, is not satisfied with this array of concepts and so pushes them toward a unity, laying claim finally to the third set of *a priori*s: the Ideas of Reason (God, a transcendental self, and the noumenal world) (1950, 100-2). What is important for our purposes is to note that we do not encounter these Ideas in our construal of space and time, nor in our understanding. In fact, they serve simply to “regulate” what is already understood and are removed from the previous faculties of sense perception and understanding. The Idea of God has as its particular task the regulation of understanding for the sake of morality.<sup>8</sup> When Kant “found it necessary to deny knowledge in order to make room for faith” (1993, 29), he had effectively assigned to theology a particular arena within the metaphysical realm in which it would be considered a legitimate pursuit.

Theology, in a Kantian universe, is limited. Confined to the regulation of morality, it is denied access to the structures which give time, space, and knowledge of being.<sup>9</sup> This is an especially troubling situation when we consider the actual nature of these structures—that is, this metaphysics—which Kant assumed to be universal and outside the realm of historical contingency. According to John Milbank’s reading of the tradition, the structures of being and knowing to which Kant subscribed were far from universal and a-historical. In fact, it is possible to trace the history of their arrival on the scene, a task which we will here sketch briefly.

Following a well-known sociological thesis, Milbank has indicated a pervasive hierarchical structure in ancient Indo-European societies.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>“The moral law [leads] . . . to a practical task which is assigned solely by pure reason and without any concurrence of sensuous drives. It is the task of perfecting the first and principal part of the highest good, viz., morality. . . . It must postulate the existence of God as necessarily belonging to the possibility of the highest good (the object of our will which is necessarily connected with the moral legislation of pure reason)” (1993, 130-1).

<sup>9</sup>Milbank sees Kant’s role in the modern situation of theology as pivotal. The following sentences begin a discussion of the wide-scale acceptance of Kant’s categories: “Modern theology on the whole accepts that philosophy has its own legitimacy, its own autonomy, apart from faith. Philosophy articulates categories of being in general, or else of what it is to know in general, but speaks only obscurely, if at all, of God. Theology reserves to itself the knowledge of God as a loving creator who also redeemed the human race” (1998, 21). See also (1997c, 9-16).

<sup>10</sup>This thesis is taken from George Dumézil, a mid-twentieth century sociologist of the Durkeimian school (Milbank 1997b, 451).

Stated briefly, in these class-based societies the ontological layers, from the cosmic all the way down to the intra-personal, bore a striking resemblance to the social hierarchy on which the society depends (1997b, 456). The latter was characterized by a “justice” that was in fact a judicial system erected for the preservation of social status. This political schema was ruled by the guardians of wisdom, who controlled the farmers and merchants with the auxiliary force of the military (451-2). It was of great importance that the hierarchy be preserved. If militaries were given free reign to exercise force beyond the control of the reasonable rulers, or if the ruling class, deprived of its military, were unable to control production, the balance of the society would devolve into chaos. Simultaneous with the arrival of this sociological hierarchy, we can see evidence of parallel hierarchies in both the ordering of the soul and the cosmos. A human being came to be seen as a tripartite hierarchy of head (reason) controlling stomach (desire, or drive to produce) with the power of heart (strength). Similarly, the universe, it was thought, was governed by reason, which ruled the activities of every living and nonliving thing with certain natural forces (452).<sup>11</sup>

What this hypothesis suggests is that ancient western cultures shared a metaphysics that was not at all an ahistorical “picture” of *the way things are*, but was deeply rooted in and interconnected with the social practices of these societies. Further, it is not at all difficult to see how these structures lent themselves to violence. Cosmic balance was embedded in the willingness of the classes to remain immobile.

For the ancient Greeks, though the dynamics were slightly different, there can yet be seen a parallel to this socially entangled ontology in the rendering of the virtues (457, 460). By Aristotle’s account, virtue was the quality of a “hero,” a man who made himself strong for the sake of his *polis* (1990, 352-3). Militarism, therefore, was a virtuous pursuit, and it is presumably for this reason that Aristotle called it “the greatest and noblest of perils” (Aristotle 1986, 88). A virtuous soldier was one ordered according to the needs of battle. To be strong and mobile would assist the city against enemies. The magnanimous man, in whatever office he filled in life, would be ordered according to the heroic ability to retain the upper

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<sup>11</sup>The hierarchical ordering of the heavens is shown paradigmatically by Dumézil in the Roman gods of Jupiter, Mars, and Quirinus, who were, respectively, the ruler-god, the god of war, and the god of agriculture (Milbank 1997b, 452).

hand, to outshine his adversaries, to vanquish.<sup>12</sup> This played itself out in Greek history as a quest for unity. It was not, however, the unity of what we have called “perfection,” but a radically limited unity which extended only so far as the walls of the city. “Greek ethics ultimately concerns an economy of self-control within a totality which keeps the passions within the bounds and in their right places” (Milbank 1997b, 460). The xenophobia characteristic of the ancient Greeks is evidence of this obsession: those who are inside the city walls are a unity; all others are to be excluded. Greek ethics, then, in connection with the ontological ordering of Indo-European societies in general, suggests a unity of conquerors and a peace which is the space between wars. Rather than perfection, what we find here is an “ontology of violence” (1990, 4-5, 278; 1997c, 220).<sup>13</sup>

If violence was a guiding principle for the ancients, it became canonized law for the moderns. With the emergence of a world-grounding individual subject, even the good of the city became secondary to needs of the self to own, control, and vanquish. While modern biologists celebrated the “survival of the fittest,” their not-so-distant cousins engaged in a similar celebration of *laissez faire* capitalism. Admittedly, within the space of modern egoism, we have managed to erect political units. These, however, appear to be nothing more than formal structures consisting of individuals who have surrendered their “natural rights” to unchecked power in order to achieve a greater security (1997c, 281-2).<sup>14</sup> We still live by the law of the greatest good for the greatest number of *individuals*, forming “communities,” the better to defend ourselves *against* all enemies, foreign and domestic. Like our Indo-European ancestors, the pervading principle is still that difference presupposes violence, even if, by benevolent acts of diplomacy, we now and then manage to shake hands.

This genealogy has disturbing ramifications for Kant’s “Copernican revolution.” By this account, it seems that the metaphysical structures

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<sup>12</sup>“If virtue is still heroic honour, then virtue as such is linked to competition for scarce resources, albeit *not* a modern, naked, economic competition, but a competition in the exercise of excellence and patronage, and for the educative and political means to do so” (Milbank 1990, 352).

<sup>13</sup>In a discussion of Milbank’s account of the inherent violence of Greek ethics, Stanley Hauerwas and Charles Pinches largely agree: “A full-scale return to Greek virtue cannot but involve a return to a pre-Enlightenment/pre-Christian world of war” (1997, 67).

<sup>14</sup>On the theological critique of liberal democracy, see also Cavanaugh 1998, 187-194.



which he assumed to be outside of history (the construal of space and time, for instance), are in fact *deeply* historical, and hopelessly entangled with social and cultural construction.<sup>15</sup> And far from neutral or amoral, they both support and are supported by a deeply rooted ontological violence. What does it mean, then, to quarantine theology to a space of "regulation," removed from these ontological structures? The response is clear. Uninvited to the colloquium on metaphysics, theology is impotent to challenge the violence.<sup>16</sup>

And yet, if it is the case that metaphysics reeks of social construction, it must also be the case that theology is no longer confined to "the limits of reason alone." In a post-Kantian world, theology is free to recover its own structuring of reason, that is, of space, time, and understanding. In fact, we are *bound* to do so. If we allow a secular philosophy to prescribe what it means to be and know *theologically*, this philosophy will to some extent decide in our absence what it means to *be* Christian, and *know* Christ (1998, 21). Surely this would make the church (at best)

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<sup>15</sup>The influence of Michel Foucault can be seen in Milbank's understanding of the complexity of historico-cultural relations of power from which Kant's metaphysics emerge: "Once it has been conceded, as by Kant, that ethics is to be grounded in the fact of the will and of human freedom, then quickly it is realized that freedom is not an ahistorical fact about an essential human subject, but is constantly distilled from the complex strategies of power within which subjects are interpellated as unequal, mutually dependent persons" (1990, 279).

<sup>16</sup>This is the central criticism that Milbank has of Karl Barth. For all his efforts to think *von Gott aus*, Barth was still (admittedly) working within a Kantian philosophy, and was therefore unable to develop an unlimited theological critique of metaphysics (1998, 21-2, 32-4, nn. 1-2). In support of this reading of Barth, it can be said that Bruce McCormack continues to argue his thesis that Barth ought not be considered in any way "postmodern," since his philosophical categories were largely and uncritically Kantian (or "neo-Kantian") (1995, 130, 466-7). However, McCormack also demonstrates that Barth's fully developed theology contained an *implicit* critique of Kant (466-7). See, for instance, Barth's insistence on real knowledge of God in the first edition of *Der Romerbrief*: "Our *Sache* is our knowledge of God which is realized in Christ; in which God does not become objective to us, but rather comes close to us, immediately and creatively; in which we not only see, but *are seen*, not only understand, but *are understood*, not only comprehend, but *are grasped*" (quoted in McCormack 1995, 158). The question to explore in a critical investigation of Milbank's reading of Barth is whether or not Barth *is* truly and uncritically Kantian, and thus cannot envision a theological critique of "secular knowing." Though tempting, such an investigation is far beyond the limits of this paper.

unwitting participants in the violence.<sup>17</sup> We are, then, both free and bound to suggest a Christian metaphysics. In Milbank's understanding, this must be a restless metaphysics which challenges other notions of "the real" that are in fundamentally rooted in conflict.

It is thinkable, in a world characterized by fragmentation and ungrounded traditions, that theology could simply narrate its own story alongside every other, leaving the others to construe reality however they choose. To do so would be commensurate with an ascetic withdrawal. Christian theology would keep itself from the violence but remain impotent to challenge the violence itself. Granted, from an objectively detached point of view, there can be no judgment passed between the "trueness" of the Christian story and, for instance, the realm of pure (secular) reason, Milbank nonetheless maintains that the particular way Christians have of understanding their world refuses to allow these accounts any inherent adequacy (1990, 4). His question: can we *out-narrate the violence* by telling the Christian story in a way that is simply more compelling as a vision of peace than are narrated visions of war (1990, 381-8)? In essence, then, Milbank is calling for something akin to a narrative theology *on speed*, a radically construed theology that sets in motion the evacuation of *all* ontologies of violence (1997c, 49).<sup>18</sup> Though daunting, this is an urgent task indeed.

### Faith Seeking Understanding

We should pause to qualify this grandiose proposal with a statement of methodology. John Milbank readily admits that his work takes place within the realm of speculation (1990, 423). This speculation is best understood when seen as an intrinsic element of his Augustinian methodology.

Augustine's *De Trinitate* is, at least in one of several possible readings, a kind of phenomenology of the three Persons who are the one God-head. It reads, however, more as a catalogue of the shortcomings of human

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<sup>17</sup>Ecclesiastical history is, of course, full of less than this parenthetical "at best." Throughout this paper, when I speak of the church, I am speaking of it in admittedly idealistic terms: to a certain undeniable extent, "the church" has never (yet) existed.

<sup>18</sup>"The *logic* [qua Logos] of Christianity involves the claim that the 'interruption' of history by Christ and his bride, the Church, is the most fundamental of events, interpreting all other events" (1990, 388).

understanding than as a definitive tractate on the distinctive essences. Confronted again and again by his own lack of insight in relation to the infinite existence of God, Augustine continues to write, claiming a faith even where logic runs dry. Regarding the gospels' narratives of the life of the Son, for instance, he finds record of one who originated, died, was raised to life, and taken into heaven. "Of these four stages," he says, "we already knew two in ourselves; we know that men originate and die. As for the second two, being raised to life and taken up, we can justly hope that they are going to happen to us because we believe that they happened to him" (1991, 170). There is an apparent collision here between the elements of the story that Augustine reads and the empirical evidences of the world in which the story purports to have taken place: between what is to be believed, and what is already known. In response to the collision, Augustine does not opt, as certain of his post-Enlightenment successors will, for a "demythologized" Jesus, that is, a Christology subordinate to secular ways of knowing; instead, he claims the privilege of a faith seeking understanding.<sup>19</sup>

Further, Augustine realizes that understanding, as the activity of an embodied human being, *takes time*. It occurs (*if it occurs*) as a moment that can be both expected and remembered. The search for understanding, when it is conducted in faith, is a liturgical activity; trinitarian theology is not so much *explanation* as it is *performance*. Faith, similarly, occurs in and through time. This is why Augustine tells us that faith is temporary, naming a posture of finite beings that will be no longer necessary in eternity.<sup>20</sup> Belief is not a quality *in abstractum*, but an activity that only occurs across

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<sup>19</sup>This is demonstrated in a delightful passage which attempts to make sense of our use of the term "persons" for the Godhead: "Perhaps we just have to admit that these various usages were developed by the sheer necessity of saying something, when the fullest possible argument was called for. . . . Human inadequacy was trying by speech to bring to the notice of men what it held about the Lord God its creator. . . . It was afraid of saying three beings, in case it should be taken as meaning any diversity in that supreme and ultimate equality. On the other hand, it could not say that there were not three somethings. . . ." (1991, 227). James O'Donnell summarizes the confusion well: "Augustine the rhetorician, so precise with his words and wordplays, freely admits the failure of language in relation to the unsayable Other" (1994, 26).

<sup>20</sup>"Clearly, when the human mind sees the faith with which it believes what it does not see, it is not seeing something everlasting. It will not always exist, because it will certainly no longer exist when this sojourn abroad comes to an end in which we are living away from the Lord so that we have to walk by faith, and when the sight by which we shall see face to face takes its place" (1991, 372). Cf. Hill 1994, 55.

an expanse of time. "If this cannot be grasped by the understanding, let it be held by faith, until he shines in our minds who said through the prophets, *Unless you believe, you will not understand* (Isa. 7:9)" (232).<sup>21</sup>

To follow the works of Milbank in search of the possibility of perfection is to follow him following Augustine, seeking for that which remains unknowable.<sup>22</sup> Regarding *how* the temporal world, bounded by birth and death, is to become a world opened to resurrection and ascension of the saints, we can only practice humble speculation; nonetheless, that our faith *insists* that these things *must* be, we proclaim openly.<sup>23</sup> Our narrative, after all, rules out the finality of death and offers instead the vision of an infinite life in the non-violent reign of God. Our task, then, is to engage in the proclamation of an apparent absence. By all appearances, a God of peace is an impossibility in a world held together *only* by ontological violence. By faith, this God and this peace *must* be (1997c, 229).<sup>24</sup>

This, then, is the "speculative moment" in which theology finds itself. We cannot, after all, respond to evil by shouting the creeds louder and louder; we must *renarrate*. This involves new language, new voices, and a certain degree of hesitancy in our suggestions. We repeat the gospel by repeating it differently. That is to say, we bear witness to our faith by *making it strange* (1990, 381-3; 1997c, 1). This faithful seeking resonates with the words of that other Anglican Brit:

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<sup>21</sup>Edmund Hill notes that Augustine actually read and quoted a mistranslation of this verse in the Latin Vulgate. Even so, the significance is unaltered: if our seeking does not originate in belief, the whole project will have been in vain (1994, 51-3).

<sup>22</sup>Cf. Milbank's introductory remarks in *The Word Made Strange*: "While insisting that no human discourse has any 'secular' or 'scientific' autonomy in relation to theology, I seek to recognize equally that theology has no 'proper' subject matter, since God is not an object of our knowledge, and is not immediately accessible" (1997c, 3). See also 231, in the chapter entitled "Can Morality Be Christian?" This essay is doubly interesting for the present project: first, because of the obvious contrast with Kant's "moral theology" when Milbank immediately reveals that the answer to the title's question is "no." (219). Secondly, Milbank wrote this essay as a sort of reaction against the sectarian concerns that are characteristic of many churches in the holiness tradition. He says that "Christian morality is a thing so strange, that it must be declared immoral or amoral according to all other norms and codes of immorality" (219).

<sup>23</sup>In other words, theology must resort to an imaginative and faithful "agnosticism" (Milbank 1997, 9).

<sup>24</sup>Cf. Susan Mennel's comments on Augustine's "knowing subject": "Faith . . . is an essential mode of knowing in a world of time. . . because faith accepts absence" (1994, 322). See also Hankey 1999, 395-7, on Milbank's *poesis*.

We *expect* to be sanctified *wholly* through his Spirit. . . . [We] *seek* an *entire* circumcision of heart, [we] *thirst* to be cleansed “from *all* filthiness of flesh and spirit,” and to “*perfect* holiness in the fear of God.” . . . We *look for* a *full* deliverance from the “carnal mind which is enmity against God.” . . . We do *expect* to love God with *all* out heart, and our neighbor as ourselves. Yea, we believe that He will in this world so “cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of His Holy Spirit, that *we shall perfectly* love Him, and worthily magnify His holy name” (Wesley 1966, 119, italics mine).

Admittedly, Wesley is himself proposing a grandiose project, actually believing in the historical possibility of perfect love, full deliverance, entire cleansing and circumcision of the heart, and complete sanctification. Apparently he was undaunted by the lack of clear and concrete models for such perfection. Like Augustine and Wesley before him, Milbank too believes in Christian perfection and, in fact, that it is the undeniable task of the theologian to proclaim this faith as completely unlimited by the grace of the unlimited God (1990, 1-3).

In our time, we are still hesitant to admit that our metaphysics is not static and ahistorical, but in fact arrives historically, in an arrival that is nearly always violent. Even if we can make this judgment, we have not yet challenged the legitimacy of the ancient equation of difference with violence. Christians in a post-Kantian world are left with two options: we can co-exist as “just another narrative” alongside every other and carry on with our theological pursuits, largely handcuffed to address this pervasive violence of difference, or we can proclaim and act upon a vision of a peaceful society, a vision that can *only* be imagined, a vision that is at once groundless *and* universal, calling for the subversion of each and every narrative that is based in violence (1990, 433). Yet if we choose the latter option, where will our faith begin to seek?

### The Difference in God

The vision of peace that Christian theology is bound to narrate is a direct witness of Christianity's central understanding of reality: God is triune. When we utter this sentence, we have already begun to imagine perfection. We turn, then, to an inquiry into this doctrine. To elucidate Milbank's understanding of the Trinity, we begin again with Augustine.

The piling up of metaphors that is *De Trinitate* leaves little hope for a systematic appraisal of Augustine's doctrine, and I attempt no such

thing here. Rather, I seek to make a suggestion about Augustine's understanding of the Trinity and then demonstrate the importance of this suggestion for Milbank's own "critical Augustinianism." The suggestion is simply this: Augustine's Trinity is characterized by *difference*. Unlike the difference feared by ancient hierarchies and modern subjects, however, Augustine assumes a God who is difference based in charity.

We see this, first of all, in reference to the "distance" of the Son from the Father. In the intra-trinitarian relations, this distance is primarily understood in terms of their relationship to time (Augustine 1991, 232): the Father *is* eternally, where all of time is, all at once. The Son, insofar as he is of one substance with the Father, is likewise eternal; yet insofar as the Word is made flesh, "he" becomes present in time (173-4). He enters the realm of the passing away and himself becomes finite (156). To call this distance "temporal" is not to imply that the Father and Son are in two different places in time. Rather, with the assumption of temporal flesh, the eternal God takes on that which is passing. Like a human word spoken or written in time and space, the flesh of the divine Word spoken into time by the eternal Father *cannot last*. He is passing away each moment of his existence.<sup>25</sup>

That the Son does not, finally, pass away, is the *de profundis* of Augustine's work. The final image of the Trinity upon which he reflects is a mental one. The Spirit is desire, the Son is understanding, and the Father is memory (298-9, 376-7). Again, what seems to be important to Augustine is the time dimension. Spatially, these are one mind; temporally, there is a certain difference.<sup>26</sup> Understanding, like a word spoken in time, is the present which has no duration (Milbank 1990, 426). Memory is a kind of storehouse, in which all things that have passed are kept.<sup>27</sup> Though absent

<sup>25</sup>The analogy between passing words and decaying bodies is a common feature of Augustine. Compare the following with his remarks on linguistic "passing away" (175, 222): "The longer this life lasts, the more does the body, as *the outer man*, decay (2 Cor. 4:16) whether by age or sickness or a whole variety of troubles, until it comes to the last of them which everybody calls death" (155).

<sup>26</sup>In Milbank's words, the "psychological analogy" is better understood as "uncovering the ontological structure of historicity" (1997c, 182).

<sup>27</sup>That the Spirit is eminent "desire" completes the baffling analogy: memory of things past and understanding of things present are joined together by the desire of the understanding to remember and the desire of the memory to understand—in *the future*. Milbank underscores the *othering* of this analogy: "His final analogue of memory, understanding, and will means that knowledge of the other is born in recall of the other in the past, and driven by the desire of the other in the future" (Milbank 1997b, 464-5).

from the understanding (the *present*), they still somehow *are*, as if their presence has been deferred (1991, 376). While this metaphor has obvious limitations, what is central is the temporal “distance” between the eternity of the Father (as locus of all that is, all at once), and the flesh of the Son (as the duration-less moment which is ever passing out of existence). It is in the midst of this distance that Augustine understands the Spirit to be at work. At the same “moment” as a timed gap opens between the memory and understanding, the desire of each for the other binds them across this gap, preserving the unity of the three. Put strictly in terms of the more familiar metaphors: the Spirit, as the love of the Father for the Son, preserves the eternity of the Son by refusing to allow him to pass out of existence. And as the love of the Son for the Father, the Spirit keeps open the “road in time” so that the Son can return to the eternal Father (153).

The Spirit, through her very name, becomes the locus of another difference within the Trinity. Love has an ecstatic character essential to it; it is always only love of another (251-2, Williams 1990, 328-9, Milbank 1997b, 465). And yet this love does not simply come to rest when it “arrives” at the beloved; it keeps requiring the other. The Father desires the Son, and the Son the Father, with a love that refuses to be put to rest, and thus is in excess of its object.<sup>28</sup> “Charity certainly loves itself, but unless it loves itself *loving something* it does not love itself as charity” (Augustine 1991, 253, italics mine). This excess can be seen most clearly when Augustine names the Spirit the *gift of love*, a gift that is at once God’s and ours; for the Love of each Person in God for the other escapes from an intra-trinitarian movement and is given (as *gift*) to creation (Augustine 1991, 199). To name God triune, therefore, is to witness a love which refuses to remain within God. Grammatically speaking, this is because the verb constantly requires an accusative, and ontologically, because in loving, God is already creating an other. With such metaphorical naming, a new light is shed on Augustine’s vision of a *fides quaerens intellectum*. Our seeking for understanding mirrors the trinitarian motion of the Father’s *Desire* for the Son. This is to say that, by remaining faithful to that which exceeds us, we participate in the very love of God.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>28</sup>Regarding Augustine, Rowan Williams can say that the Spirit is essentially love in search of an object, and therefore the life of God is “a life that generates love, and so generates otherness, difference” (1990, 229-230).

<sup>29</sup>I am here following a suggestion made to me by Michael Hanby in a private correspondence.

These trinitarian differences are crucial for Milbank's understanding of the Godhead. The first difference in God allows for the very creation of time and history. The Son is not *simply* sent forth into creation, but is actually the open space in which creation appears (1997c, 80). We can trace the work of the Spirit as second difference, that excessive bond which clasps time to eternity. The Son's going forth to creation, his atonement, is finally complete where his life is closed in death; thus, from the cross, the words "It is finished." The Spirit's work is in *re-opening what is closed off* in the death of the Son (187). Primarily, this means the resurrection of Christ, which the Apostle Paul claims explicitly as the work of the Spirit. Secondly, this means the resurrection and ascension of all to whom Christ is joined. If the first work of Christ was a once-and-for-all death, the Spirit engages in an ongoing work of binding Christ to creature and raising both to God (184-5). The Spirit, as the infinite re-opening of what is finished on the cross, can be called "another atoner" (184).

In linguistic terms, the first difference is the Logos, the once-and-for-all Word of God to creation; the second difference is the endless Response of creation to God, and thus sets in motion an infinite number of differences. In the Spirit, the Word is raised up and returned to God in the (as yet) *unfinished* response of all that is. Christ as Word is all that needs to be said; but all is *not yet said*. The Spirit is this *saying* of creation, vocalizing the word of God as responses to God's first utterance. These responses occur throughout space and time, in the bodily life of each member of the creation that will be redeemed (185-189).<sup>30</sup> The voices are different, as are the bodies, and historical and cultural settings. But the word is always the same, repeated again and again: the Spirit is the "non-identical repetition" of the word made flesh.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>30</sup>Without this second difference, we would be tempted to think that the expression just carried us back to a preformed content, or else that God was but a single *ratio*, which would be little better than seeing him as but a single person. With this second difference, one truly has a moment of response to expression in God, which goes beyond, is 'excessive' in relation to the expression. Hence the love that subsists between the Father and Son is communicated as a further difference that always escapes . . ." (1997a, 274). Cf. Hankey, 1999, 391-5.

<sup>31</sup>Although the immediate context of this phrase, that is, as a description of the Spirit, is my own, it seems to be justified by Milbank's pneumatology. The Deleuzian idea of a "non-identical repetition" is of central importance for him generally, and appears often in his writing. See, for instance, 1995, 132-3, 150; 1997a, 274; 1997c, 65.



Christian theology teaches that God is an infinite othering—a difference that awaits the disseminated responses of all to whom God has gone. “The harmony of the Trinity is therefore not the harmony of a finished totality but the ‘musical’ harmony of infinity” (Milbank 1990, 424). This is to suggest an alternative to the seemingly uncontested verdict of both the ancient and modern worlds that difference presupposes violence. The Trinity is a non-violent community, characterized by excessive love through temporal distance. Christian theology, therefore, poses the possibility of non-identical peace (5). This is the difference, not of city-states in conflict over territory, but of the several pieces of an orchestra, playing various notes and rhythms and volumes, starting and stopping and different times:<sup>32</sup> a “charitable” difference. Such a cacophony can hardly be called harmonious. In this case it is not until the conclusion of the final notes that the entire symphony will have been “in harmony” (or, to use Wesley’s term, “perfect”). To call it thus ahead of time runs counter to evidence, counter even to pure reason, and yet is in accord with faith in a God who is himself non-identically harmonious.

### Gothic Holiness

It has become clear above that, first, Christian perfection necessarily denies the possibility of violent exclusion and, second, that theology is undertaken in a world which assumes the validity of an ontology that can only be called violent. Our vision of peace, therefore, can only be offered as a “live option” if it poses a challenge to this ontology, narrating instead an ontology of *non-violence*. We see such an ontology take shape from a reading of Augustine’s *Trinity*. It remains for us to speculate on how these trinitarian perfections can open a space for an imaginative vision of a peaceful, “perfect” society, an ecclesia. The church, as a perfect collection of saints surrounding the mysterious God, must be envisioned as a radically new phenomenon. We have no blueprint for such a community; we

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<sup>32</sup>Or, perhaps, pace Augustine, the harmony of a choir: “It is what makes concord between high-pitched and deep voices, and if anyone strays discordantly away from it, it is not our knowledge, which many lack, but our very sense of hearing that is painfully offended. To explain this would require a long lecture; but anyone who knows how can demonstrate it to our ears with a tuning string, or tonometer” (1991, 155). Edmund Hill offers an etymology that increases the image of Spirit as charitable bond which constantly restores this harmony: the Latin *harmonia* is originally not a musical term, as in Augustine’s usage, but a term of carpenters and shipbuilders, naming a “clamp” or “fastener,” which served to bind two separate objects together (in Augustine 1991, 177, n. 13).

have only the narratives of the cross, resurrection, and the lives surrounding both. It seems we must continue to rely on our Augustinian methodology: faith seeking understanding. By faith we seek a time and space for human community within the peaceful difference of God.

Here we can be assisted by an analogy from sacred architecture which, while not Milbank's, is at least Milbankian.<sup>33</sup> There is in Eastern Orthodoxy an ancient tradition of "cruciform" churches, or churches constructed so that sanctuary, nave, and transepts intersect, forming a cross, with the "head" pointing east, the "feet" pointing west, and the "arms" stretching out to the north and south. It is most common for the door of the church to be directly across from the sanctuary on the southern end of the building. There is, however, a strand of the tradition among the Coptic churches of northeast Africa which places the door on the north side of the church, just west of the northern transept, that is, below the "right arm" of the cross. The congregation comes and goes through an opening in the *side* of the building. To make the theological implication explicit, the puncture in the side of the body of Christ becomes the opening through which the church can enter. In Milbank's language, the Spirit, as the "second atoner" who is constantly re-opening the body of Christ, provides the way of the church into the peaceful life of the triune God.<sup>34</sup> It thus becomes her work constantly to remake the body of Christ into the *body of Christ*. As the outsiders continue to enter, the body itself is ever changing, endlessly redrawing its borders as it strives in the Spirit to image the very life of God.

Recalling our Augustinian/Wesleyan methodology, we must say that this entrance into the body/church *takes time*. As the Spirit who is love binds the eternity of the Father to the passing moment of the Son, she also binds the multitude of passing moments—human beings—to the eternal life of the Trinity. Our way into the body/church is thus the redemption of time itself, and we bear witness to this redemption by keeping "sacred" time, ordering history according to the repetition of Advent, Epiphany, Lent, Easter, and Pentecost. We thus proclaim our belief that, against all appearances, history itself can become the arena of non-violence.

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<sup>33</sup>The following was told to me by Professor Gene Rogers, who observed these churches recently while traveling in north Africa.

<sup>34</sup>"His giving of the church from his side, and his always *himself* arriving only in and through this giving, participates in the eternal procession of the Spirit" (1995, 150). Here we can see Milbank's strong emphasis on the temporality of the Word made flesh, and therefore on the infinite differentiating repetition of Christ's atoning work.

All of this is, of course, so much speculation, and as such is objectively unjustifiable. We narrate reality in this way not for what philosophy might call a valid "reason," but simply as a result of a conscious decision to construe time and space christologically (1997c, 281). With such a choice, we are already beginning to challenge Kant's assumption that theology must accept the metaphysical space which "pure reason" offers.<sup>35</sup> Instead, Christianity proclaims the advent of a *new* reason, a new Logos, whom Saint John understands to have preceded being itself. Returning to the earlier discussion of the entrenchment of metaphysics within sociological constructions, we can now contrast with the Indo-European obsession with security a *trinitarian obsession with charity*. Whereas the former offered a metaphysics embedded in social hierarchy, the latter speaks of a new "Reason," a Logos *given* from eternity. With this Reason, there is no more need for violent hierarchies: rather than a static system of classes, the trinitarian model is one of interpenetration, mutual transgression, and total absence of subordination (1997b, 466-7). This is our new metaphysics: the Logos made flesh, a Gift from the eternal Father. And we practice this new metaphysics most perfectly when we participate in the non-identically repetitive act of eucharist.<sup>36</sup> These gifts of bread and wine become the center, the gathering point of our re-narration (1997c, 32), and are echoed in the excessive giving and receiving among members of the body.<sup>37</sup> The beginning and end of the eucharistic liturgy in the Christian narrative comprise the new "limits of reason alone."

<sup>35</sup>In an essay on "Catholic social teaching," Milbank contrasts what he calls "simple" time and space with the "doubly exceeding" body of Christ. The first is characterized by groups of individuals in which the whole is equal to the sum of the parts, i.e., representative "democracy." This is still a Kantian metaphysics, with its emphasis on the "rights" of isolated individuals, and all too easily collapses into violence. The latter, on the other hand, is characterized by the sort of fluctuation we have been tracing above; at any given time in the life of the church, the members are more than just fragmented pieces of the whole, and at the same, the whole infinitely exceeds all the individual parts. Sacred time and space, therefore, are situated beyond the limits of liberal democracy, marking out the rule of charity beyond the rule of contractual compromise (1997c, 280-5).

<sup>36</sup>"Perpetual eucharist: that is to say, a living through the offering (*through* the offering, through the *offering*) of the gift given to us of God himself in the flesh" (1995, 152). Cf. 1997c, 186.

<sup>37</sup>In the essay on morality (see n. 23 above), Milbank concludes with the specifically Christian version of "being good," which involves a faith that strives to "hear the other, receive the other, and through the other receive the gratuitous God. Cease to be self-sufficient in the face of scarcity. Instead to be good as first receiving from the all-sufficiency of God, and acting excessively out of this excess" (1997c, 231).

Time and space, as understood in the body/church, thus become the time and space of charity. No market economy can advise this metaphysics; it is only the Spirit-ed response of faithful creatures to their vision of the Creator. "The response to God is response to the pressure of the unknown, and if Christians ask 'What is God like?' then they can only point to our 'response' to God in the formulation of community" (1997a, 269). Of course, such a metaphysics will be radically open-ended, because the community which we form will be altogether *unlike* God (ibid.). The Spirit must continue to open the body which we form from the outside; continue to usher the excluded through the doors of the church; continue to make our charity an excessive thing which refuses to be put to rest. This is our liturgical response to "the triune God, who is transcendental peace through differential relation" (1990, 6).

It seems appropriate to conclude this speculation with a metaphor of "social holiness," again architectural, this time taken directly from Milbank. Re-envisioning reality as *entrance* involves the sort of ad hoc adjustments that one finds intrinsic to the design of a gothic cathedral. This is a building which "can be endlessly added to, either extensively through new additions, or intensively through the filling in of detail" (1997c, 276). The result of such a method of architecture approaches a chaotic piling up of materials and dimensions, yet throughout the process a certain note of harmony is sounded. The endless addition and revision is in fact essential to the gothic style (277). Other, more geometrically "true" styles of architecture depend on symmetry, and so prescribe a design that will remain unaltered once the initial stage of construction is complete. If there are to be modifications, they can only come in meticulously calculated, controlled form. The Gothic architect, on the other hand, is free to revise, modify, and add material for as long as the building stands (277-8). If there is a need for light in a certain corridor, for instance, a window can be added, and is thereafter incorporated into the design of the cathedral. The Gothic, in fact, *depends* on such redesign and renovation; it is constantly being reopened on the way to becoming a more perfect church (277-8).

Such renovations, however, do not occur without a certain risk: the contingency of the cathedral "embodies constant recognition of imperfection, of the fragmentary and therefore always-already 'ruined' character of the gothic structure . . . [this character] expresses the Christian imperative of striving for the ultimate at the risk of thereby more comprehensively exhibiting one's finite and fallen insufficiency" (276). Similarly, to

“evacuate” the given metaphysical structures in order to imagine time and space after the vision of the triune God involves an ultimate risk: our efforts to adjust the design are bound to “ruin” the entire cathedral. And yet this is precisely what it means to respond to the Word of God in the continuous, unfinished, renarrating Person of the Spirit.

Unlike the vast majority of Indo-European, Hellenic, and modern variations of community, the Church (*as properly so called*) is not obsessed with the preservation and protection of its own borders, but is constantly transcending them, and allowing them to be penetrated from without (Milbank 1997a, 277). As the structure expands and undergoes revisions, it begins to look more like a gothic town than a cathedral. The boundaries around the church grow fluid and it is difficult to tell just where the sacred ends and the secular begins. Such a wall-less community knows no possibility of exclusion; for charity *requires* the one whom violence *rejects*. We should say, then, that this community knows no possibility of *positive* exclusion: the violence, in the end, is all that gets cut out (1997a, 269).

Such then is our vision, the narrative of peace we are bound to repeat in the hope that it will compel. If God, as Trinity, is in fact difference, if the body of Christ has been opened by the Spirit and is constantly becoming the church, and if the Way has thus been opened for imaginative renarrations of the atonement, then we can perhaps begin to see the dim outlines of a “gothic,” post-violent holiness theology that is taking shape in our time.

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# **THE PATH OF PEACEFUL FLIGHT: MILBANK'S TRINITARIAN ONTOLOGY AND A RE-NARRATION OF WESLEYAN-HOLINESS THEOLOGY**

by

**Henry W. Spaulding II**

The horizon of Wesleyan-holiness theology must include a serious encounter with the work of John Milbank. One clear place where Milbank might point the way forward for Wesleyan-holiness theology is his gesture toward Trinitarian ontology.<sup>1</sup> This is a thoroughly Wesleyan move as these words of John Wesley indicate: “The knowledge of the Three-One God is interwoven with all true Christian faith; with all vital religion.”<sup>2</sup> While Wesley seems to have been uninterested in metaphysical speculation regarding the Trinity, he clearly saw its importance. Those who followed Wesley, while no doubt seeing the importance of the Trinity, have not given sustained attention to the doctrine. Therefore, a disciplined reflection here will enrich the capacity of Wesleyan-holiness theology to address its most basic theological commitments. It is precisely at this

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<sup>1</sup>I am using the term “Trinitarian ontology,” as does Milbank, in order to make it clear that his interest to this point has not been to develop a doctrine of the Trinity. The most that can be said of his work is that it is a gesture toward a way of conceiving reality in a genuinely theological manner.

<sup>2</sup>John Wesley, “On the Trinity” in *The Works of Wesley*. Third Edition (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1979), 6:205.



point that Milbank might be of great importance for Wesleyan-holiness theology.<sup>3</sup>

I begin my looking at Milbank's Trinitarian ontology. First, consideration is given to his philosophical account of Trinitarian ontology, then to his more doctrinal approach, and finally to how all of this might help those of us within the ranks of the Wesleyan-holiness tradition to re-narrate the nature of redemption. This is the "peaceful flight" that I promise in the title of this paper. It is a concept that requires much work in order to appreciate fully. While it will take some time to get there, the path of peaceful flight is the ultimate goal of my reflections.

### Milbank's Trinitarian Ontology: The Path of Peaceful Flight

Milbank's theology is a radical attempt to "reclaim the world by situating its concerns and activities within a theological framework."<sup>4</sup> The depth and breadth of his theological analysis and his constructive proposals testify to the seriousness of his project. The fundamental theological commitment standing at the center of his work can be located in his two major books, *Theology and Social Theory* and *The Word Made Strange*. What emerges is called "Radical Orthodoxy" and is dependent on an underlying attempt to define "Trinitarian ontology." He begins the last chapter of *Theology and Social Theory* by suggesting that "theology itself . . . will have to provide its own account of the final causes at work in human history, on the basis of its own particular, and historically specific faith."<sup>5</sup> In light of this conviction, it is significant that he sketches a counter-history (telling all history from ecclesial origination) and a

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<sup>3</sup>Perhaps, it will help the reader to understand that this paper is part of a larger undertaking in my theological work. My re-consideration of fundamental themes within Wesleyan-holiness began formally with a paper that attempted to reconstruct Christian perfection within a broader polity, which included a richer understanding of the forms of life associated with Christian perfection. This included a fuller understanding of ecclesiology and the sacraments. I continued my reconsideration with an examination of moral theology or more properly the lack thereof within the ranks of Wesleyan-holiness theology. It is in the pages, which follow that I intend to extend this discussion by a fuller accounting of Trinitarian reflection and its promise for Wesleyan-holiness theology.

<sup>4</sup>John Milbank, Graham Ward, and Catherine Pickstock, "Suspending the Material: The Turn of Radical Orthodoxy," in *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology*. Edited by John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock, and Graham Ward (London and New York: Routledge Press, 1999), 1.

<sup>5</sup>John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford, UK and Cambridge, USA: Blackwell Publishers, 1990, 1993), 380.

counter-ethic (the difference from both premodern and postmodern ethics). Yet, the crucial part of this re-narration is counter-ontology, for it is here “where theology articulates the framework of reference implicit in Christian story and action, that this ‘total’ difference is fully clarified, along with its ineradicable ties to non-provable belief.”<sup>6</sup> It is with his clear linking of Christian belief and practice that he begins to lean toward a Trinitarian ontology as counter-ontology.<sup>7</sup>

One preliminary indication of this counter-ontology can be inferred from the last words of *Theology and Social Theory*: “in the midst of the self-torturing circle of secular reason, there can open to view again a series with which it is in no continuity: the emanation of harmonious difference, the exodus of new generations, the path of peaceful flight. . . .”<sup>8</sup> I will attempt to trace “the path of peaceful flight” in order to suggest its importance for Wesleyan-holiness theology. This path requires very specific moves on Milbank’s part. The first is his critical move or his attempt to provide the parameters of a “theo-metaphysic.” Peaceful flight is meta-

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, 381.

<sup>7</sup>The direction Milbank wishes to take can be easily noted by the way he begins the section on counter-ontology:

Christian belief belongs to Christian practice, and it sustains its affirmations about God and creation only by repeating and enacting a metanarrative about how God speaks in the world in order to redeem it. In elaborating the metanarrative of a counter-historical interruption of history, one elaborates also a distinctive practice, a counter-ethics, embodying a social ontology, an account of duty and virtue, and an ineffable element of aesthetic “idiom,” which cannot be fully dealt with in the style of theoretical theology. However, the developing idiom is also an allegorical representation of an idea, a speculation, which practice itself both promotes and presupposes as “setting.” In the speculation, social ontology (which is really a description of and prescription for, the Church) is grounded in a general ontology (concerning the ratio of finite to infinite) and a “counter-ontology” is articulated.

This counter-ontology speculatively confirms three major components of the counter-ethics: first, the practice of charity and forgiveness as involving the priority of a gratuitous creative giving of existence, and so of difference. Secondly, the reconciliation of difference with virtue, fulfilling true virtue only through this reconciliation. Thirdly, the treatment of peace as a primary reality and the denial of always preceding violence indicate counter-ontology (*Theology and Social Theory*, 423)

These comments should serve as an indication of his counter-ontology and a frame understanding his Trinitarian ontology.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, 434.

physics in such a way that all of life is situated through theology. The second move in Milbank is more doctrinal as he looks at the "Second Difference."<sup>9</sup> In other words, the path of peaceful flight is both ontology/ cosmology and theology. The first part of this section will be toward creation and difference, which is the cosmological/ontological move of Milbank. This is the ontological dimension of Milbank's Trinitarian ontology.

**1. Creation and Difference.** One of the more interesting concerns for Milbank is creation. He suggests that one of the ways philosophers, sociologists, and others have attempted to underwrite secular reason is with an idea of creation that includes order from chaos. Modernity denies the Christian doctrine of creation. Secularity and modernity depend upon a "reversion to an antique mythology of rational action as the 'inhibitor of chaos.' . . ."<sup>10</sup> Milbank begins to gesture toward a Trinitarian ontology by suggesting that "the absolute is no longer just 'limit,' no longer finite, as it was for antique philosophy. What was chaos, *apeiron*, the unlimited and finite is now God himself."<sup>11</sup> There is something more fundamental for Milbank than chaos or even difference. God is not a bare undifferentiated Being who is beyond difference and for that matter creation. Milbank's basic starting point for metaphysics is neither an unapproachable unity nor a yet to be realized nature. Accordingly, "Infinite realized act and infinite unrealized power mysteriously coincide in God, and it must be this that supports the circular 'life,' that is more than *stasis*, of the Trinity."<sup>12</sup> Understanding creation and difference, therefore, is not about finding the hints of the Triune God in creation; it is rather about understanding creation as the outflow of a still more fundamental harmony.

The harmony which is the plentitude of God in creation begins with a sense of the relationality of a Triune God:

"power-act" plays out through, and is constituted by, the Trinitarian relations: it is not that the Father is power and the Son act, for this would depersonalize their relation and make it *not* a real surface relation at all (this is why the Father-Son relation is not *just* a signified-signifier one, implying an "absence" of the

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<sup>9</sup>The "Second Difference" is pneumatology and, while Milbank does not express it this way, the "First Difference" is christology or as he does express it, "Christological Poetics."

<sup>10</sup>Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 148.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, 423.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*

Father, but also an “adjacent”, or figurative relation). A relation, even a relation constituting its own poles, can only be a relation between act and act, although it is the play of potential which introduces relation as a moving and dynamic element.<sup>13</sup>

Unity is understood through the difference and difference is comprehended in unity. Yet, it is more than a preliminary or temporary triumph of unity in the face of difference. The relations, which are the Trinitarian life of God, are “not the harmony of a finished totality but a ‘musical’ harmony of infinity.”<sup>14</sup> Understanding how difference and creation are related is essential for getting at Milbank’s counter-ontology. It requires that we look at time itself as relational.

Time is the way God relates to creation. I have already talked about participation as crucial for understanding Milbank, but it should be understood that such participation depends on his Trinitarian ontology. He says, “Creation is therefore not a finished product in space, but is continuously generated *ex nihilo* in time. To sustain this process, the monads, seeds or ratios also self-generate, but in this they do not ‘assist’ God, who supplies all power and all-being, but rather participate in God.”<sup>15</sup> Understanding time through the “external relationality” of the Triune life of God is to begin to see everything through counter-ontology. Milbank says, “The great failure of modern Christian ontology is not to see that secular reason makes the essentially Platonic assumption that ‘the made’ lies beneath the portals of the sacred, such that a humanly made world is regarded as arbitrary and as cutting us off from eternity.”<sup>16</sup> This radical understanding of participation is framed at the human level by charity. Such an understanding underscores the fact that all human initiative is response as a signal of our dependence. Therefore, Trinitarian ontology helps us to understand more fully the anti-Christian dimensions of an assertion of a separate reality from God. It suggests at an even more fundamental level that any sense in which theology is treated as just another field of inquiry is not just wrongheaded, but tragic. This means that time is not a matter of linking tenuously, however, finitude with infinitude, nor is it really even a matter of finding a correspondence between an idea and God, but a partic-

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<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, 424.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, 425.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*

ipation in the very God who is triune. This ontology is difference in unity and unity in difference.

It is not only time and creation, but also language that accounts for externality and points toward a Trinitarian ontology. Milbank says, "A Christian ontology that takes account of language and culture, will then be, more fully than before, a *Trinitarian* ontology."<sup>17</sup> I will explore this idea more fully when we look at the "Second Difference," but it is important to note here that language is tied up with externality and as such with Trinitarian ontology in Milbank's project. According to Bauerschmidt, "Milbank's point . . . is that there is a Christian metaphysics that sees reality as fundamentally linguistic."<sup>18</sup> When looking at creation, this Christian metaphysic posits *ex nihilo*, and regarding language it posits its primordial character. Bauerschmidt observes:

Language is not *representative* but *constitutive* of "natural" abilities. Thus the Christian metaphysics proposed by Milbank might be characterized as an idealist materialism in which the generation of conceptual structures is in a process that is coextensive with the generation of material cultural forms.<sup>19</sup>

Therefore, Milbank is after a Christian ontology "which does justice to culture and history as an *integral* element of Christian being alongside contemplation and ethical behavior rather than as a 'problem,' external to faith."<sup>20</sup> This desire is completely consistent with the theological situation of life and thought, which is so central to Milbank's project. Language is not the human construction of reality; rather it is participation in the Triune life of God. While we must admit at this point that Milbank is merely leaning toward a doctrine of the Trinity, it is a significant gesture. Further, it is one that we must acknowledge and look for in future reflections on in Milbank's developing work. Milbank's direction is unmistakable: "When *Verbum* is included as a transcendental, all the transcendentals are transformed into personal, intersubjective, Trinitarian categories: but this leaves us with more than a 'social God' which might be open to appropriation by an ahistorical theology, it leaves us also with a *cultural God*."<sup>21</sup>

<sup>17</sup>Milbank, *The Word Made Strange: Theology, Language, and Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), 80.

<sup>18</sup>Frederick Christian Bauerschmidt, "The Word Made Speculative? John Milbank's Christological Poetics," *Modern Theology*. 15:4 (October 1999): 418.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*: 418-419.

<sup>20</sup>Milbank, *The Word Made Strange*, 79.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, 80.

Therefore, a Trinitarian ontology will avoid the kind of sharp distinctions which tend to complicate participation.

The trajectory of Trinitarian ontology avoids the inevitable positing of violence as having any ontological ground. It avoids the chaos, which figures so importantly in antique metaphysics, but it also avoids the underlying nihilism of postmodernism. Either of these options begins with difference as the fundamental reality. Milbank wants to start elsewhere: "The God who is, who includes difference, and yet is unified, is not a God sifted out as 'truth,' but a God who speaks in the harmonious happening of being."<sup>22</sup> Therefore, Christian theology when it is true to its own ontology posits not conflict but peace as logically prior, albeit a Trinitarian logic.

Evil is accounted for as that unrelated related flight from the infinite peace, which is the Triune life of God. It is, perhaps, due to complicity with secular reason and the inevitable positing of violence that leads Christian theologians to emphasize evil. In fact, the tendency toward dualism is a consistent threat to genuine Christian reflection. Yet, such a threat is only real to the extent that the Trinitarian life of God recedes in favor of an ontology that posits chaos as its staring point. While it may not be possible to convincingly demonstrate the priority of peace, at least a gesturing toward a Trinitarian ontology can point toward the possibility, even hope of a liturgical consummation of philosophy and life. Perhaps in such a movement we can better understand that all creation will join in worship of the God who is One in Three.

**2. The Second Difference.** The previous section was an attempt to give a philosophical account of Milbank's Trinitarian ontology. Toward that end the emphasis on act/event, relation, time, harmony, culture and language served to indicate the conviction with which he attempts to define an alternative. The power of this alternative involves two moments, one critical and the other constructive. The critical movement is dependent on the persuasiveness with which he can name the implications of those theologies, which have wrapped themselves around secular reason. At one level this becomes evident in the emergence of liberalism, but the larger picture is the notion of onto-theology. Wayne Hankey defines onto-theology in the following way: "philosophical theology confuses Being with beings, and turns God into a super being. God becomes comprehen-

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<sup>22</sup>Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 430.

sible within a particular conception of being. . . . This relation reduces being so understood to manipulable things.”<sup>23</sup> Milbank with amazing breadth defines this alien conception in relation to liberalism, positivism, dialectics, and difference. He does this critically through pointing to the presence of secular reason and constructively by pointing to counter-ontology, that is Trinitarian ontology. Milbank develops his more doctrinal reflection on the Trinity in an essay entitled “The Second Difference.” He begins his reflection by saying:

If theology is properly the elucidation of the Godhead of the Son, then it is not surprising that pneumatology should find expression only as an echo, an afterthought. Yet if we are to believe Origen, it is precisely in the distinguished knowledge of Pneuma, that the distinction of Christianity most lies. Perhaps theology still awaits its complementation by a *theopneumatics*.<sup>24</sup>

Essentially, the problem with Trinitarian reflection has most often been an account of the Spirit which is more than a bond between Father and Son, or an echo of the Son. Milbank looks for “A latent Trinitarian logic, perhaps, in which the sequence of substantial relations can be stated in such a way that threefoldness becomes inescapable.”<sup>25</sup> He justifiably feels that such logic is necessary in order to avoid either arbitrariness or positivity regarding pneumatology or a doctrine of the Trinity. It is with the articulation of a theology of the Spirit that Trinitarian thinking begins.

Milbank looks at two solutions to the problem he is addressing. The first is Catholic transcendentalism. He is looking specifically at three Roman Catholic theologians: Louis Bouyer, Yves Congar, and Walter Kasper. Milbank tends to see the Trinitarianism which arises from these theologians as “an uneasy amalgam of personalist and Kantian perspectives. . . .”<sup>26</sup> Fundamentally his problem is that they “turn primary discourse and practice into a *foundational* point of reference.”<sup>27</sup> It is in this light that Milbank first indicates his point of view: “Neither theological

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<sup>23</sup>Wayne Hankey, “Theoria Versus Poesis: Neoplatonism and Trinitarian Difference in Aquinas, John Milbank, Jean-Luc Marion, and John Zizioulas,” *Modern Theology*. 15:4 (October 1999): 388.

<sup>24</sup>Milbank, *The Word Made Strange*, 171.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, 173.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, 175.

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, 179.

concepts, *nor* ‘original’ narratives and images are foundational, but a constant movement between the two ensures a mutual enrichment.”<sup>28</sup> He sees, by contrast, that Catholic transcendentalism turns on “mythic foundationalism” and “epistemological foundationalism.” Here the Father becomes a self-positing subject and the Spirit “the categorical possibility of freedom which allows the first paternal instantiation of freedom to evoke a commensurate response.”<sup>29</sup> The foundational tendencies of this view along with its alternative positivism point to the need for another alternative.

Milbank also looks at what he calls Protestant Hegelism, that is “the Trinity is seen in terms of God’s involvement in historical becoming, and the Spirit as God’s eschatological arrival in the Kingdom, already anticipated in the Church.”<sup>30</sup> He feels that Jürgen Moltmann, Wolfhart Pannenberg, and Eberhard Jüngel all present variations on this understanding. According to Milbank, Moltmann’s Trinity incorporates a necessary alienation, which is problematic for Trinitarian reflection. He suggests that Pannenberg’s approach is more sophisticated in that “he retains the logic of substantial relations with respect to historical becoming, such that the Son and the Spirit are ‘always already’ present as an anticipation of the future, which alone finally defines their subsistent content.”<sup>31</sup> Yet, this analysis, according to Milbank, weakens Moltmann’s emphasis on suffering in favor of “a developmental immanence of the final, peaceful outcome.”<sup>32</sup> Milbank observes that Jüngel is still Hegelian and modalist, “the transcendent paternal subject freely identifies himself with the man Jesus Christ in his death on the Cross.”<sup>33</sup> The problem here is that “necessary estrangement is justified by final outcome.”<sup>34</sup> This locates the problem not only in comprehending the Trinitarian relations in non-modalist and non-tritheistic terms, but also in linking Trinity to creation/Fall. This is problematic in that it unduly separates the immanent Trinity from the economic Trinity. Yet, it is the dependence on Hegel that saves Protestant reflection on the Trinity from fully incorporating the separation. Mil-

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<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*, 180.

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, 181.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*, 182.



bank's critique locates the problematic in two very distinct places. First, it posits a necessary estrangement in the conception of the economic Trinity. This leads to a second difficulty, which can be stated as some posited interval between creator and creation. This problematic amounts to an inadequate Trinitarian theology.

Since Hegel is, according to Milbank, "the most profound modern mediator upon the identity of the Holy Spirit. . .,"<sup>35</sup> he offers a pathway for considering "the pathos of Christ's absence, of the Spirit's atoning work, and of the connection between Spirit and community."<sup>36</sup> This suggests that, while finally Hegel will be inadequate for understanding either a Trinitarian ontology or a fully developed doctrine of the Trinity, his philosophy might be helpful in the linking of salvation and the Trinitarian life of God. What is important for my current investigation is a fuller account of the Second Difference in Milbank's theology. Bauerschmidt offers his own summary in an article which finally critiques Milbank:

Just as Milbank's emphasis on the Spirit's act of reception of the Word reverses the normal direction of Trinitarian causality, so too his emphasis upon the Spirit-constituted church's non-identical repetition of the practice of Jesus reverses the normal relationship between head and body. And the objective indeterminacy of the Spirit's reception—it is the "dynamic surplus" of the Spirit's act of judgement concerning the Word's form "surpasses the formal object and constitutes 'subjectivity' "—means that it is impossible to speak of Jesus apart from that reception.<sup>37</sup>

He goes on to call this a case "of the philosophical tail wagging the theological dog."<sup>38</sup> Whether this is the case or not is a matter of dispute, but it correctly states the fundamental direction of Milbank's understanding as it calls attention to his linguistic ontology.

Milbank has already observed that the Second Difference is the decisive movement in a Trinitarian theology. While this is hardly a surprising observation, it does hit at the core of Trinitarian reflection by insisting that an adequate pneumatology be defined. The critique of Bauerschmidt

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*, 183.

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup>Bauerschmidt: 429.

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*

notwithstanding, Milbank is calling attention to an issue that anyone who has ever taught Systematic Theology has faced, that is how to account for the person of the Spirit. As Milbank observes, “time and again the Spirit is falsely seen as more immanent, more economic, than the other two persons: a ‘go-between God’ whose redundant mediation only obscures the immediacy of the divine presence.”<sup>39</sup> This leads Milbank to argue “that if one conceives of God as ‘interpersonal,’ then one must also conceive him as ‘linguistic.’”<sup>40</sup> He thinks that this will make it possible to understand the relationship of the Spirit to the Trinity.<sup>41</sup>

All of this leads Milbank to suggest an “aesthetics of reception”<sup>42</sup> for providing a more adequate Trinitarian logic:

In this aesthetic moment, the place of the Holy Spirit is secured as the irreducibility of the interpretative moment either to formal structure, *or to a priori* aesthetic categories of subjectivity. In this way a reduction of Trinitarian logic to dialectics, in which Father and Son as it were “hand over” the univocal outcome of their intercourse, is overcome. Instead, the Spirit who proceeds from paternal-filial difference is genuinely a “second difference” whose situation is that of a listener to a rhetorical plea of one upon the other.<sup>43</sup>

This is, according to Milbank, the only way that Second Difference can be understood adequately. He is after an understanding of the Trinity which “takes absence as the occasion for rhetorical community, and not dialectical unity, nor infinite concealment and betrayal.”<sup>44</sup> This means that the “important thing for the future of Trinitarian doctrine is at once to reclaim the themes developed in all kinds of gnosticism in all their profundity, and yet to show that orthodoxy exhibits a wisdom which is beyond even that of the gnostics.”<sup>45</sup> Thus, it is possible to see in Milbank a linking of Trinitarian ontology, ecclesiology, liturgy, and atonement.

<sup>39</sup>Milbank, *The Word Made Strange*, 174.

<sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*, 177.

<sup>41</sup>Cf. John V. Taylor, *The Go Between God: The Holy Spirit and the Christian Mission* (London: SCM, Ltd, 1972). This book is an example of the danger that Milbank is addressing here.

<sup>42</sup>Milbank, *The Word Made Strange*, 188.

<sup>43</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup>*Ibid.*, 189.

<sup>45</sup>*Ibid.*, 190.

This is the precise place where his reflections might enable Wesleyan-holiness theology to “go on.”

The importance of Milbank's Trinitarian reflection is so nuanced, so broad, and so original that a full accounting of it is not possible here. Yet I have attempted to locate the parameters of his reflection by calling attention to his Trinitarian ontology. First, it is crucial to understand the importance of harmonic peace, musicality, and external relationality in Milbank. It is precisely with these ideas that he begins to flesh out counter-kingdom, defined by peaceful flight. It appears that the church is the field on which the Second Difference receives the *logos* and extends the sphere of musical harmony. Indeed, this is played out amid the contingencies of history. Second, it is also important to begin to see the possibilities of linguistic ontology for defining the Trinity in such way that liturgy and ecclesiology become more than an appendix for theology. Responding to his critics, Milbank says:

Since God is not an object in the world, he cannot be available to us before our response to him, but in this response—our work, our gift, our art, our hymn—he is already present. Moreover, such poetic, theurgic, sacramental presence, is for Christianity as not for neoplatonism, also fully theoretical, intellectual presence, since with the Trinity Christianity has succeeded in thinking thought as absolute simple, precisely because it no longer thinks of it as reflexion, but as relation, poesis and vision.<sup>46</sup>

While some questions are left unresolved, Milbank's proposal is worth considering. His critical engagement with onto-theology is his major contribution to contemporary theology. His clear diagnosis regarding the nihilism inherent in most postmodern theology is helpful. Yet, it would be unwise to pass over “too-quickly” his constructive proposals. Even if Milbank only gestures toward pneumatology or even a doctrine of the Trinity, his work is worth serious consideration. The next section should be understood as a basic attempt to recover Trinitarian reflection for Wesleyan-holiness theology, which is the path of peaceful flight.

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<sup>46</sup>John Milbank, “Intensities,” *Modern Theology*. 15:4 (October 1999): 486.

## A Preliminary Re-Narration of a Wesleyan-Holiness Understanding of Salvation

The absence of sustained Trinitarian reflection by Wesley and those who have consciously sought to work in the Wesleyan-holiness family has been noted.<sup>47</sup> This fact should not, however, be interpreted as meaning that Wesley was not interested in the Trinity, just that the kind of reflection that could be defined as metaphysical, ontological, and/or speculative was of little interest to him. Even so, the significance of Trinitarian reflection can be seen at the core of Wesleyan theology.<sup>48</sup> Maddox explains this apparent contradiction by describing Wesley's theology as "practical-theological activity."<sup>49</sup> It is, perhaps, the task of the present generation of theologians to develop a Trinitarian ontology, which will enrich not only the practice of Christian holiness, but also the speculative capacities of the tradition. This section should be understood as a preliminary gesture in that direction.

Wesleyan-holiness theology must become more explicitly Trinitarian. Such a move can have far-reaching effects for our tradition. For example, it is imperative that we lift the horizon of theological reflection in the Wesleyan-holiness tradition beyond an exclusive consideration of the moral imperative. While such considerations are important, there is much more

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<sup>47</sup>Sam Powell observes, "The doctrine of the trinity among 19<sup>th</sup> century Arminian-Wesleyans is like a vulgar joke in polite company. It is the Christian antique: to be admired, but not used." Sam Powell, "The Doctrine of the Trinity in 19<sup>th</sup> Century American Wesleyanism 1850-1900," *Wesleyan Theological Journal*. 18:2 (Fall 1983): 33.

<sup>48</sup>Randy L. Maddox makes this claim regarding John Wesley: "He actually argued that the truth of the Trinity 'enters into the very heart of Christianity; it lies at the root of all vital religion'. Of course, he immediately added that it was belief in the *fact* of the Trinity that was involved here, not adherence to any specific philosophical explication of the Trinity." Cf. Randy Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon/Kingswood Books, 1994), 139.

Maddox indicates that John and Charles Wesley "sought to form in their Methodist followers a truly trinitarian balance of (1) reverence for the God of Holy Love and for God/Father's original design for human life, (2) gratitude for the unmerited Divine Initiative in Christ that frees us from the guilt and enslavement of our sin, and (3) responsiveness to the Presence of the Holy Spirit that empowers our recovery of the Divine Image in our lives. There can be no better expression of Wesley's theology of *responsible grace* than Christians who preserve such a trinitarian balance as they proceed along the Way of Salvation" (140).

<sup>49</sup>Maddox, *Responsible Grace*: 139.

that demands our sustained attention. It will be important to materially relate doctrines such as ecclesiology and Christology.<sup>50</sup> Trinitarian reflection might also help us to define the relationship between liturgy and the self, or the theological orientation of Christian practice.<sup>51</sup> Perhaps Trinitarian reflection could help the Wesleyan-holiness tradition come to terms with the doctrine of the Spirit in other than purely experiential-expressive ways. A fair reading of the themes which have given shape to Wesleyan-holiness theology might suggest that an articulation of a Second Difference, that is, a Trinitarian ontology, will be necessary for our tradition to "go on." Perhaps, our legitimate concern to call attention to the work of Christ has run the risk of turning the Christ into a hero who defeats our enemy and pleads our case to the Divine Judge. There is little need for a Second Difference in such a scheme. One might even wonder if the Trinity could be anything other than an afterthought within such a scheme. Trinitarian reflection in the Wesleyan-holiness tradition could provide the means to re-examine our most basic theological commitments.

I will argue in the remainder of this paper that Milbank's Trinitarian ontology might help those of us within the Wesleyan-holiness tradition to accomplish this task. Further, I want to test this theological conviction by looking at soteriology. Specifically, I want to point to some theological problems associated with the relationship between Wesleyan-holiness theology and the satisfaction theory of the Atonement which might be more fully addressed through a renewed reflection on the Trinity.

**1. The Problem Stated.** The Satisfaction Theory of the Atonement enjoys a long history in the Christian tradition, including the Wesleyan-holiness tradition. H. Ray Dunning talks about "Satisfaction Theories" under which he places Anselm, Calvin, and even Grotius.<sup>52</sup> It is, of course, true that variations on this view are nearly universal among Chris-

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<sup>50</sup>Cf. Paul Bassett, "The Interplay of Christology and Ecclesiology in the Theology of the Holiness Movement," *Wesleyan Theological Journal*. 16:2 (Fall 1981).

<sup>51</sup>Cf. E. Byron Anderson, "Trinitarian Grammar of the Liturgy and the Liturgical Practice of the Self," *Wesleyan Theological Journal*. 34:2 (Fall 1999).

<sup>52</sup>H. Ray Dunning, *Grace, Faith and Holiness: A Wesleyan Systematic Theology* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1988): 336. It should be understood that the following analysis of "satisfaction theories" includes the Punishment and Governmental theories. Further, my analysis is not intended to ignore the subtle differences between the theories, but rather to call attention to the fact that they all share a common assumption.

tians.<sup>53</sup> Essentially this family of theories assumes the “necessity of an ‘antecedent satisfaction’ as the condition for the remission of sins.”<sup>54</sup> This is all the more problematic in light of the fact that Wesley held to a Satisfaction Theory, which is according to Dunning “antithetical to his central soteriological claims.”<sup>55</sup> This is a problem that many have noted or otherwise struggled with in the Wesleyan-holiness tradition. It is both a theological and a practical problem.<sup>56</sup>

H. Orton Wiley in his *Christian Theology* points to several limitations of the Satisfaction Theory. First, “It is in [the] attempt to impute our sin to Christ as His own, that the weakness of this type of substitution appears.”<sup>57</sup> Sin is not actually punished or it is punished without demerit in the one being punished. Second, there is a tendency to conceive of substitution in a too narrow fashion, that is, only the penal substitution theory is appropriate. Wiley argues that the Governmental theory offers an alternative and better understanding. Third, the “theory leads of necessity, either to universalism on the one hand or unconditional election on the

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<sup>53</sup>Barry L. Callen observes: “This atonement model remains in common use in the Christian community. The Lausanne Covenant (1974) says that Jesus ‘gave himself as the only ransom for sinners’ (satisfaction). The Junaluska Affirmation (1975) states that ‘by His [Jesus] death on the cross the sinless Son propitiated the holy wrath of the Father, a righteous anger occasioned by sin.’ Such focus on propitiation (appeasement) of God is unacceptable to some who prefer to avoid a theological affirmation presuming God’s wrath and anger.” Cf. Barry L. Callen, *God As Loving Grace* (Nappanee, Ind.: Evangel Publishing House, 1996), 236-237.

<sup>54</sup>Dunning, *Grace, Faith, and Holiness*, 337.

<sup>55</sup>*Ibid.*, 362. Dunning is even more direct in another of his books: “No version of the satisfaction theory provides any logical grounds for asserting the necessity of holiness of heart and life. An authentic view of the atonement must provide for both faith alone and holy living, and a fully developed Wesleyan interpretation that looks at Scripture theologically will do this.” Cf. H. Ray Dunning, *Reflecting the Divine Image: Christian Ethics in Wesleyan Perspective* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1998), 26.

<sup>56</sup>Barry Callen suggests: “While several New Testament references clearly employ the metaphor of substitution or satisfaction, much in the New Testament can be seen as resisting any overemphasis on this metaphor since it hardly pictures the Father of our Lord as bringing ‘good news of great joy’ when the news centers in God’s justice needing to be placated with a literal human sacrifice. If grace is made conditional on required satisfaction, is it really grace?” (Barry L. Callen, *God As Loving Grace*, 237-238).

<sup>57</sup>H. Orton Wiley, *Christian Theology* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1952): 2: 245.

other.”<sup>58</sup> Fourth, Wiley sees that this “theory is associated with the Calvinistic ideas of predestination and limited atonement.”<sup>59</sup> This observation is connected to the way grace is to be understood. Finally, Wiley thinks that it leads “logically to antinominanism.”<sup>60</sup> It inevitably separates faith and sanctity. This alone raises issues of great significance for a Wesleyan-holiness theology. All of this can be summed up in the words of Dunning: “The real problem for a sound theology is making provision for sanctification without losing the biblical emphasis on justification by faith alone.”<sup>61</sup> While both Wiley and Dunning point to important issues, there is an underlying concern which links everything together. It is toward this reality that I think our attention should be turned.

For Wesleyan-holiness theology, the fundamental problem with maintaining a satisfaction theory of atonement is the radically different understanding of God assumed by each. The satisfaction theory assumes that the real problem in the atonement is with God. Either God's honor or his holiness must be addressed before atonement can be consummated. Leaving aside the substantialist notions that such a view of sin and for that matter grace/holiness implies, the real problem is the assumption that God has constructed a barrier separating Himself from humankind. Inevitably this pits Jesus against Father; it is Jesus who as our redeemer pleads for mercy to the Father who is our Judge. Such a construction seems at the most fundamental level to be tritheistic and as such it is sub-Trinitarian, and perhaps anti-Trinitarian.

Looking at the issue from a more consistent Trinitarian point of view, we see a God who in the fullness of his grace has reached us. This view is unapologetically relational, but it is at the same time Trinitarian. I am aware of two interrelated attempts to address the problem within the ranks of Wesleyan-holiness theology. The first attempt is made by H. Ray Dunning in *Grace, Faith, and Holiness* where he argues that Wesley's uses of the threefold office of Christ lends itself to “an Atonement motif.”<sup>62</sup> He argues his case persuasively as both biblical and Wesleyan. A second approach is offered by R. Larry Shelton: “The central paradigm

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<sup>58</sup>*Ibid.*, 246.

<sup>59</sup>*Ibid.*, 247.

<sup>60</sup>*Ibid.*, 248-249.

<sup>61</sup>Dunning, *Grace, Faith, and Holiness*, 364.

<sup>62</sup>*Ibid.*, 366. Cf. John Deschner, *Wesley's Christology: An Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1960, 1985).

of this saving relationship in Scripture is the covenant in both its cultic and its interpersonal elements as understood and expressed in the life of the community.”<sup>63</sup> He argues that this paradigm has the advantage of being biblical, as well as both personal and communal. He says further: “The covenant relationship between God and His people is thus central to the entire biblical message of salvation.”<sup>64</sup> In this light, it is intriguing that Shelton observes: “Anselm’s emphasis on the importance of maintaining God’s honor and on the atoning significance of Christ’s obedience are important elements to be maintained in a theory of Atonement.”<sup>65</sup> Both attempts use relational categories regarding sin and holiness. Both Dunning and Shelton believe that such a description is more biblical and truer to Wesley. In other words, approaching salvation either through the three-fold office of Christ or the Covenant frees those within the Wesleyan-holiness tradition to avoid the weaknesses named by Wiley. Both are serious attempts to deal with the incongruity described above. Yet, Trinitarian concerns are not central to either view.

After looking briefly at the problem, which is noted by many, including Wiley and Dunning, it seems to me that the perspective of Milbank might be of service. I argue that the best alternative for resolving the “Satisfaction/Holiness” problem can best be addressed by a more sustained reflection on the Trinity. Wesley himself seems to pull all of this together in a comment on 1 John 5: 7-8:

The testimony of the Spirit, the water, and the blood is by an eminent gradation corroborated by three who give still greater

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<sup>63</sup>R. Larry Shelton, “The Redemptive Grace of God in Christ,” in *A Contemporary Wesleyan Theology: Biblical, Systematic, and Practical*. 2 Vols. Edited by Charles Carter, R. Duane Thompson, and Charles Wilson (Grand Rapids, MI: Francis Asbury Press/Zondervan Publishing House, 1983): 1: 473. Larry Shelton addresses this issue in an article in the *Wesleyan Theological Journal* as well. He says, “it is possible to stress the covenant relationship between God and His people while minimizing the insertion of theological constructs which are external to the canonical text or which are occasional rather than universal paradigms for atonement.” See, R. Larry Shelton, “A Covenant Concept of Atonement,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal*. 19:1 (Spring 1984): 91. He adds: “the covenant model, since it is Biblical, provides a balance which prevents an overemphasis on either mere sentimentality or on the rigid deterministic categories which obscure both the seeking love of God and the reality of His actual work in the believer” (105).

<sup>64</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup>*Ibid.*, 505.



testimony. *The Father*—Who clearly testified of the Son, both at His baptism and at His transfiguration. *The Word*—Who testified of Himself on many occasions, while He was on earth; and again with still greater solemnity, after His ascension into heaven. *And the Spirit*—Whose testimony was added chiefly after His glorification. *And these three are one*—Even as those two, the Father and the Son, are one. Nothing can separate the Spirit from the Father and the Son.<sup>66</sup>

It is important to remember the thoroughgoing saturation of redemption and salvation which informs the text Wesley is addressing. This fact, when linked to Wesley's own reflection on the Trinity in his notes, gives me a warrant call for the same. Specifically, I intend to outline briefly the need to more fully comprehend sanctity through Milbank's Trinitarian ontology. I think that such a gesture is not only Milbankian, but Wesleyan and finally biblical. It is in every way the path of peaceful flight.

**2. Can a Gift be Given?**<sup>67</sup> The path of peaceful flight unfolds the beauty of God as it opens all reality to the gift of God in Christ and envisions the eschatological presence of the Church in the power of the Spirit. Such a re-narration of salvation must include three movements: beauty,

<sup>66</sup>John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament* (London: Epworth Press, 1754, 1976): 917.

<sup>67</sup>The title of this section is chosen because of a particular essay entitled "Can a Gift be Given: Prolegomena to a Future Trinitarian Metaphysic." Milbank attempts to look at the meaning of the gift from a theological perspective. He writes, "Eventually, this relation between, on the one hand, primordial give and take, and on the other hand, the historical irruption of *agape*, will be my main concern." See John Milbank, "Can a Gift be Given?: Prolegomena to a Future Trinitarian Metaphysic," *Modern Theology*. 11:1 (January 1995): 119. He goes on in his analysis of the beginning question to "suggest that the gift is, first of all, inseparable from exchange. . . (121). This means that the giving of the gift is caught up in taking, corruption, donation, and brute principle. These ambiguities suggest that the answer to the question is not as simple as it might on first sight appear. He asks: "if gifts are only good according to the measure of concealed moral contracts, debts and obligations, what is a gift after all?" (125). Perhaps, a gift is really a concealed obligation. How we intend to answer these questions goes to the heart of re-narrating salvation. Is the one forgiven of an offense obligated to forgive the other? Is it possible to think about ecclesial community as those who are obligated to be holy? Could it be that the economy of grace is reduced to something like commerce? The answer can only be yes, if something other than Trinitarian theology informs us. Salvation, when it is conceived through the Trinity, could never be either a payment to Satan or a satisfaction of the Father.

poesis, and vision. First, understanding salvation requires a re-emphasis upon beauty/harmonic peace.<sup>68</sup> The Christian faith and in particular Wesleyan-holiness theology seems to be positioned to recover beauty as a theological conviction. Beauty begins with an understanding of God as beautiful, whole, musical, and holy. It also means that God invites all of creation to join in the music of His harmonic peace. Perhaps theology is aesthetics when viewed through the Trinity. Music is an apt metaphor for beginning to appreciate beauty. David Cunningham says, "Christianity proclaims a polyphonic understanding of God—one in which *difference* provides an alternative to a monolithic homogeneity, yet without becoming a source of exclusion."<sup>69</sup> Such an understanding cannot be the product of formal logic or a preoccupation with some completed substance; rather it points to a more fundamental beauty of creation out of nothing, the unceasing love of God. Therefore, beauty as a theological conviction finds warrant in a Triune God. It is expressed in creation:

Creation is always found as a given, but developing "order." As the gift of God, creation also belongs to God, it is within God as the *Logos*. But existing harmonics, existing "extensions" of time and space, constantly give rise to new "intentions," to movements of the Spirit to further creative expression, new temporal unraveling of creation *ex nihilo*, in which human beings most consciously participate. Yet even this movement, the vehicle of human autonomy, is fully from God, is nothing *in addition* to the divine act-potential, and not equivocally different in relation to him.<sup>70</sup>

The unceasing love of God weaves a musical harmony that invites everything to participate in it. It has long been recognized that part of what Trinitarian theology attempted involved a clear linking of God, salvation, and creation.

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<sup>68</sup>While I appreciate the tenor of Marjorie Suchocki when she calls attention to beauty as one dimension of well-being, it is my sense that her formulation is onto-theology, while what I am attempting to get at is theo-ontology. Cf, Majorie Hewitt Suchocki, *The Fall to Violence: Original Sin in Relational Theology* (New York: The Continuum Publishing Company, 1994).

<sup>69</sup>David Cunningham, *These Three are One: The Practice of Trinitarian Theology* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 129.

<sup>70</sup>John Milbank, "Postmodern Critical Augustinianism: A Short *Summa* in Forty-two Responses to Unasked Questions," *Modern Theology*, 7:3 (April 1991), 377.

Wesleyan-holiness theology has talked in terms of the renewal of the image of God, but often stopped short of understanding the cosmological implications of salvation. Beauty is the conviction that within the Triune life of God there is the capacity to fashion a musical harmony for the cosmos. Can the gift be given? Yes, the gift is the beauty of the Triune life of God, which envisions wholeness instead of alienation, peace instead of violence.

The second movement in a re-narration of salvation is *poesis*. Milbank describes this as “the idea that human making is not a merely instrumental and arbitrary matter, but itself a route which opens towards the transcendent. . . .”<sup>71</sup> Such an understanding avoids the temptation to think of salvation in purely personal terms. At the very least, it seems short-sighted to conceive of salvation “purely” in terms of a decision or a response. Salvation is not what God and the individual accomplish together; it is what God preveniently brings about in the life of the believer. To the extent that salvation is construed through a “possessive individualism” it becomes a transaction between God and humankind, one that all too often is as much a personal achievement as it is a divine gift. *Poesis* can enhance the capacity of Wesleyan-holiness theology to more fully comprehend the meaning of putting our salvation to work. Perhaps, this emphasis can help us to see salvation/holiness as participation. It resists the tendency to reduce holiness to morality because it reminds us at every point that putting our salvation to work is engendered by a transcendent God. Too often salvation is reduced to “my” moment, a time when “I” made the “choice.” *Poesis* is construed through the triune life of God, the One who offers a gift, One who opens the self to its poetic possibilities. Can the gift be given? Yes, if we understand that in the Triune life of God the gift flows from a plentitude of graciousness. It is not withheld until some satisfaction is accomplished or a punishment is accepted. Salvation has always been given, even from the foundation of the world.

The third movement in the re-narration of salvation is vision. This final movement is eschatological to the core. It is the working out of the counter-ontology into another city/counter-kingdom, one that looks toward its completion as it practices the stubborn hope of redemption. Vision is the reminder that there is a “not-yet” about salvation. It admits

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<sup>71</sup>Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 148.

that evil still exists, sometimes it even appears to reign.<sup>72</sup> But most of all it points to centrality of the church, the “Body of Christ” and the “Temple of the Holy Spirit” for the eschatological vision of redemption. If salvation is not “just” a personal thing, it is essential that we see the importance of the church for continuing to incarnate Christ in the world. Cunningham puts it this way: “It can thus help us to recognize the contours of a specifically *Trinitarian* polyphony; it should also begin to *form* us polyphonically, urging us to understand ourselves and others as the various melody-lines that contribute to the symphony of the Church.”<sup>73</sup> Milbank makes it clear that the Counter-Kingdom or The Other City is about salvation. He is equally clear that it is constituted by the Triune life of God. Yet, he is neither blind to the violence that appears to still reign, nor to the church’s complicity with such violence. Milbank speaks clearly to this point:

In the midst of history, the judgement of God has already happened. And either the Church enacts this vision of paradisaal community which this judgement opens out, or else it promotes a hellish society beyond any terrors known to antiquity: *corruptio optimi pessima*. For the Christian interruption of history ‘decoded’ antique virtue, yet thereby helped to unleash first liberalism and then nihilism. Insofar as the Church has failed, and has even become a hellish anti-Church, it has confined Christianity, like everything else, within the cycle of the ceaseless exhaustion and return to violence.<sup>74</sup>

The cross makes such violence absurd, even as it points to the path of peaceful flight. Milbank observes: “An abstract attachment to non-violence is therefore not enough—we need to practice this as a skill, and learn its idiom. The idiom is built up in the Bible, and reaches its consummation in Jesus and the emergence of the Church.”<sup>75</sup> What is really at stake for the Church is its faithfulness to situate all of life within the “emanation of harmonious difference.”<sup>76</sup> The obvious sense in which this is consistent with the Wesleyan-holiness tradition is striking. There are

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<sup>72</sup>There are several implications for theodicy that will be need to be fleshed out.

<sup>73</sup>Cunningham, 135.

<sup>74</sup>Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 433.

<sup>75</sup>*Ibid.*, 398.

<sup>76</sup>*Ibid.*, 434.

two reasons for this. First, Wesleyan-holiness theology sees salvation more fully within the continuing work of the Spirit. Salvation is not only forensic; it is therapeutic. Second, Wesleyan-holiness is saturated with an eschatological hope that says human beings can indeed become holy, not just apparently, but actually.<sup>77</sup>

It remains the task of this generation of Wesleyan-holiness theologians to more fully flesh this out. My contention is that such work requires that Trinitarian ontology serve as the prolegomena for a fuller re-narration of Wesleyan-holiness theology. Can a gift be given? Yes, a gift is given in the continuing and unceasing love of the Triune God in the community of the incarnation. It should be understood from the start that the One who sends the Son gives the Spirit without reserve in order to reclaim creation. If giving is a matter of sacrifice, either to Satan who holds the rights to humankind or to the justice of a Holy God, then it is not a gift. Any attempt to reduce the economy of salvation to some sort of contract reduces the capacity for a Trinitarian theology to inform our speculation and practice. Catherine Pickstock attempts to define one such practice (medieval Roman Rite) and as such points to its Trinitarian implications:

This combination of salvific narration and purificatory reading makes of the book a sacrificial altar, which is censed in preparation for the sacrifice, so that its words appear to ascend as an offering to God. But the text thus burns upwards to join the eternal divine text of the Logos which is nonetheless a book perpetually *uttered* by the Father, uttered as writing, only to re-expire in the out-breathing of the Spirit.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>77</sup>Theodore Runyon underscores this point: "For Wesley religion is not humanity's means of escape to a more tolerable heavenly realm but participation in God's own redemptive enterprise, God's new creation, 'faith working by love,' bringing holiness and happiness to all the earth."

Cf. Theodore Runyon, *The New Creation: John Wesley's Theology Today* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 169. He goes on to address human rights, poverty and the rights of the poor, the rights of women, environmental stewardship, ecumenism, and tolerance. Randy Maddox says: "He [Wesley] vigorously denied any doctrine of 'angelic' perfection, repeating his earlier teaching on the limiting impact of infirmities on our holiness and the continual place for growth in holiness during this life." Cf. Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 185.

<sup>78</sup>Catherine Pickstock, *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 219.

Liturgy, then, is one dimension of the externality of salvation. It is one way in which the church seeks to extend the sphere of aesthetic harmony first envisioned in the Trinity, but eschatologically completed as all nature joins in the chorus.

These three movements—beauty, *poesis*, and vision—gesture toward a more genuine Trinitarian understanding of salvation. They suggest something of the power and possibility of the gift being given. In order to more comprehend this preliminary reflection it might be important to look at the demands of soteriology. First, sin must be accounted for, not just dismissed. This Trinitarian ontology begins with an even greater conviction, the harmonic peace of God, but it does not dismiss sin. Yet, it tends to see that evil is never more fundamental. Rather, evil is always and actually overcome in the fullness of the Triune God and eschatologically overcome in the extension of the sphere of harmonic peace through ecclesial doxology. Second, any understanding of soteriology must be careful to define the place of Jesus Christ. The kingdom of God, that is the counter-kingdom, has appeared in the Christ. Jesus has walked into the face of sin, evil, and death for us in order to subvert the power of darkness.

Graham Ward attempts to deal with this: “From the moment of the incarnation, this body then is physically human and subject to all the infirmities of being, and yet is also a body looking backward to the perfect Adamic corporeality and forward to the corporeality of resurrection. The materiality of this human body is eschatologically informed.”<sup>79</sup> In other words, the incarnation and the resurrection must be accounted for and in fact are in the eschatological community, the church. Jesus Christ has “already” subverted evil through his obedience, even unto death. Jesus Christ has eschatologically delivered all of creation through the resurrection to life, as the first fruits of the resurrection to come. This is the “not-yet” which is progressively called into being through the practice of the faith in this new community called into being by Word and Spirit. This points to the adequacy of a new understanding of salvation viewed through Trinitarian ontology.

Trinitarian ontology engenders the practice of charity, first in the life of God, and then in the paradisaal community of peace:

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<sup>79</sup>Graham Ward, “The Displaced Body of Jesus Christ,” in *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology*. Edited by John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock, and Graham Ward (London and New York: Routledge Press, 1999), 164.

Where Being is already assumed, where Being is what there is to give, even though it is now, for a Christian ontology, seen to be only in this giving, then gift is “further” to Being, and Being itself, as bound in the reciprocal relation of give-and-take, is for-giving, a giving that is in turn, in the Holy Spirit, the gift of relation. And if the created interplay between Being and beings . . . participated in the constitutive distance between Father and Son, then we, as creatures, only *are* as sharing in God’s arrival, his for-giving, and perpetual eucharist. Only if this is the case, if first we really do receive, and receive through our participatory giving in turn, is it conceivable that there is a gift to us, or that we ourselves can give. This is the one given condition of the gift, that we love because God first loved us.<sup>80</sup>

Charity, when it is envisioned through the Trinitarian life of God, resists reduction to gift exchange. It means that we are to understand salvation as the free offer to participate in the Trinitarian life of God. It also means that the gracious God of everlasting relation is neither appeased nor fooled, rather God “for-gives.”

I have attempted to argue that a Trinitarian ontology alone is adequate to re-narrate salvation in such a way that the metaphor of punishment/satisfaction is subverted and Christian holiness envisioned. While the covenant is a more adequate approach than satisfaction, it is still possible to miss the gift and reduce salvation to the calculus of a contract. Likewise the attempt to resolve the dilemma through an insertion of the threefold office of Christ may miss the Trinitarian horizon of salvation, by overlooking the unfolding work of the Spirit in the church. Milbank’s Trinitarian ontology is a preliminary gesture toward a richer understanding. In fact, it is just such reflection that enables us to understand Jesus as more than a “moral” person or a “mask” of divinity:

To identify Jesus, the gospels abandon memetic/diegetic narrative, and resort to metaphors: Jesus is the way, the word, the truth, life, water, bread, and seed of a tree and the fully grown tree, the foundation stone of a new temple and at the same time the whole edifice. These metaphors abandon the temporal and horizontal for the spatial and the vertical. They suggest that Jesus is the most comprehensive possible context: not just

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<sup>80</sup>Milbank, “Can a Gift be Given?,” 154.

the space within which all transactions between time and eternity transpire, but also the beginning of all this space, the culmination of this space, the growth of this space and all the goings in and out within this space. Supremely, he is both work and food: the communicated meanings which emanate from our mouths and yet in this outgoing simultaneously return to them as spiritual nurture.<sup>81</sup>

Christ lives as the ‘body of Christ’ in and through the telling of and the practice of the story. As Milbank says, “the doctrine of the atonement must be drastically reconceived from an ecclesiological vantage point.”<sup>82</sup> It is in this way that atonement, forgiveness, salvation, and even holiness are construed eschatologically. It is in this way that atonement can be “already” and “not-yet.” It is in this way that “transposing Chalcedonian orthodoxy into a new idiom . . .” makes it possible to be orthodox. The Christological question is always a Trinitarian question.

It is in this way that we begin to understand Trinitarian ontology as a gesture of holiness. As often as you do this re-member, that is, as often as you do this re-narrate the gift of the Trinitarian God. Ultimately, remembering is a practice, not as abstract commitment, or as transcendently secured idea. Understanding the link between the Trinity and vital religion is the pathway to a deeper, more profound music. It is understanding salvation as something more than a transaction between a feudal lord and a serf. Neither is it an Almighty God who conquers an inferior challenger. Salvation is the everlasting musical harmony, that we begin to hear in the echo of the eschatological community. It is heard in the path of peaceful flight. Robert Jenson sums this up in the following comment:

God will reign: he will fit created time to triune time and created polity to the *perichoresis* of Father, Son, and Spirit. God will deify the redeemed: their life will be carried and shaped by the life of the Father, Son, and Spirit, and they will know themselves as personal agents in the life so shaped. God will let the redeemed see him: the Father by the Spirit will make Christ’s eyes their eyes. Under all rubrics, the redeemed will be appropriated to God’s own being.

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<sup>81</sup>Milbank, *The Word Made Strange*, 149-150.

<sup>82</sup>*Ibid.*, 162.



The last word to be said about God's triune being is that he "is a great fugue." Therefore, the last word to be said about the redeemed is Jonathan Edward's beautiful saying, cited at the end of the first volume to the converse point: "When I would form an idea of a society in the highest degree happy, I think of them. . . sweetly singing to each other."

The point of identity, infinitely approachable and infinitely approached, the enlivening *telos* of the Kingdom's own life, is perfect harmony between the conversation of the redeemed and the conversation that God is. In the conversation God is; meaning, and melody are one.

The end is music.<sup>83</sup>

This is the path of peaceful flight. . . .

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<sup>83</sup>Robert Jenson, *The Works of God*, vol. 2 of *Systematic Theology* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 369.

# **FROM TULIP TO ROSE: CLARK H. PINNOCK ON THE OPEN AND RISKING GOD**

by

**Barry L. Callen**

By the eighteenth century much Calvinistic theology had solidified into dogmatic assertions about the being of a sovereign God and God's relations to the fallen creation. Formalized at the Synod of Dort (1618-1619), this "TULIP" solidification had become firmly scholasticized Calvinistic dogma. Hardly a fragrant flower lacking rigid and defensive thorns, this particular TULIP consisted of the five affirmed articles of Dort issued in response to the Arminian Remonstrance of 1610. These articles were: (1) Total depravity; (2) Unconditional election; (3) Limited atonement; (4) Irresistible grace; and (5) Perseverance of the saints. These five petals of the theological TULIP are tightly interconnected as the logical chain that would become standard theological thinking for much of evangelicalism in the twentieth century.

John Wesley carried on a long debate with Calvinists, especially the Calvinist George Whitefield. Certainly endorsing the fundamental concepts of a sovereign God and a fallen creation, Wesley's view of the relational and redeeming nature of the sovereign God disallowed any unqualified unfolding for him of at least points 2-5 of Dort's TULIP. In the North American evangelical community of the last half of the twentieth century, this debate continued. Wesley's view managed to gain only a minority position. This now may be changing, at least to some significant degree. A Wesley-sensitive school of thought, often called "Free-Will Theism," has been pioneered by Canadian theologian Clark H. Pinnock.

Since the 1970s, the theological work of Clark Pinnock has taken up the daunting and often controversial task of renewing evangelical theology.<sup>1</sup> In large part this renewal has proceeded by Pinnock's effort to freshly champion key theistic and soteriological insights similar to those of John Wesley. As it was in the eighteenth century, Pinnock's contemporary path often has been hazardous since dogmatic (scholastic) Calvinists remain fixed on the TULIP of Dort.<sup>2</sup> Even so, considerable progress is now being made to "liberate" God from certain non-biblical and rationalistic strictures. Emerging again is the sovereign but also "open" and "risking" God in whom Wesley rejoiced and about whom the troubled world of this new millennium needs to know.<sup>3</sup>

The present task of Pinnock and others is to replace TULIP with what is perceived by them to be the more biblically authentic and pastorally satisfying ROSE (God is **R**elational, **O**pen, **S**uffering, and **E**verywhere-active). The new floral rubric reflects the heart of Wesley's work, has been at the center of Pinnock's work since the 1970s, and is a source of hope for contemporary Christian theism. What follows is a brief tracing of the theological journey that has brought Pinnock to this revised (recovered) theism and the central elements of the new theological ROSE as it has emerged in his pioneering work. The journey began with (1) the results of the "reciprocity principle," led to (2) a revising of "classical" theism, rediscovered (3) the God who is "open" and risks the historical process, and now has generated (4) a passion that emerges from the new metaphor for God.

### The Results of Reciprocity

During the 1950s Clark H. Pinnock, then a new Christian living in Toronto, Canada, was introduced to some of the key institutions of North American evangelicalism. He attended an early Billy Graham crusade in

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<sup>1</sup>See Barry L. Callen, *Clark H. Pinnock: Journey Toward Renewal* (Nappanee, Ind.: Evangel Publishing House, 2000).

<sup>2</sup>One modest exception is the Calvinist Norman Geisler who nuances aspects of the "TULIP" model into a "moderate" instead of an "extreme" Calvinism. He judges an extreme Calvinist to be one who is more Calvinistic than John Calvin himself (*Chosen But Free*, Bethany House Publishers, 1999, 55).

<sup>3</sup>See especially Clark H. Pinnock and others, eds., *The Openness of God* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1994), John Sanders, *The God Who Risks* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1998), and Gregory A. Boyd, *God of the Possible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000).

Toronto and a large missionary conference in Urbana, Illinois. He was encouraged to read evangelicalism's theologically "sound" authors. Going frequently to an Inter-Varsity bookroom in Toronto, he immersed himself in the staunchly Calvinistic writings of John Murray, Martyn Lloyd-Jones, Cornelius Van Til, Carl F. H. Henry, James I. Packer, and Paul Jewett. His attention was directed to Westminster and Fuller seminaries and, for safe and true formation in theology, to leaders like Kenneth Kantzer, John Gerstner, and Gordon Clark.

Although at first absorbing the whole theological ethos of the widely privileged position of Calvinism among evangelicals, Pinnock later would deal forthrightly with several related issues and free himself from much of the TULIP theological model. The significant changes in Pinnock's thinking, especially during the 1970s, were enabled primarily by gaining and then actively pursuing "the insight of reciprocity."<sup>4</sup> Although not at first consciously aware of or intentionally motivated by particular Christian traditions that are reciprocity oriented, Pinnock soon realized that his emerging biblical insights had deep roots in various Christian traditions. They pointed to a "ROSE" theism that had a coloration and fragrance significantly different from the old TULIP.

New perspectives came to Pinnock similar to those typical of theologians like John Wesley and the ancient Orthodox tradition of the East. This tradition does not assume that the human fall into sin has deprived persons of all divine grace or responsibility for responding to God's offer of restored relationship with Christ. Salvation necessarily involves cooperation in divine-human interrelations.<sup>5</sup> While Western (TULIP) theologians typically have shied from such reciprocity, fearing an undermining of the sovereignty of God in favor of a works-righteousness heresy, Eastern theologians have insisted that, while never *meriting* God's acceptance because of human action, it nonetheless is the case that God's freely-bestowed grace empowers humans for *responsible cooperation*. Wesley affirmed the universal gift of "prevenient grace," probably deriving this

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<sup>4</sup>Clark H. Pinnock, "From Augustine To Arminius: A Pilgrimage in Theology," in Pinnock, gen. ed., *The Grace of God and the Will of Man* (Zondervan: Academia Books, 1989, Bethany House Publishers edition, 1995), 19.

<sup>5</sup>See, for instance, Daniel Clendenin, *Eastern Orthodox Christianity* (Baker Books, 1994) and Bishop Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Way* (St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, rev. ed. 1995).

view largely from early Greek theology (especially Macarius).<sup>6</sup> Pinnock now joined this long and more dynamic trail of church tradition, freshly championing a divine-human mutuality that would stimulate a wave of theological innovation (recovery) in evangelical circles. If Wesley had united “pardon” and “participation” motifs, resulting in what some judge his greatest contribution to ecumenical dialogue,<sup>7</sup> Pinnock now was beginning a similar journey that he hoped would make a significant contribution to the renewal of contemporary evangelicalism.

Even though some critics have assigned other motives to his pattern of theological changes in the 1970s, Pinnock claims that they were driven by his own fresh reflections on biblical teaching. With respect to the central issue of the nature of the Bible’s inspiration and authority, for instance, the differences between the early and late Pinnock probably are best explained in the larger context of his theological paradigm shift (TULIP to ROSE). Ray Roennfeldt explains:

In the formulation of his early view of Scripture, Pinnock used the presuppositions of Reformed theism, whereas the later Pinnock consciously works from a more Arminian model without rejecting all aspects of Calvinism. He now considers that Scripture should be understood as the result of both divine initiative and human response. It is his contention that a strict belief in biblical inerrancy is incompatible with anything less than belief in Calvinistic determinism. The Arminian paradigm, which took about ten years to affect Pinnock’s doctrine of Scripture, has been gradually filtering down into all of his theological reflections.<sup>8</sup>

The first link in the Calvinistic chain to break for Pinnock (the first TULIP petal to fall) was the doctrine of perseverance of the saints. At the time of this breaking, Pinnock was teaching at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School (1969-1974) and giving attention to the book of Hebrews. Why, he

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<sup>6</sup>Randy L. Maddox, “John Wesley and Eastern Orthodoxy,” *Asbury Theological Journal*, 45:2 (1990), 35. Maddox develops Wesley’s whole theological vision around the concept of “responsible grace” (*Responsible Grace: John Wesley’s Practical Theology*, Kingswood Books, Abingdon Press, 1994).

<sup>7</sup>See, for example, Albert Outler, “The Place of Wesley in the Christian Tradition,” in *The Place of Wesley in the Christian Tradition*, ed. K. A. Rowe (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1976), 30.

<sup>8</sup>Ray C. W. Roennfeldt, *Clark H. Pinnock on Biblical Authority: An Evolving Position* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1993), 364.

wondered, are Christians warned not to fall away from Christ (e.g., 10:26) and exhorted to persevere (e.g., 3:12) if they enjoy the absolute security taught by five-point Calvinism? In fact, he concluded, human responses to God *are taken seriously by God*. Is there not a dialectic of divine and human interaction, a relationship of reciprocity? The garment of strict Calvinism thus began unraveling for Pinnock with this realization of the truth of reciprocity. A believer's security in God is linked to the faith relationship with God that must be intentionally maintained. There is, in other words, a "profound mutuality" between God and believers.<sup>9</sup> God allows the divine will to be frustrated by human intransigence. A believer's continuance in the saving grace of God depends, at least in part, on the human partner in the divine-human relationship. Pinnock now began to understand that, once the factors of reciprocity and conditionality are introduced, the landscape of Christian theology is altered significantly. On this terrain he could begin to "regard people not as a product of a timeless decree but as God's covenant partners and real players in the flow and the tapestry of history."<sup>10</sup> Human responses actually do matter to God.

Two forces now were at work in Pinnock. First, himself an experienced apologist in the Calvinistic tradition, he tended to think logically, seeing a systematic sequence of results naturally emerging from his new premise of reciprocity. Second, and he insists more basic in his own case, was biblical teaching. When reconsidered in light of the God-human mutuality, the Bible—surprisingly to many "evangelical" believers—presents itself as highly congenial to the fresh insights being inspired by the reciprocity principle. Five doctrinal moves thus occurred for Pinnock dur-

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<sup>9</sup>Pinnock was influenced by I. Howard Marshall's examination of the security issue in his book *Kept by the Power of God: A Study in Perseverance and Falling Away* (London, 1969; Minneapolis, 1975).

<sup>10</sup>Pinnock, "From Augustine To Arminius. . .," 18. Pinnock's colleague and friend John Sanders was traveling a similar road. The shift in theistic view first came to Sanders through his own Bible reading, especially in relation to petitionary prayer. Why pray in a petitionary way if God already has determined everything? To the contrary, Sanders observed, there is a divine-human mutuality (see Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, InterVarsity, 1998). While Pinnock was supplementing his Bible reading with Wesleyan, pentecostal, and process theological sources and finding there much support for an open, free-will theism, Sanders was finding similar support by reading some Dutch Reformed sources, especially the work of Vincent Brümmer.

ing the 1970s, all results of affirming and applying the reciprocity assumption.<sup>11</sup> They may be summarized briefly as follows.

1. **No “Terrible Decree.”** John Calvin had used the phrase “terrible decree” in relation to his belief that God as a sovereign act had destined some people to eternal lostness (*Institutes* 3:23). He reasoned: God wills all things. Since some people will be lost according to the Bible, logic compels the conclusion that God wills such lostness. But with the premise of reciprocity, Pinnock now could see and accept the biblical teaching that God’s desire and will are that *all people* be saved (1 Tim. 2:4; Titus 2:11; Rom. 5:18). Lostness happens only by human choice, not by divine decree.

2. **Corporate View of Election.** What, then about divine election? It is a corporate category, Pinnock concluded. God has chosen *a people* and individuals enter into God’s election as they choose by faith to join the elect body in Christ (Eph. 1:3-14). Election thus encompasses all people, at least potentially, and is a cause for rejoicing rather than for having to defend God from the charge of acting in a morally intolerable way by choosing some people and damning others. Pinnock was helped to see this corporate focus of God’s election by the writing of Robert Shank.<sup>12</sup>

3. **Predestination and Theodicy.** If the biblical narrative reflects a dynamic and interactive pattern of God’s dealing with people, then predestination focuses on God setting goals rather than enforcing preprogrammed decrees. The primary goal for those elect in Christ is that they be conformed to the image of God’s Son (Rom. 8:29). The future is a realm of possibilities for believers who are to be co-workers with God. This view helps greatly to avoid any suggestion that God is the author of evil.<sup>13</sup> Here is the personal witness of Pinnock: “In the past I would slip

<sup>11</sup>A former student and now critic of Pinnock, R. K. McGregor Wright, turns “results of reciprocity” into the negative of “accommodating the assumption of human autonomy” (*No Place for Sovereignty*, InterVarsity Press, 1996, 12).

<sup>12</sup>Robert Shank, *Elect in the Son* (Springfield, Mo.: Westcott, 1970).

<sup>13</sup>See Gregory A. Boyd, *God At War: The Bible and Spiritual Conflict* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1997). Boyd assumes the reality of an active reciprocity between God and a fallen world that has the freedom to choose against the will of God. Boyd argues that theologians still draw too heavily on Augustine’s approach to the problem of evil, an approach that attributes pain and suffering in this world to the mysterious “good” purposes of God. Pinnock is highly appreciative of Boyd’s extensive work, the most recent of which is the book *God of the Possible* (Baker Books, 2000).

into my reading of the Bible dark assumptions about the nature of God's decrees and intentions. What a relief to be done with them!"<sup>14</sup>

**4. Free Will of the Sinner.** Calvinists had defined human sinfulness as total, leaving no room for human freedom to function in relation to potential salvation. But, if there is a divine-human reciprocity, would there not be some room for the functioning of human free will? Pinnock was appreciatively aware of John Wesley's doctrine of universal preventive grace (God graciously compensating for a fallen humanity unable to respond otherwise)<sup>15</sup> and he recognized that the Bible treats people as though they were responsible and able to respond to God. The gospel of Christ and the evangelistic efforts of the church certainly address people as though they are free and responsible. Therefore, Pinnock concludes that such is actually the case.

**5. Atoning Work of Christ.** What then about the very source of human salvation, the atoning work of Jesus Christ? Put simply, Jesus really did die for the sins of the *whole* world, contrary to the more restrictive Calvinian (TULIP) logic. Given the premise of reciprocity, where does human response fit in? If Christ died for all people and no human response is possible or necessary, one would be at universalism (all will finally be saved) or at the old Calvinism (those few who are saved must be saved by God's electing choice). But such are not the only options if stress is placed on the needed human appropriation of the saving act of Christ. Those who are finally saved are those who, in their relative freedom, choose in faith to reach out and accept the divine grace offered—and, of course, persist in their acceptance. Pinnock had become convinced that there is a real reciprocity in the salvation process.

During his time on the faculty of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School (1969-1974), Pinnock concluded that this new (old) cluster of ROSE-like insights deserved a broader hearing. He took the initiative to assemble and edit the essays of several evangelical scholars who were thinking much like himself, resulting in the 1975 book *Grace Unlimited*.<sup>16</sup> These theological results of the reciprocity premise were not well received by all at Trin-

<sup>14</sup>Pinnock, "From Augustine To Arminius. . .," 21.

<sup>15</sup>See Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, Abingdon Press, 1994).

<sup>16</sup>Clark H. Pinnock, ed., *Grace Unlimited* (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1975).



ity. One of Pinnock's own students, R. K. McGregor Wright, found the paradigm shift unacceptable and revisited the subject many years later in the writing of his own *No Place for Sovereignty*.<sup>17</sup> Even so, the results of reciprocity continued and expanded for Pinnock and a growing group of others. They had no intention of supplanting divine sovereignty with some novel teaching; they did intend to look again at the biblical evidence of how the sovereign God chooses to relate to a fallen creation.<sup>18</sup> The results of this ongoing work quickly came to include an altered approach to aspects of "classic" Christian theism (the TULIP variety).

### Into the Eastern and Wesleyan Streams

By the 1990s Clark Pinnock had developed fresh appreciation for key aspects of the Eastern, Wesleyan, charismatic, and even process traditions of Christian life and thought. He now was an "ecumenical evangelical" speaking of three standard profiles of Christian theology, the conservative, moderate, and progressive. He claimed some relationship with all three. His original roots were in the conservative, some of his more recent insights were being inspired in part by the progressive, while by choice his own anchor had been placed in the moderate middle. This clarification is offered:

To distinguish conservative from moderate one would have to say that, for the conservative, the view of revelation that dominates is cognitive and propositional, which imperils flexibility. Whereas for moderates, the view of revelation is closer to the salvation story itself such that the voices of the present can be given a hearing but will not be able to hijack the enterprise, because it is rooted in the Christian grammar.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>17</sup>R. K. McGregor Wright, *No Place for Sovereignty* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1996). Pinnock was a member of Wright's Th.M. thesis committee at Trinity. Wright recalls Pinnock as "very kind and helpful to me. . . considerate and patient, thoughtful and irenic." He also recalls, however, that Pinnock was not pleased when Wright chose to develop a thesis based on the conviction that "apologetics had to be based on a consistent Calvinism" (38). Wright did not realize at the time that "Pinnock was already in a determined retreat from his earlier Calvinist convictions" (39).

<sup>18</sup>See Barry L. Callen, *God As Loving Grace* (Nappanee, Ind.: Evangel Publishing House, 1996). Here the nature of God (loving grace) is viewed as defining the manner of God's relationships to fallen creation—a manner clearly including the love-motivated elements of reciprocity.

<sup>19</sup>Clark H. Pinnock, *Tracking the Maze* (New York: Harper & Row, 1990), 73.

This middle position is characterized by recognition of the full range of human responses generated and enabled by God's disclosure in Jesus Christ. These responses, the written Word, the church that remembers and interprets the Word, and the ongoing experiencing and rational appropriation of the Word in the midst of the community of faith, had come to represent for Pinnock a measure of fullness, balance, and flexibility thought ideal for the work of *moderate* theologians.

Pinnock's journey to this middle position may be pictured as a new turning toward select perspectives of the Eastern tradition of Christian thought. This focus has become Pinnock's integrating perspective, largely replacing the previous Latin focus of the West. By contrast with his earlier rationalistic theological patterns, he now exhibits the characteristics of the relational, therapeutic, transformational, and cooperative approaches to Christian faith. Like John Wesley before him,<sup>20</sup> Pinnock has come to give increased priority to aspects of the Eastern tradition of Christianity, while at key points retaining the *language* and *evangelical audience* of the West, language like the "inerrancy" of the Bible and audience like the Evangelical Theological Society. Pinnock recognizes a helpful addressing of this altered approach in "the so-called quadrilateral of Wesleyan theology"<sup>21</sup> which retains biblical centrality while recognizing key roles for the experience of true transformation of the believer and the continuing wisdom of the church's tradition (including that of the ancient East). In his 1997 keynote address to the Wesleyan Theological Society, Pinnock observed that there is shallowness in the rhetoric of "scripture only" and announced that over the years he had come to realize "how Wesleyan my moves in method and theism were." His conclusion? "I think we need to move to a larger concept of method (as represented by the Wesleyan quadrilateral) and to a more dynamic model of the nature of God (as intimated also in Wesley's thinking)."<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup>Randy L. Maddox has concluded that "Wesley is best read as a theologian who was fundamentally committed to the therapeutic view of Christian life, who struggled to express this view in the terms of the dominant stream of his western Christian setting, and who sought to integrate some of the central convictions of this setting into his more basic therapeutic viewpoint" ("Reading Wesley As Theologian," *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, Spring 1995, 16).

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>22</sup>Clark H. Pinnock, "Evangelical Theologians Facing the Future: Ancient and Future Paradigms," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 33:2 (Fall 1998), 12-13. Pinnock had been invited to keynote the 1997 annual meeting of the Wesleyan

In recent years there have evolved significant similarities between the theological work of John Wesley in the eighteenth century and Clark Pinnock in the twentieth. Both have strong ties to England and significant impact in the “new world.” Both in their times grieved over the lostness of the masses and the desperate need for renewal in the church by the power of the Spirit of God. Both wrote extensively without being “systematic” theologians in a technical and rationalistic sense. Both affirmed most foundations laid by the Protestant Reformers, but each also struggled against hardened scholasticisms within the Protestant ranks. Mildred Bangs Wynkoop says that Wesley unlocked “the scholastic doors to allow the vibrant ‘Word of God’ to illuminate and vitalize the cold, correct Reformation theologies.”<sup>23</sup> Philip Meadows explains that Wesley was

. . . struggling to find a more acceptable balance between the freedom of nature and the sovereignty of grace that can satisfy a truly biblical life of faith. . . . [For Wesley] the idea of divine justice involves a limitation of God’s sovereignty in respect of and response to the genuine creaturely freedom of choice between good and evil.<sup>24</sup>

Wesley, much like the contemporary Pinnock, concluded that God is a “loving personal agent whose gracious power is exercised not at the

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Theological Society by Douglas Strong of Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, D. C. Strong was the WTS program chair that year and invited Pinnock in part because Pinnock’s “scholarly trajectory places him in close proximity to our [Wesleyan] tradition” and in part because he is recognized as “one of the leading North American theologians today and is viewed as a spokesperson for the broad umbrella of American evangelicalism” (email letter from Douglas Strong to Barry Callen). His invitation was supported enthusiastically by the WTS Executive Committee and led to the Society’s support of the publication by Barry L. Callen titled *Clark H. Pinnock: Journey Toward Renewal* (Evangel Publishing House, 2000). The keynote address is found in the Fall 1998 issue of the *Wesleyan Theological Journal* under the title “Evangelical Theologians Facing the Future.”

<sup>23</sup>Mildred Bangs Wynkoop, “John Wesley: Mentor Or Guru?,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* (Spring 1975), 7. See Appendix D of Barry Callen, *Clark H. Pinnock: Journey Toward Renewal* (Evangel Publishing House, 2000) where Pinnock reflects on the trauma experienced as he has sought to renew in more relational categories the view of God’s nature and way with humans. He observes: “Had I been a Wesleyan, I might have had an easier time of it.”

<sup>24</sup>Philip R. Meadows, “Providence, Chance, and the Problem of Suffering,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* (Fall 1999), 72, 62-63.

expense of human agency but in order to set persons free to love.”<sup>25</sup> The issue of human freedom is key. Traditional Protestant teaching has understood “original sin” to mean total corruption of the image of God in humans, so that apart from grace humanity has no freedom to respond to God (leading to the logic of determinism since God alone can and does choose who will be graced with response-ability). Again, joining Wesley, Pinnock has come to believe that the loving God of the Bible “preveniently” graces *all people*, hoping that *all* will respond and be saved. Pinnock also is open to the Eastern Orthodox position on sin and grace which includes real freedom for humans, so that salvation requires the joint functioning of divine grace and human free will—God’s intent, provision, and risk. Randy Maddox has concluded that the closest resemblance between Orthodoxy (early Eastern) and Wesley likely lies in “their respective doctrines of deification and sanctification.”<sup>26</sup> Similarly, Clark Pinnock has been on a journey of renewal that has come to the centrality of relational theological categories that focus on actual transformation into Christlikeness and the importance of walking closely with the Spirit.<sup>27</sup>

A more “resistible” view of God’s presence and power is said by Pinnock to lead to a more positive appreciation of the human side of the Bible.<sup>28</sup> Such a view has a comfortable home in the Wesleyan tradition. Pinnock already had seen this in 1978 when observing that an evolving new evangelicalism was gaining greater sophistication in its historical perspectives, finally reaching beyond the relatively recent and generally reactionary perspective of fundamentalism. He saw within the English Puritan, Wesleyan, and American revivalism streams less preoccupation with “precise inerrancy” and “a healthier concern for the spiritual power and authenticity of Scripture instead.”<sup>29</sup> As in the Eastern Christian tradi-

<sup>25</sup>Henry H. Knight III, *A Future For Truth: Evangelical Theology in a Post-modern World* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), 172.

<sup>26</sup>Randy Maddox, “John Wesley and Eastern Orthodoxy,” *Asbury Theological Journal* 45:2 (1990), 39.

<sup>27</sup>Note H. Ray Dunning, *Redefining the Divine Image: Christian Ethics in Wesleyan Perspective* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1998). He writes chapters on the “Image of God” as relation to God, others, the Earth, and self.

<sup>28</sup>Clark H. Pinnock, *The Scripture Principle* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984), 101-103.

<sup>29</sup>Clark H. Pinnock, “Evangelicals and Inerrancy: The Current Debate,” *Theology Today* 35:1 (April 1978), 68. Pinnock points with appreciation to the example of the letter of Timothy L. Smith to *The Christian Century* (March 2, 1977).

tion, the goal is more the journey toward renewal, actual transformation by divine grace (sanctification), and less an almost singular focus on being justified of past sin for the sake of safety and bliss in the next life. Wesley certainly believed that the intended work of divine grace involves more than pardon, a legal transaction that removes the guilt of sin. Grace also and especially is the transforming power of God in human life. It is a power associated closely with the presence of God as believers journey by faith toward real renewal in the Spirit.

Pinnock's book *Flame of Love* (1996) radiates the same belief. It hopes to set the reader on a journey with the Spirit, a journey of true transformation. Both Wesley and Pinnock experienced a theological journey that led away from scholastic Reformed determinism with its rationalism that commonly pictures God in ways other than the way Jesus portrayed the Father—loving, gracious, sacrificial, wounded by human transgressions, prepared to risk on behalf of all who are lost. As Colin Williams observes, Wesley “broke the chain of logical necessity by which the Calvinist doctrine of predestination seems to flow from the doctrine of original sin, by his doctrine of prevenient grace.”<sup>30</sup> For Pinnock, the tight Calvinistic logic had also unraveled and has led to a revising of “classical” (TULIP) theism.

### Revising Classical Theism

An adequate Christian doctrine of God, according to the more recent work of Clark Pinnock, would be “a distillation of what we believe God has told us about himself. . . . Although the Bible does not present a systematic doctrine of God that can be easily reproduced, it provides building blocks for such a doctrine.”<sup>31</sup> In order to formulate what he was coming to accept as an adequate theistic view, Pinnock gathered these building blocks that both criticized elements of “classic” Christian theism (resident in the “TULIP” logic) and warned that the metaphysics of the currently popular “process” theology alternative does not represent adequately the broader biblical vision of the divine that is now enriching his

<sup>30</sup>Colin Williams, *John Wesley's Theology Today* (N. Y.: Abingdon Press, 1960), 44. Wesley remained on the edge of Calvinism in the sense that he also attributed all good to the free grace of God and denied the presence of all natural free will and human power antecedent to divine grace.

<sup>31</sup>Clark H. Pinnock, in Pinnock and Delwin Brown, *Theological Crossfire: An Evangelical/Liberal Dialogue* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 61, 63.

own thought and Christian life (since it tends to violate divine sovereignty in favor of a too-extreme view of reciprocity). God surely is more than the earth-bound gods of modern thought. God is transcendent in a way that can really satisfy today's urgent questions about meaning and significance with answers that have roots in a reality beyond the restricted and momentary horizons of this world. God clearly transcends and reigns, but in a way that does not negate the creation's divinely-given freedom to be and choose. Indeed, in very "ROSE-like" fashion, Pinnock now insists:

To say that God is the sovereign Creator means that God is the ground of the world's existence and the source of all its possibilities. But he is not necessarily the puppet master who pulls all the strings. It is possible for God to make a world with some relative autonomy of its own, a world where there exist certain structures which are intelligible in their own right and finite agents with the capacity for free choice. Thus, God gives a degree of reality and power to the creation and does not retain a monopoly of power for himself. His sovereignty is not the all-determining kind, but an omniscient kind. God is certainly able to deal with any circumstances which might arise, and nothing can possibly defeat or destroy God. But he does not control everything that occurs. God honors the degree of relative autonomy which he grants the world.<sup>32</sup>

How, then, is God best understood? The answer lies at the foundation of all Christian theology and, for Pinnock, is explained well in his essay titled "From Augustine To Arminius: A Pilgrimage in Theology."<sup>33</sup> Biblically speaking, God at least is the Lord, sovereign and free, the mystery who transcends all time and worlds and all that they contain. But "classic" Christian theism came to add to such affirmations that *God's glory* is the ultimate purpose that all creation serves, that God controls all that happens, and that God's sovereign will is irresistible. According to the Westminster Confession (1646): "God from all eternity did, by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass" (3:1). After World War II evangelical-

<sup>32</sup>Clark H. Pinnock, "God Limits His Knowledge," in David and Randall Basinger, eds., *Predestination & Free Will: Four Views of Divine Sovereignty and Human Freedom* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 145-146.

<sup>33</sup>This pivotal Pinnock essay appears in Clark Pinnock, gen. ed., *The Grace of God and the Will of Man* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1995, original edition 1989), 15-30.

ism in North America was dominated by this “classic” (TULIP) view that God is understood best as the One who is all-controlling and ordains all things, the One who is timeless, changeless, passionless, unmoved, and unmovable. This was the very teaching environment of Clark Pinnock’s earliest years as a Christian and a view he now refers to as “a power-centered theology requiring deterministic freedom and no-risk providence” [no risk to God].<sup>34</sup>

One finds the “classic” view of God defended and expounded effectively in Pinnock’s early writings. But by the 1970s the theological landscape was shifting for Pinnock. In the stimulating environment of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School he prepared a major manuscript he titled *The Living God and Secular Experience* [InterVarsity Press chose not to publish it]. Explaining that the manuscript was *for* and not *of* the times, he resisted the common call to reformulate the Christian gospel without the hypothesis of a transcendent God. His wish was to “maintain that the doctrine of God is meaningful simply because it alone is capable of illuminating large areas of human experience” (Introduction). He also assumed, however, that theological answers need to be connected with the questions emerging from the contemporary human situation. While Bible norms are not to be subservient to modern ideas, theology needs to be clear, intelligible, and its relevance to real life made explicit.

What then, he asked, is the biblical understanding of God and how God relates to the concerns of ordinary human life today? By the 1980s Pinnock was identifying as a significant theological problem key aspects of the classical theism found in Augustine, Aquinas, and Reformed scholasticism generally. The problem was said to be that God is understood as a closed, immobile, unchanging structure rather than the more biblical view of God as a dynamic personal agent who by choice is deeply and vulnerably involved in human joys and sorrows. To many ancient minds a god who is immutable and impassable suggested a divine being who is stoic, stable, even untouchable. But Pinnock now was convinced

<sup>34</sup>Clark H. Pinnock, “Evangelical Theologians Facing the Future: An Ancient and a Future Paradigm,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 33:2(Fall 1998), 22. In 1998 there appeared *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Providence* by John Sanders (InterVarsity Press). Pinnock refers to this book as a competent and detailed argument that God indeed is relational in nature. In the manner of working with the creation, God is relational and loving to the extent of taking real “risks”. Says Sanders: “The almighty God creates significant others with freedom and grants them space to be alongside him and to collaborate with him” (137).

that the divine determination of all things, meaning that the future is already settled and divinely known, “has a definite tendency to diminish the dynamic dimension of God’s nature and to threaten the reality of creaturely freedom.”<sup>35</sup> Such diminishing and threatening were serious theological and practical matters. The classic tendency is to “prefer to speak more of God’s power than of weakness, more of God’s eternity than of temporality, and more of God’s immutability than of living changeableness in relation to us.”<sup>36</sup> Pinnock had come to believe that the Calvinist argument for God’s exhaustive foreknowledge is tantamount to predestination since it implies the fixity of all things. Further, the rigid categories of scholastic Calvinism are inadequate to contain the radically relational God revealed in the Bible. After all, the Word *became* flesh—a dramatic statement of God’s changing unchangeability!

For Pinnock, this tendency to theological fixity is a serious distortion that needs corrected—without the equal danger lurking in an overcorrection. Avoiding such an equal danger was the central burden of Gabriel Fackre’s review of the books *The Openness of God* and *Unbounded Love*, each by Pinnock and others. According to Fackre, “evangelicals pursuing the agenda of immanence and openness would benefit from studying the mainline’s previous engagement with this subject.” To clarify the points of wisdom gained in this previous engagement, he highlights five subjects, each intended as a point of current caution for free-will theists like Pinnock. They are the areas of: (1) human freedom and divine sovereignty where it is easy to stumble on oversimplifications that lead to both predestinarian determinisms and libertarian Pelagianisms; (2) the need to avoid cultural captivity when celebrating divine immanence; (3) dealing adequately with a necessary political witness when underscoring divine compassion and vulnerability; (4) being adequately sober about the depth and intractability of sin when insisting on the limitations of the Augustinian-Reformation tradition that may limit excessively divine relationality and human responsibility; and (5) not forgetting that God also is holy when one seeks to correct a pattern of “retributive absolutisms” unfairly attributed to God. Fackre is appreciative of Pinnock’s central concerns

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<sup>35</sup>Clark H. Pinnock, “Between Classical and Process Theism,” ed. Ronald Nash, *Process Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1987), 315.

<sup>36</sup>Clark H. Pinnock, “Systematic Theology,” in Pinnock and others, *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 105.



and only calls for caution that in the proper recovery of certain biblical accents too often lost by Christian theologians there remain “the importance of the *closure* as well as the *openness* of God.”<sup>37</sup>

Well aware of these cautions that deserve honoring in the midst of making needed corrections in the prevailing Christian theism, Pinnock proceeded to initiate fresh thought about the “social Trinity.” He judged that reluctance to recognize a truly social model of the Trinity has been a major theological problem over the centuries. For instance, while making the doctrine of the Trinity central to his theology, Karl Barth elevated unity over diversity, insisting on speaking of three modes of divine functioning rather than a triunity of the divine being. For Pinnock, “such agnosticism regarding the immanent Trinity has led some of his [Barth’s] disciples into unitarianism” and has deprived Christians of “the revolutionary insight concerning God’s nature represented by the social analogy of the Trinity.” Naturally one wants to make it easier for Jews and Muslims to appreciate Christianity in the context of monotheism; thus, in order to avoid any suggestion of tri-theism, “we say that the Trinity is a society of persons united by a common divinity.” Of course, there is only one God, eternal, uncreated, and incomprehensible. But Pinnock further insists that biblical revelation offers this key insight: God’s nature is “internally complex and consists of a fellowship of three. It is the essence of God’s nature to be relational.”<sup>38</sup>

In a dynamic biblical context that reveals a relational God who chooses loving reciprocity with creation, it had become possible for Pinnock to engage in the reconceptualization of God similar to the reforming work of John Wesley two centuries earlier. Wesley argues in his “Thoughts upon Divine Sovereignty” that integral to the divinity of God as God is the necessary association of divine justice and mercy with divine transcendence, power, and sovereignty. By insisting on such a necessary association, Theodore Jennings, Jr., suggests that Wesley “sought to overcome a bifurcation in the conceptualization of the divine being which seemed to be the consequence, on the one hand, of a deistic conception of God and, on the other, of a Calvinist reflection on the divine

<sup>37</sup>Gabriel Fackre, “An Evangelical Megashift? The Promise and Peril of an ‘Open’ View of God,” *Christian Century* (May 3, 1995), 485-487. Emphasis added.

<sup>38</sup>Clark H. Pinnock, *Flame of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 33-35.

sovereignty. . . . [Thus] the question of the poor, of the violated and humiliated of the earth, is decisive for the doctrine of God.”<sup>39</sup> After all, the distinctive place where the God of the biblical witness intersected the life process of creation was at the point of pain. Israel experienced great pain in its Egyptian slavery and through the pain came a distinctive discernment of the God who identifies with, shares, and redeems (the exodus) in the midst of the pain (Ex. 6:6-7). Here was God interactively involved, relationally engaged with the human historical process in ways hardly fitting TULIP rigidities.

Clark Pinnock has thus been critical of any “classic” theism that fails to recognize biblical relationalism. However, he has not wanted to overdo his criticism of classical theism. After all, in his judgment the “classic” evangelical view is far better than radically liberal or extreme process views of God, although he readily admits to having learned a few important lessons from process thinker Charles Hartshorne. One lesson was that God, although unchanging in character and intent, surely is able and intends to change *operationally* in response to a changing creation that possesses genuine freedom of decision. Pinnock confesses that, without being a process thinker himself, “God has used process thinkers to compel me to change certain ideas which I had and bring them up to scriptural standards.”<sup>40</sup> He admits that modern culture generally has also influenced him in this matter, encouraging in him a new emphasis on human freedom and a viewing of God as Self-limited in relation to this present world. At least at these points, he is sure that modernity has drawn Christian theological reflection in the direction of restored biblical teaching. Further, recovering fresh dimensions of God’s immanence helps today’s Christians relate to the new insights into the origin of the universe now being supplied by modern science.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>39</sup>Theodore W. Jennings, Jr., “Transcendence, Justice, and Mercy: Toward a (Wesleyan) Reconceptualization of God,” in Randy L. Maddox, ed., *Rethinking Wesley’s Theology for Contemporary Methodism* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, Abingdon Press, 1998), 65.

<sup>40</sup>Clark H. Pinnock, “Between Classical and Process Theism,” 317. Another evangelical, Gregory Boyd, embraces elements of the fundamental vision of the process world view and constructs an interpretation of the Trinity with careful modifications of this process vision (see Boyd, *Trinity and Process*, New York: Peter Lang, 1992).

<sup>41</sup>Clark H. Pinnock, “Systematic Theology,” 113. He refers the reader to Hugh Montefiore’s *The Probability of God* (London: SCM Press, 1985) which “shows us how to craft a new teleological argument out of the evidences of modern science in relation to the immanence of God the Spirit.”

Pinnock shares his fear that “if evangelical theologians refuse to recognize the moments of truth in process thought, they will force many to accept process theology.”<sup>42</sup> In Pinnock’s view, such acceptance would be highly negative because the process view of theism is an “extreme correction” to the classical theism it seeks to improve. It so honors the freedom instinct of modernity that God’s very being is fundamentally compromised. The resulting reduction yields a feeble, compromised, non-biblical theism. For many process theists, judges Pinnock:

God is not the ground of the world’s existence and has no final control over what is going on. . . . God is finite and metaphysically incapable of determining events. . . . A God who is neither the creator or redeemer of the world in any strong sense does not deserve to be called God, and is vastly inferior to the God of the Bible and evangelical experience.<sup>43</sup>

Therefore, despite his deep concern about some aspects of classical theism and his appreciation for some aspects of process thought, Pinnock remains a committed and biblically oriented evangelical Christian. Commenting on the “social trinity” of God, he confesses valuing “the way in which trinitarian theology can match process theology’s witness to God as being related to and being affected by the world without requiring one to actually adopt a process metaphysics.”<sup>44</sup> He explains this way his understanding of the biblical vision of the triune God and its consequence for a vision of the divine intention for creation:

The Trinity portrays God as a community of love and mutuality. . . . God is not an isolated individual but a loving, interpersonal communion, to which we owe our very existence. . . . As loving communion, God calls into being a world that has the potential of realizing loving relationality within itself.<sup>45</sup>

Pinnock’s approach to the doctrine of God shows his continuing evangelical identity, regardless of his affinity with select insights of process theism. He will not relinquish the ontological transcendence of

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<sup>42</sup>Clark H. Pinnock, “Between Classical and Process Theism,” 317.

<sup>43</sup>*Ibid.*, 318.

<sup>44</sup>Clark H. Pinnock, “A Bridge and Some Points of Growth: A Reply to Cross and Macchia,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* (October 1998), 51.

<sup>45</sup>Clark Pinnock, *Flame of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 29, 23.

God. God *is* even when the world *is not*, he insists. Contemporary Christians should resist the “interiorization of faith where Christianity becomes an ideal of life rather than a truth claim about an objective God beyond the natural world.”<sup>46</sup> He places much responsibility on Immanuel Kant for the negative trending today that seeks to shift the grounding of theological concepts to the realm of human experience. By contrast, commitment to biblical revelation rather than to modern experience and ideology inclines Pinnock toward using biblical categories and even language. The controlling criterion of judgment is said to be this:

. . . the foundational symbols of the Bible cannot be replaced, though they may be supplemented and interpreted. The symbols cannot be replaced because they are not based upon cultural experience but on a divine intrusion into history. . . . We do not feel entitled to resymbolize Christian theology to suit ourselves, based in the ostensive authority of human experience.<sup>47</sup>

As he journeys from the TULIP to the ROSE model of Christian theism, Pinnock’s general intent is to retain as much as possible of the biblical portrait of God as taught faithfully in the ecumenical tradition of the church, except at the points where the conserving tradition is found to be preserving elements not truly biblical. If his critics are right about Pinnock’s “openness” views of God being largely reflections of modern philosophical and politically-correct assumptions, he would find such criticism devastating. To him, the primary criterion of truth for the Christian is fidelity to the Scriptures. But, in fact, he judges that the critics are wrong in this regard and that an “openness model” of God is more biblically adequate than several aspects of the conventional Christian theism of evangelicalism that are reflected in the TULIP theological model.

### **The God Who Risks the Process**

The proper view of Christian theism is now thought by Clark Pinnock to be a carefully balanced model that is both sensitive to select insights of contemporary “process” thought and also retains the core biblical elements of theism. This equilibrium model must both insure true divine transcendence and celebrate a social triuneness that comprises God’s very nature and characterizes God’s dealings with a wayward cre-

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<sup>46</sup>Clark H. Pinnock, in *Theological Crossfire*, 67-68.

<sup>47</sup>*Ibid.*, 72.

ation. Calling this balanced model “classical free will theism,” he explains:

It means that we affirm God as creator of the world as classical theism does and process thought does not, and also affirm the openness of God as process theology does and classical theism does not sufficiently. This leaves us with a model of the divine which sees God as transcendent over the world and yet existing in an open and mutually affecting relationship with the world. It is a doctrine of God which maintains mutuality and reciprocity within the framework of divine transcendence.<sup>48</sup>

Pinnock wishes to be clear that, in projecting this new model of Christian theism, it is really very “old.” The Bible and not modernity is being given the primary and final voice. As the whole Bible narrative reflects, human history is to be seen as much more than “the temporal unfolding of an eternal blueprint of the divine decisions.” In fact, by divine choice, human history is “the theatre where new situations are encountered and fresh decisions are made, the scene of divine and human creativity.”<sup>49</sup> God tested Abraham to see what he would do. Only after the test did God conclude: “Now I know that you fear God” (Gen. 12:22). Commenting on the wickedness of Israel, God says in frustration: “. . . nor did it enter my mind that they should do this abomination” (Jer. 32:35). The flow of fallen human history yields results which God does not dictate and to which God reacts.

The mistake of TULIP theism is its denial of the gracious choice of the sovereign God to grant real freedom to humans and to enter the human arena vulnerably and redemptively so as to affect and be affected by the flawed historical process that persists prior to the final triumph of God over all evil. God feels the pain of broken relationships (Jer. 31:20). This surely is at the heart of the meaning of the Incarnation and is symbolized dramatically by the cross of Christ. On that old tree of divine sacrifice is revealed this: love instead of coercive power is the primary perfection of God. God works “not in order to subject our wills but to transform our hearts.”<sup>50</sup> There emerges from the Bible a distinctive view of God, a dynamic theism that sees God as simultaneously sovereign over

<sup>48</sup>Clark H. Pinnock, “Between Classical and Process Theism,” 321.

<sup>49</sup>*Ibid.*, 323.

<sup>50</sup>Clark H. Pinnock, “Systematic Theology,” 114.

creation and suffering with creation. God is involved, interactive, responsive, and compassionate. God should not be understood either as immune to the evil and suffering of our fallen world or trapped in an ongoing codependence with this world. Pinnock has come to join John Wesley in understanding God's power

. . . fundamentally in terms of *empowerment*, rather than control or *overpowerment*. This is not to weaken God's power, but to determine its character! As Wesley was fond of saying, God works "strongly and sweetly." That is, God's grace works powerfully, but not irresistibly in matters of human life and salvation; thereby empowering our *response-ability*, without overriding our *responsibility*.<sup>51</sup>

The doctrine of God as "Trinity" is crucial for reflecting adequately the very nature of God and, consequently, God's chosen relation to the creation. Pinnock now teaches a relational ontology, a social trinitarian metaphysics that views God as both ontologically other (not part of or dependent on creation) and at the same time relating actively and responsively to the creation with unmerited love. God has chosen to create "an echo in space and time of the communion that God experiences in eternity, a reflection on the creaturely level of the loving movement within God." Since God by nature is "socially triune," the creation is designed to be "an ecosystem capable of echoing back the triune life of God." God exists as a communion of love and freedom, is "an open and dynamic structure" which, while wholly Self-sufficient, "delights in a world in which he can interact with creatures for whom his love can overflow."<sup>52</sup> Frank Macchia explains that Pinnock

. . . views the Godhead as a fellowship of persons. God for Pinnock is not pure "rationality" decreeing eternal ideas and causing all things to conform to their fulfillment. God is rather pure "relationality" which seeks to draw all things into the symphony of love that is played eternally within the divine life. The graceless God who forms covenants in order to exact obedience is replaced by the triune God whose very being is

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<sup>51</sup>Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, Abingdon Press, 1994), 93.

<sup>52</sup>Clark H. Pinnock, "Systematic Theology" (1994), 108, 110.

an eternal dance of love into which the Spirit of God attempts to bring the entire creation by grace.<sup>53</sup>

God's involvement with the world is characterized by the unchanging nature, essence, and intent of God, but also by God's responsive and therefore changing experience, knowledge, and action. Never is God subject to change involuntarily, but God allows the world to touch and affect him—the very world over which God is truly transcendent and in which much happens in opposition to divine intent.

For evangelicals, probably the most troublesome implication of this more dynamic view of the divine nature is Pinnock's belief that it implies a limitation of God's complete knowledge of the future. Here is his assessment:

Like Philo before him, Augustine had wedded to the biblical portrait of God certain Greek presuppositions about divine perfection, notably God's immutability. This made it impossible for Augustine to think of God's learning anything he had not eternally known or changing in response to new circumstances. He thought of God as existing beyond the realm of change and time, and knowing all things past, present and future in a timeless present. However, if history is infallibly known and certain from all eternity, then freedom is an illusion.<sup>54</sup>

If freedom is real and human decisions are not yet made, then Pinnock judges that information about those coming decisions *does not yet exist*—and thus cannot be known even by God. God by definition must know all things that can be known and always knows them rightly. Pinnock readily affirms this. Nonetheless, divine omniscience need not mean exhaustive foreknowledge of all future events. If that were its meaning, would the future not be fixed and determined, much as is the past? In that case, nothing in the future needs to be decided and human freedom is an illusion. We humans make no significant difference and thus finally are not

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<sup>53</sup>Frank Macchia, "Tradition and the *Novum* of the Spirit: A Review of Clark Pinnock's *Flame of Love*," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 13 (1998), 34.

<sup>54</sup>Clark H. Pinnock, "God Limits His Knowledge" (1986), 150.

responsible.<sup>55</sup> In fact, however, God faces the future as a partly unsettled matter. It is unsettled because of the human choices not yet made, but also it is settled by what already has happened and certainly by what God promises to do eventually regardless of human choice. God indeed is omniscient, but in a way congruent with the dynamic character of the created world—the very character chosen and enabled by a loving God who is prepared to risk the process.

The issue of divine sovereignty, when understood as “nothing happens except what is knowingly and willingly decreed by him” (John Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.16.3), can be very troubling for modern people who wonder about the supposed divine purpose in the death camps of the Holocaust or the killing fields of Cambodia. So Clark Pinnock now concludes that “history itself seems to call the sovereignty of God into question and to require us to rethink it.” Further, the Bible “seems to portray more genuine interaction and relationality in God’s dealings with creatures than theological determinism allows.” Therefore, “it would seem that we need a better model of divine sovereignty than that of total control.” If God is a loving Parent, sensitive and responsive, evidently God has chosen “to actualize a world with significantly free agents and to exercise sovereignty in an open manner.”<sup>56</sup>

<sup>55</sup>Of course, classic Christian theists seek to uphold both a genuine human freedom and God’s power and knowledge as total (“compatibilism”). Pinnock says that this is the theological sleight of hand and does not work. Millard Erickson’s response is that Pinnock’s “incompatibilist” view has not effectively refuted the compatibilist view (*The Evangelical Left*, 1997, 105). Norman Geisler also challenges the incompatibilist view, particularly on the basis of predictive prophecy which, Geisler argues, shows that God often had specific knowledge of future events before human choice brought them into actual being (*Creating God in the Image of Man?*, 1997, 149). Contrary to Geisler’s challenging of the incompatibilist view, Gregory Boyd reads a passage like 2 Kings 20 and asks: “Was God being truthful when he had Isaiah tell Hezekiah he was planning to bring him home? And if so, then must we not believe that God really changed his mind when he decided to add fifteen years to Hezekiah’s life?” (Boyd, *The God of the Possible*, Baker Books, 2000, Preface).

<sup>56</sup>Clark H. Pinnock, “God’s Sovereignty in Today’s World,” *Theology Today* 53:1 (April 1996), 16-18. Richard Muller recognizes that contemporary evangelical theology needs to express the profound involvement of God with creation (just as Pinnock does). Contrary to Pinnock, however, Muller remains convinced that the structure of classical theism is still the best option. He insists that “incarnation and the divine immutability are not contraries” (“Incarnation, Immutability, and the Case for Classical Theism,” *The Westminster Theological Journal*, Spring 1983, 25).



Such divine openness calls for a new view of divine power. God chooses to delegate power to the creature, willing that human history flow from the decisions of free persons who, because of their freedom, are capable of both evil and lovingly responding to a loving God. God by a deliberate choice becomes vulnerable to human choice and normally does not choose to override human decisions—at least not immediately. Jesus says that God’s rule is near but not yet in full effect since the powers of darkness still resist. Paul says that the Spirit waits and groans with us on the way to final redemption (Rom. 8:23). God clearly is sovereign, meaning that all ability exists within the divine being, but not meaning that there is any divine tyranny involved. God can and will manage, whatever the resistance to the divine will, and one day will triumph. Even so, risk, frustration, and pain lie along God’s chosen way. This vulnerability exposes God to genuine suffering, an amazing expression of power by a truly sovereign and also wonderfully loving God. Insists Pinnock:

The power of love, the power that wills genuine relationships, is certainly not a diminished or inferior form of power. . . . Jesus likens God to a father who lets his son leave home and learn for himself that sin leads to destruction. . . . God’s true power is revealed in the cross of Jesus Christ. In this act of self-sacrificing, God deploys power in the mode of servanthood, overcoming enemies not by annihilating them but by loving them.<sup>57</sup>

With love as God’s reigning attribute, the sovereign God, truly transcendent, has chosen to make room for others and to seek real and mutually responsible relationships with them. Accordingly, the wonderful truth is that “God is so powerful as to be able to stoop down and humble himself, and God is so stable and secure as to be able to risk suffering and change.”<sup>58</sup> This sovereign God has created a world populated by free agents who are drawn by the Creator’s love, but who also are capable of rejecting God’s love. God is willing to work within this risky historical process, choosing to accept a future that is open and a world that is dynamic rather than one that is static and predetermined.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>57</sup>Pinnock, “God’s Sovereignty in Today’s World,” 20.

<sup>58</sup>Pinnock, “Systematic Theology,” 105.

<sup>59</sup>This line of thought is appreciated by Philip Meadows (“Providence, Chance, and the Problem of Suffering,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, Spring 1999). Speaking of the paradox of providence and chance, Meadows explores the resources in John Wesley’s theology for constructing a contemporary theodicy. He concludes that God loves the world by setting it free. Seen in the cross and resurrection of Jesus is the deeply personal and relational nature of God’s vulnerable love.

The concept of a loving and relational God who is “open” and chooses to risk by granting meaningful freedom to humans<sup>60</sup> began to have some controversial implications for Clark Pinnock beyond the issue of divine foreknowledge. He was coming to use a key theological concept of John Wesley in a somewhat expanded sense, seeing the work of the Spirit in the world as a form of “prevenient grace.” Reformed theology, of course, does recognize the universal operations of the Spirit, a “common” grace. But this grace is thought to assist sinners only in non-salvific ways. For Pinnock, it now was appearing that, with appropriate caution that continues to affirm the central significance of the incarnation of God-with-us supremely in Jesus Christ, one must not prematurely restrict the present work of the Spirit to those people who actually hear the Jesus message. In fact, “believing in the finality of Christ does not require us to be arrogant in our claims or closed to grace at work in other people.”<sup>61</sup> Here is the “E” of the fresh ROSE model, the Everywhere-Active God who intends the redemption of the whole creation.<sup>62</sup>

### Passion from the New Metaphor

Clark Pinnock’s spearheading of this fresh and “open” thinking about the nature and functioning of God certainly has sparked widespread response. His direct style of communication occasionally is one reason. For instance:

To say that God hates sin while secretly willing it, to say that God warns us not to fall away though it is impossible, to say that God loves the world while excluding most people from an opportunity of salvation, to say that God warmly invites sinners to come knowing all the while that they cannot possibly do so—such things do not deserve to be called mysteries when that is just a euphemism for nonsense.<sup>63</sup>

Well beyond manner of speech, however, is the substance of the subject. Vigorous opposition to such ROSE-like “neo-theism” has come from sev-

<sup>60</sup>Note especially the significant volume by John Sanders titled *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Providence* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1998).

<sup>61</sup>Clark H. Pinnock, *Flame of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 205.

<sup>62</sup>See Clark H. Pinnock, *A Wideness in God’s Mercy: The Finality of Jesus Christ in a World of Religions* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992).

<sup>63</sup>Clark H. Pinnock, “Systematic Theology,” in *The Openness of God*, 115.

eral evangelicals, including Norman Geisler. Rather than a wise correction of classic theism with selected insights from process theology, Geisler sees Pinnock's work as part of "a dangerous trend within evangelical circles of creating God in man's image. . . . If the logical consequences of neo-theists' unorthodox beliefs about God are drawn out, they will be pushed more and more in the direction of process theology and the liberal beliefs entailed therein."<sup>64</sup> Here is fear of a theistic "slippery slope." There also is Robert Morey who equates the more open view of God as finite godism.<sup>65</sup> Pinnock's pastoral response to Morey's criticism is: "What troubles me about his view is not the charge of heresy so much as the distance I feel between his vision of God and the loving heart of the Father."<sup>66</sup>

Mention of the "loving heart of the Father" brings into focus the now controlling metaphor for Pinnock's understanding of God. Many of the alterations in his theological perspectives over the last twenty-five years have emerged from this one central paradigm change. The shift has been a move from the root metaphor of God as "absolute monarch" (TULIP model) to the "loving Parent" (ROSE model) who is at once transcendent, triune, "open," and gracefully engaged with a fallen creation. The result is that he now is "filled with passion for explicating the tender mercies of God more convincingly in our day and for lifting up the divine relationality more effectively."<sup>67</sup>

Change in "classic" Christian theism of the strict "TULIP" variety will not come easily among evangelicals generally. Pinnock has pro-

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<sup>64</sup>Norman Geisler, *Creating God in the Image of Man?* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1997), 11-12. The very idea of God not knowing all things, past, present, and future, is unacceptable to many evangelical Christians. In recent years, the Baptist General Conference has struggled with the issues of divine providence and foreknowledge. What should the denomination believe and expect of its professors in this regard? Should the "classic" view of theism be questioned? Should faculty members be permitted the freedom to espouse the "openness of God" model of free-will theism? The issues are basic and the politics of the matter is sometimes hard to separate from the substance of the question.

<sup>65</sup>Robert Morey, *Battle of the Gods: The Gathering Storm in Modern Evangelicalism* (Southbridge, Mass.: Crown, 1989).

<sup>66</sup>Clark H. Pinnock, in Pinnock and others, *The Openness of God* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 191 (note 8).

<sup>67</sup>Clark H. Pinnock, "Response to Daniel Strange and Amos Yong," *The Evangelical Quarterly* 71:4 (October 1999), 351. With this passion comes Pinnock's acceptance of the controversy that accompanies it.

ceeded nonetheless to journey along a path that he sees as biblically illumined and vital for the credibility and effectiveness of Christian life in the postmodern and pluralistic world of the twenty-first century. Out of a heart of love and in the chosen context of freedom granted to fallen and yet beloved humans, the transcendent and loving God reaches, risks, suffers, relates, and redeems. There emerges the beautiful “ROSE” of the **R**elational, **O**pen, **S**uffering, and **E**verywhere-active One. Committed to belief in the triune God whose Spirit is everywhere active, Pinnock has become convinced that God is striving for life and wholeness among all peoples. This “inclusivist” view is a natural response to belief in the boundless love that God is by nature. This view brings vision, challenge, and significant implications for the Christian theological enterprise and evangelistic mission.

# THE DEATH OF JESUS: HISTORICALLY CONTINGENT OR DIVINELY FOREORDAINED?

by

Jirair S. Tashjian

There has been a recent interest among biblical and systematic theologians in reconsidering the theological significance of the death of Jesus,<sup>1</sup> to say nothing of the historians' quest to determine the political and religious currents of first-century Palestine that brought about the crucifixion of Jesus.<sup>2</sup> Christian thought throughout its history has viewed the death of Jesus in one way or another as atonement for sin and not merely the result of human decisions.<sup>3</sup> If so, is there any logical way to avoid the

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<sup>1</sup>Two whole issues of *Interpretation* (January 1998 and January 1999) were devoted to this subject. In 1996 Handsel Press and Eerdmans republished J. McLeod Campbell's nineteenth-century monograph, *The Nature of the Atonement*, over which Campbell had been deposed from his position as a Presbyterian minister in Scotland. Evangel Publishing House published Richard S. Taylor's book, *God's Integrity and the Cross* (1999), in which Taylor reconsiders the doctrine of the atonement and interprets it as penal substitution.

<sup>2</sup>Two alternate views are represented in Raymond E. Brown, *The Death of the Messiah* (2 vols; New York: Doubleday, 1994) and John D. Crossan, *Who Killed Jesus?* (HarperSanFrancisco, 1996). Brown sees the passion narratives as history remembered, whereas Crossan sees them as prophecy historicized.

<sup>3</sup>Henry Bettenson, ed., *Documents of the Christian Church* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.; Oxford University Press, 1963), 30-31, 33-35, 138-139, 145-147; Frederick W. Dillstone, *The Christian Understanding of Atonement* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1968); H. Orton Wiley, *Christian Theology* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1952), 2:217-269; H. Ray Dunning, *Grace, Faith, and Holiness* (Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1988), 332-394.

implication that God manipulated human history to cause the death of Jesus?

While the New Testament writers explicitly proclaim that the death of Jesus was in accord with God's redemptive purposes, the passion narratives of the four Gospels and the sermons in Acts leave no doubt that the death of Jesus was brought about by human beings, whether Jewish or Roman authorities, and therefore was historically contingent. I am defining historical contingency as any event for which human beings, rather than God, are responsible. Christian theology over the centuries has grappled with the dilemma of reconciling the historical contingency of Jesus' death with its divinely ordained purpose. The atonement theories that have emerged are various attempts to come to terms with this theological dilemma. That is, in view of the fact that it was human beings who killed Jesus, how can the death of Jesus be, if at all, a divinely foreordained event? Are we to conclude that it was God who orchestrated and manipulated human decisions in order to bring about Jesus' death?

As a student of the New Testament and one who is committed to Wesleyan theology, I wish to look at this issue from the perspective of New Testament theology and critique some of the atonement theories that have emerged in the history of Christian thought. I will first formulate the theological dilemma by laying out key statements from the synoptic gospels relevant to the issue of Jesus' death. Then I will look at the historical Jesus to see what can be said, if anything, about his understanding of the probability of his own violent death. Then I will examine various New Testament writers' interpretations of the death of Jesus. I will finally raise the question as to which of the theological interpretations of Jesus' death in the history of Christian thought is most viable from the perspective of the historical Jesus and the biblical witness, and whether such an interpretation would be consistent with the core of Wesleyan thought.

### **The Theological Dilemma**

The New Testament understands the death of Jesus to be in accordance with the redemptive purposes of God.<sup>4</sup> One of the most significant

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<sup>4</sup>Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), 1:294-298; Martin Hengel, *The Atonement: The Origins of the Doctrine in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981); Leonhard Goppelt, *Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 1:193-199; George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Rev. ed; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 187-191, 464-477.

ways that the New Testament speaks of the death of Jesus is that it was *for us*, for our sake, in our behalf. According to Mark 10:45, “the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.”<sup>5</sup> Using an early Christian tradition in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4, Paul unequivocally declares, “I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures.” In Galatians 2:20 Paul says, “The Son of God . . . loved me and gave himself for me.” Perhaps Paul’s most puzzling statement is in 2 Corinthians 5:21: “For our sake he [God] made him [Christ] to be sin who knew no sin.” In 1 John 2:2 and 4:10 we find a reference to Jesus as *atonement sacrifice*,<sup>6</sup> and in Romans 3:25 Paul says, “whom [i.e., Christ] God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement.”<sup>7</sup>

At the same time, however, the New Testament writers clearly understood not only that the death of Jesus was in keeping with God’s redemptive purposes, but also that it was caused by human beings, who therefore stand guilty before God. All four gospels see human factors at work in the death of Jesus. Judas is held responsible for betraying him (Luke 22:3). “For the Son of Man is going as it has been determined, but woe to that one by whom he is betrayed!” (Luke 22:22). Judas is held culpable for his betrayal of Jesus. It is true, of course, that in some sense all human beings are culpable for the death of Jesus. However, that is not a historical statement but a theological one, frequently occurring in Christian hymnody and spirituality. As the gospels see it, Judas had a part in the historical events that resulted in the death of Jesus. The Jewish leaders are also blamed. According to Mark, the chief priests and the scribes were looking for a way to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him (14:1; cf. Matt. 26:3-5). Matthew says that when Jesus was before Pilate, the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowds to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus killed (27:20). There is no doubt that the gospel writers hold the Jewish leaders responsible.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Unless otherwise noted, quotations from the Bible are from the NRSV.

<sup>6</sup>So NRSV and NIV, or “propitiation” (NASB), “a sacrifice to atone for our sins” (REB).

<sup>7</sup>In NRSV footnote, “a place of atonement.” Other translations of Rom 3:25: “sacrifice of atonement” (NIV), “propitiation” (NASB), “means of expiating sin” (REB). In Heb. 9:5, the same word is translated “mercy seat” (NRSV), “atonement cover” (NIV), “place of expiation” (REB).

<sup>8</sup>Burton L. Mack, *A Myth of Innocence* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 249-251.

On the other hand, the gospel writers do not exempt Pilate himself from blame. Although Pilate washed his hands before the crowd and announced that he was innocent of Jesus' blood (Matt. 27:24), Matthew does not regard that little ritual an absolution of Pilate's guilt. A few verses earlier Matthew reported that Pilate's wife sent word to her husband about her dream, which is taken to be a vision from God as a warning to Pilate (27:19).<sup>9</sup> But Pilate heeds the voice of the crowd rather than the voice of his wife or his own conscience. Even after he had decided that Jesus was innocent, he gave in to the public demand and handed Jesus over to the will of the crowd. The Gospel of John seems to attribute Pilate's decision to his cowardice, confusion, expediency, and/or sarcasm. When the chief priests say, "We have no king but the emperor," Pilate decides to have Jesus crucified (John 19:16). Whatever Pilate's actual motives may have been,<sup>10</sup> John in this dramatic portrayal has skillfully created a narrative in which Jesus emerges as the true judge and all other parties, including Pilate, stand condemned.<sup>11</sup>

Many critics have argued that for polemic reasons the gospels tend to shift the blame for the death of Jesus from Roman authorities to Jewish leaders.<sup>12</sup> This anti-Jewish stance eventually turned into anti-Semitism in the later history of Christendom, ultimately resulting in the Holocaust.<sup>13</sup> Others point out that the gospels find both Jewish and Roman authorities equally blameworthy.<sup>14</sup> Although I concur with the second view, my purpose here is not to resolve the historical question as to which human per-

<sup>9</sup>W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Matthew* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1997), 3:587.

<sup>10</sup>N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 544-547.

<sup>11</sup>C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978), 530-531; Ernst Haenchen, *John 2* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 183-185.

<sup>12</sup>Joseph B. Tyson, *The Death of Jesus in Luke-Acts* (Columbia: University of South Carolina, 1986), 148-153, 164-165.

<sup>13</sup>Samuel Sandmel, *Anti-Semitism in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978); Charlotte Klein, *Anti-Judaism in Christian Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978); Douglas R. A. Hare, *Matthew* (Interpretation; Louisville: John Knox, 1993), 316-317; Crossan, *Who Killed Jesus?*, 31-32; Marcus J. Borg and N. T. Wright, *The Meaning of Jesus: Two Visions* (HarperSanFrancisco, 1999), 88-90.

<sup>14</sup>E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 318; Ellis Rivkin, *What Crucified Jesus?* (New York: UAHC Press, 1997), 105-129.



son or group was ultimately responsible for the death of Jesus, but merely to point out what appears to be a theological dilemma, namely, that the evangelists can both point an accusing finger at human actors in the drama of Jesus' crucifixion and hold on to the conviction that God's purpose was somehow being accomplished. Perhaps for someone like Augustine or John Calvin the dilemma would be minimal: God's sovereign will is accomplished with or without human cooperation. But what would be a Wesleyan response?

In Peter's Pentecost sermon the death of Jesus is alluded to in these words: "this man, handed over to you according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of those outside the law" (Acts 2:23). Likewise the prayer of early Christians in Acts 4:27-28 states that "both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, to do whatever your hand and your plan predestined to take place." There is no question here that the blame is placed not on any single people or nation, but both "Gentiles and the peoples of Israel," that is, all the human actors in the passion narrative, whether Jew or Gentile, are equally culpable for the death of Jesus. But this statement in Acts raises the thorny problem of the death of Jesus seemingly being divinely predestined, which is the issue that I am concerned here.

Luke-Acts as a whole seems to present the death of Jesus consistently in this way.<sup>15</sup> The Lukan Jesus speaks of his death in the same language as that of Peter in the Pentecost sermon alluded to above: "For the Son of Man is going as has been determined" (Luke 22:22). In his first passion prediction, Jesus speaks of the necessity of his suffering and death.<sup>16</sup> In the second prediction, Luke makes the words of Jesus more emphatic: "Let these words sink into your ears" (9:44). In the third prediction, Luke adds these words to his Markan source: "everything written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished" (Luke 18:31). After his death and resurrection, when Jesus appears to the two overwhelmed disciples on the Emmaus road, Jesus reprimands them for

<sup>15</sup>John T. Carroll and Joel B. Green, *The Death of Jesus in Early Christianity* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1995), 67-69.

<sup>16</sup>According to the two-document hypothesis of the synoptic gospels, assumed in this study, the passion predictions in Luke come from Mark, where we find *dei* used in the first prediction (8:31), which Luke (as well as Matthew) retains almost verbatim.

their foolishness, slowness of heart, and unbelief, saying, “Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?” (Luke 24:26). Later, when Jesus appears to the eleven disciples, he says to them, “[E]verything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled. . . . Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise . . .” (24:44, 46).

It is clear from these statements that “necessity” is highly significant in Luke-Acts. The major voices in the New Testament seem to concur with this perspective. According to 1 Peter, the Old Testament prophets testified in advance to the sufferings of Christ and his subsequent glory (1:10-11; cf. 1:18-20). Revelation 13:8 makes reference to “the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world,” although an alternate translation is more likely, such as the NRSV rendering, “everyone whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world. . . .” Paul of course has much to say about the death of Christ. Perhaps his most puzzling statement is in 2 Corinthians 5:21: “For our sake he [God] made him [Christ] to be sin who knew no sin.”

## Jesus of History

Before we reflect further on the New Testament understanding of the death of Jesus, it may be well to consider how Jesus himself viewed the possibility or even the probability of his own violent death. This of course raises the issue of whether it is legitimate or possible to do any kind of quest of the historical Jesus. In the earlier decades of this century, Schweitzer and Bultmann argued that a quest of the historical Jesus was impossible.<sup>17</sup> But since then studies of the historical Jesus have exploded, and the interest shows no sign of abating, particularly with the work of the “Jesus Seminar” launched in the eighties.<sup>18</sup> At this point in the debate, however, there is no consensus as to how much or how little of the gospel tradition can be traced back to Jesus himself. While an overwhelming majority of critics recognize redactional tendencies in the gospel

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<sup>17</sup>Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* (New York: Macmillan, 1964), 398-403; Bultmann, 1:1, 26; Ernst Käsemann, *Essays on New Testament Themes* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), 15-17.

<sup>18</sup>Note especially the work of John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus* (HarperSanFrancisco, 1991); *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* (HarperSanFrancisco, 1994); *Who Is Jesus?* (HarperPaperbacks, 1996); Robert W. Funk, *Honest to Jesus* (HarperSanFrancisco, 1996); Marcus J. Borg, *Jesus: A New Vision* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987).

accounts, there is considerable disagreement as to the extent of these redactional tendencies and, conversely, the extent of material that can be attributed to Jesus with certainty.<sup>19</sup> It would be fair to say that all critics, including the most skeptical, agree that, in spite of the theological formulations of the evangelists, it is possible to isolate a basic core of sayings and actions that can be attributed to Jesus with certainty.

However, a more basic hermeneutical principle must be voiced here. Not only am I claiming that it is possible to do a quest of the historical Jesus, but also that a historically reconstructed portrait of Jesus is necessary for theology in general, and for our understanding of the death of Jesus in particular. This is not intended as a disavowal of the canonical authority of the gospels in their present form. Nor is it a matter of having to choose between the historical Jesus and the theology of the gospels. It is a matter of recognizing that the four evangelists present four different portraits of Jesus, each of them composed in a particular setting and for a particular theological purpose, but all of them bearing witness in different ways to the same Jesus. This diversity of witness in a wide variety of contexts makes the quest of the historical Jesus necessary for theology. As Leander Keck has reminded us, "the good news does not concern a Jesus who can be collapsed into the various forms of gospel-preaching as they develop from era to era, but concerns a Jesus who stands over against them all."<sup>20</sup>

With the above cautions and hermeneutical assumptions in mind, I wish to ask whether Jesus himself understood his mission to include a violent death as atonement for the sins of humankind. Did he go to Jerusalem expressly for such a purpose? If not, did he at least anticipate the possibility of a violent death and sought to interpret it in atonement categories? Since Christian theology has understood the death of Jesus as atonement for sin, the assumption has been in some circles that that

<sup>19</sup>Marcus J. Borg and N. T. Wright, *The Meaning of Jesus: Two Visions* (HarperSanFrancisco, 1999)—note particularly "Part III. The Death of Jesus," where Borg and Wright present two contrasting views and carry on a dialogue. Critical responses to the Jesus Seminar have been offered by several authors, including Michael J. Wilkins and J. P. Moreland, *Jesus Under Fire* (Zondervan, 1995), Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Real Jesus* (HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), Ben Witherington III, *The Jesus Quest* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.; InterVarsity, 1997).

<sup>20</sup>Leander E. Keck, *A Future for the Historical Jesus: The Place of Jesus in Preaching and Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981), 127.

understanding must have derived from Jesus.<sup>21</sup> He predicted on numerous occasions that the Son of Man would be betrayed and handed over into the hands of sinners, that he would suffer and be mocked, and that he would be flogged and killed, and after three days he would rise again. His death had been predetermined by a divine decree, and Jesus accepted it and went to Jerusalem to fulfill God's intentions, the argument goes. Calvin put it this way:

Now we must speak briefly concerning the purpose and use of Christ's priestly office: as a pure and stainless Mediator he is by his holiness to reconcile us to God. But God's righteous curse bars our access to him, and God in his capacity as judge is angry toward us. Hence, an expiation must intervene in order that Christ as priest may obtain God's favor for us and appease his wrath. . . . The priestly office belongs to Christ alone because by the sacrifice of his death he blotted out our own guilt and made satisfaction for our sins [Heb. 9:22].<sup>22</sup>

In his recent book on the atonement, Richard S. Taylor has argued that "Calvary was not an option. The cruel death of God's Son on a cross, if some other way to save the human race would have worked equally well, is not only inconceivable, but would be indefensible."<sup>23</sup> Since "God [is] the ultimate ground" of the atonement's necessity, "Christ permitted himself to be slain."<sup>24</sup>

The problem with the above scenario is that there are other incidents in the synoptic gospels that would be simply inexplicable. If Jesus knew with utmost certainty that his primary mission in Jerusalem was to die for the sins of the world, what do we make of his prayer in Gethsemane (Mark 14:32-42)? Mark tells us that Jesus began to be distressed and agitated and he said to his disciples, "I am deeply grieved, even to death." The meaning of the verbs used by Mark to describe Jesus' mood is that he was troubled, disturbed, stirred up, disquieted, perplexed, unsettled. Jesus prays that the cup of suffering and death be removed from him.

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<sup>21</sup>Archibald M. Hunter, *The Work and Words of Jesus* (rev. ed.; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1973), 113-121.

<sup>22</sup>John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1940), 501-502.

<sup>23</sup>Taylor, 23.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, 49.

Various attempts have been made to understand this episode. One option might be that the whole Gethsemane account was invented by Mark or an earlier tradition that Mark used, as the Jesus Seminar has concluded.<sup>25</sup> Jesus himself never experienced anything like the Gethsemane story. Mark, or the tradition before him, invented the story to historicize Old Testament prophecies.<sup>26</sup> However, if we apply the test of multiple attestation to this episode, it would be difficult to dismiss it altogether as pure invention. The writer of Hebrews, using words that are intriguingly reminiscent of the Gethsemane episode,<sup>27</sup> says, "In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission" (5:7-8). Even the Gospel of John, which otherwise portrays Jesus as one who is in command of his own life and destiny in accord with divine purpose, includes a statement about his consternation at the thought of his own death, reminiscent of the synoptic account of Gethsemane.<sup>28</sup> Jesus says, "Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say—'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name" (John 12:27).

If the Gethsemane story is at least in its core historical, whether as a single event or a protracted demeanor on the part of Jesus throughout his life, what exactly does it mean for him to pray that the hour may pass from him or that the Father may remove this cup from him (Mark 14:35-36)? Some have proposed that Jesus was not agonizing over suffering and death as such but over the prospect of God's wrath on sin that he would have to endure. Brown argues that since this "cup" language was used earlier in Mark in the dialogue between Jesus and James and John, where

<sup>25</sup>Robert W. Funk, *The Acts of Jesus* (HarperSanFrancisco, 1998), 144.

<sup>26</sup>Crossan, *Who Killed Jesus?*, 80-81.

<sup>27</sup>Commentators, who are generally reticent to identify this statement in Hebrews with a single experience of Jesus such as that of Gethsemane, can nevertheless see at least some correspondence. See F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 98-99; Harold Attridge, *Hebrews* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989), 148; William L. Lane, *Hebrews 1-8* (WBC; Dallas: Word, 1991), 120.

<sup>28</sup>Barrett, 424-425; Haenchen, 97. The argument of multiple attestation would work only if the Fourth Gospel is in fact independent of the synoptic gospels.

the meaning could not be anything but suffering and death, so also here the cup means not God's wrath but suffering and death.<sup>29</sup>

D. M. Baillie, while giving serious thought to the atoning death of Christ, nevertheless says the following about Jesus himself:

It is true, I believe, that Jesus accepted the Cross as from the will and purpose of God. But it was by human faith that He did it, not by the superhuman knowledge which can "declare the end from the beginning." . . . [I]t would be equally artificial to think of Him as forming the *intention*, at any point in His career, of being condemned to death. . . . The Gospels . . . do not conceal the fact that to Jesus Himself, when He looked forward and saw that it was likely, and even when He embraced it by faith, it appeared as an unspeakable tragedy, and that up to the last night He hoped and prayed that it might not come.<sup>30</sup>

If it were the case that Jesus was utterly certain that his death was his primary mission and destiny in the world, why such agony, agitation, supplications, loud cries, and tears? Why pray that God remove this cup from him?

We should seriously consider the likelihood that Jesus understood his mission in a more inclusive way than in terms of atoning death. Indeed, Jesus understood himself, his mission, and his message as part of the kingdom of God.<sup>31</sup> Mark 1:14-15 summarizes the message of Jesus at the beginning of the Galilean ministry in these words: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."

For Jesus, the kingdom of God may or may not include death. His commitment was to the kingdom of God, the will and purposes of God. It may mean death, but it may not. It is not the death itself that is primary. He was not seeking death; he certainly was not suicidal. He was seeking the reign and rule of God in all things. He can pray that the cup of death

<sup>29</sup>Brown, 1:168-170.

<sup>30</sup>D. M. Baillie, *God Was in Christ* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1948), 181-182.

<sup>31</sup>Norman Perrin, *Jesus and the Language of the Kingdom* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976); Ben F. Meyer, *The Aims of Jesus* (London: SCM, 1979), 129-137; G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Jesus and the Kingdom of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986).

be removed; *that* is negotiable. The kingdom of God is not negotiable. He can recoil from the thought of violent death; he cannot recoil from the kingdom of God and the will of God. His violent death was the result of human decisions; it was not metaphysically necessary to bring about the kingdom of God. In fact, Jesus often speaks of the coming of the kingdom of God without a word about a violent death as atoning sacrifice. He says, "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God" (Luke 6:20). "But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out the demons, then the kingdom of God has come to you" (Luke 11:20). "The kingdom of God is not coming with things that can be observed; nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There it is!' For, in fact, the kingdom of God is among you" (Luke 17:20). The kingdom of God is offered to all because God's love includes everyone. God "makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous" (Matt. 5:45).

Jesus spoke about the kingdom of God in parables drawn from everyday occurrences and realities familiar to his audience, with no violent death presupposed as a condition for its advent, except possibly in two parables. "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened" (Matt. 13:33). "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it" (Matt. 13:44-45). The examples can be multiplied, but these should suffice to make the point that for Jesus the kingdom of God rather than an atoning death was central. A violent death, though likely, was not absolutely a prerequisite for the coming of the kingdom.

Note John P. Meier's comment on Jesus' kingdom saying at the Last Supper, "Truly I tell you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom God" (Mark 14:25). Meier says:

The prophecy in Mark 14:25 is thus a final cry of hope from Jesus, expressing his trust in the God who will make his kingdom come, despite Jesus' death [emphasis added]. To the end, what is central in Jesus' faith and thought is not Jesus himself but the final triumph of God as he comes to rule his rebellious

creation and people—in short, what is central is the kingdom of God.<sup>32</sup>

The two parables that involve a violent death are that of the wicked tenants in Matthew 21:33-45 and the wedding banquet in Matthew 22: 1-14. In the latter, some of the servants who are sent to invite the guests are killed, an obvious allusion by Matthew to the fate of the prophets whom God sent to Israel. Their violent treatment at the hands of the guests, however, was surely not the intended purpose of their being sent. More to the point, is the parable of the wicked tenants, which could best illustrate how Jesus understood his mission and its possible consequences.<sup>33</sup> This parable, which is found in Matthew and in the other two synoptics (Mark 12:1-12 and Luke 20:9-19), is placed after the “cleansing of the temple” and the questioning of Jesus by the chief priests, scribes, and elders as to what gave him the authority to cause such a disturbance. Jesus refuses to answer their question directly, but instead responds with a question about John the Baptist. It is to this group in this context that Jesus tells this parable. The story is about a vineyard owner who leases his vineyard to tenants and goes to another country. When the harvest season arrives, he sends a servant after another to collect his share of the produce. But the tenants beat them up and send them away empty-handed. Finally he sends his own son thinking that they would respect him. Instead they kill him and throw him out of the vineyard. All three gospels conclude the parable with the statement that when the religious leaders heard this they wanted to arrest him but were afraid of the people.

The point is that, when the vineyard owner sent those servants and finally his son, he certainly did not expect let alone intend to have them abused or killed. He expected the tenants to recognize the servants and respect his son. The mission of the son was to collect the produce. By the same token, the mission of Jesus in Jerusalem was to proclaim the message of the kingdom of God, pronounce judgment on the temple and its

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<sup>32</sup>John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus* (2 vols; New York: Doubleday, 1991, 1994), 2:308.

<sup>33</sup>There is a fairly strong consensus among critics that the basic story is an authentic parable of Jesus, even though each gospel writer has redacted it one way or another. See Robert W. Funk, et al, *The Parables of Jesus* (Sonoma: Polebridge, 1988), 50-51; Bernard Brandon Scott, *Hear Then the Parable* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 245-251; William R. Herzog II, *Parables as Subversive Speech* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1994), 98-100.



religious and political establishment, and call this very center of Judaism to repentance. *That* would be the fruit that God was expecting from the vineyard keepers in Jerusalem. But the religious hierarchy was in no mood to lend an ear to a fanatical prophet from Galilee who was a threat to the status quo. But the reality of the situation in Jerusalem was such that he expected his fate to be not much different from that of the son in the parable. In this vein, the mood of Jesus is graphically made clear from his lament over Jerusalem (Matt. 23:37-39).

The one event during Passion Week that is widely viewed by critics as authentic is the disturbance that Jesus caused at the temple.<sup>34</sup> It is also agreed that this was not a cleansing but “an enacted parable or prophetic sign of God’s judgment on it and, therefore, of its impending destruction.... The symbolic destruction of the temple was prelude to the coming justice of a different kind of reign, the reign of God.”<sup>35</sup> And why such doom on the temple? Crossan provides a plausible explanation:

I think it quite possible that Jesus went to Jerusalem only once and that the spiritual and economic egalitarianism he preached in Galilee exploded in indignation at the Temple as the seat and symbol of all that was nonegalitarian, patronal, and even oppressive on both the religious and the political level.<sup>36</sup>

Similarly, Herzog assesses the historical situation of Jesus in Jerusalem as follows:

Jesus’ rejection of the temple may well have derived from his analysis of the economic situation created by it. As the temple amassed wealth, the people of the land were getting poorer and poorer. In a society governed by the notion of limited good, Jesus drew the logical conclusion that the temple was getting rich at the expense of the peasants, villagers, and urban artisans.<sup>37</sup>

Crossan rightly concludes that it was the incident at the temple that led to the arrest and execution of Jesus:

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<sup>34</sup>William R. Herzog II, *Jesus, Justice, and the Reign of God: A Ministry of Liberation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 111.

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*, 143. Cf. E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 70-73.

<sup>36</sup>Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, 360.

<sup>37</sup>Herzog, *Jesus*, 142.

My best historical reconstruction concludes that what led immediately to Jesus' arrest and execution in Jerusalem at Passover was that act of symbolic destruction, in deed and word, against the Temple. That sacred edifice represented in one central place all that his vision and program had fought against among the peasantry of Lower Galilee. In Jerusalem, quite possibly for the first and only time, he acted according to that program.<sup>38</sup>

One must conclude from this discussion that Jesus went to Jerusalem with his eyes wide open; he was not taken by surprise. At the midpoint of the Gospel of Mark, the reader begins to hear Jesus repeatedly foretelling his own suffering and death (Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:33-34). Even if these announcements reflect the later theological perspective and experience of the post-Easter church, as critical scholarship has tended to view them, there is no need to dismiss them entirely as *vaticinium ex eventu*. Jesus no doubt had a sense of what the national, political, and religious climate of Jerusalem was like. "One would have to declare Jesus something of a simpleton if it were maintained that he went up from Galilee to Jerusalem in all innocence, without any idea of the deadly opposition he was to encounter there."<sup>39</sup> Even while in Galilee he faced several threats on his life. The synagogue crowd in Nazareth wanted to hurl him off a cliff (Luke 4:29). Mark tells us that the Pharisees conspired with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him (3:6). At one point during his ministry in Galilee some Pharisees came and said to him, "Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you" (Luke 13:31). Jesus knew that Herod Antipas had earlier executed John the Baptist (Luke 9:7-9). Therefore, it is highly probable that Jesus anticipated for himself the same fate that had befallen John.

If this is the case, there is no reason to doubt that Jesus reflected on the meaning and the direction of his mission in light of the possibility of his own death. His original message as summarized in Mark 1:15 was: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news." But it was not long before the storm of controversy grew. Jesus came to the realization that, in order for him to remain faithful to his mission of proclaiming and living out the kingdom of God,

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<sup>38</sup>Crossan, *Who Killed Jesus?*, 65.

<sup>39</sup>Edward Schillebeeckx, *Jesus: An Experiment in Christology* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 299.

he may very well face a violent death. And it may be that he saw that it was precisely *through his own violent death* that the kingdom of God would come.

Now Jesus had the difficult task of teaching his disciples the meaning of all of this. The Caesarea Philippi episode is highly significant. Peter declares to Jesus, “You are the Messiah” (Mark 8:29). Immediately after that Jesus makes the first of his three passion predictions, the only one that uses the verb “must”: “The Son of Man must undergo great suffering. . .and be killed, and after three days rise again” (Mark 8:31). There ensues a vigorous interchange between Peter and Jesus. Words of rebuke are exchanged. Then Jesus teaches the crowd and his disciples that “if any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it.”

The second passion prediction is similar to the first. The third prediction, ironically, is immediately before the request of James and John to Jesus that they sit on his right and left in his glory. It is little wonder that Jesus says, “You do not know what you are asking.” When the other ten disciples hear that these two brothers are conspiring to get ahead, they are indignant. Jesus calls them and says to them, “You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:42-45).

What Jesus demanded of others, he himself practiced. His understanding of the kingdom of God was that one must deny oneself, take up the cross and follow him. The radical demands he made on his disciples were to be the result of one’s response to the kingdom of God that he himself accepted for his own life and mission. Again, it is *not* that God demands the death of Jesus as a penalty for sin. It is rather that Jesus comes to the realization that his faithfulness to the kingdom of God will likely mean his own death. Rather than mandated by God, the death of Jesus is the result of *the conflict that the kingdom of God creates in the world*. Jesus will drink the bitter cup if that is the only way he can remain faithful to the kingdom of God. In this way, then, Jesus understands his

own death to be not only for himself but also for others. It is “a ransom for many because the power of the kingdom of God is unleashed in the world and will transform history. In this respect Jesus may well have identified himself with the suffering servant of Isaiah and seen his mission as that of dying for others. His experience with the realities of Palestinian politics brought him to the realization that the kingdom of God cannot come without cost.<sup>40</sup>

In all three passion predictions in Mark, there is not a single statement to the effect that the death of Jesus was to be an atonement for sin as such. Even the ransom statement in 10:45 stops short of making the death a ransom for sin. Similarly, in the Lord’s Supper, the words of the institution, “Take, this is my body,” and “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many” (Mark 14:22-24), do not quite state that the death of Jesus was for sin. In fact, since the Last Supper was intended by Jesus as a Passover meal,<sup>41</sup> that may open up for us another way of looking at the self-understanding of Jesus. The Passover celebration was not particularly understood as atonement but as commemoration of the Exodus from Egyptian slavery. Thus the death of Jesus, at least in Mark, does not require us to make a case for atonement for sin. If anything, it points in the direction of an eschatological liberation or emancipation, much like Jesus’ initial announcement in his Nazareth sermon (Luke 4:16-30), with echoes of Jubilee themes from Isaiah 61:1-2. To take it a step further, several scholars have seen a connection between the temple incident and the Supper. According to Joel Green, Jesus viewed himself as “the focal point of God’s great act of deliverance; in his death the temple and all that it signified regarding the ordering of Israel’s life were invalidated, and his own life and death were to be the basis of Israel’s life before God.”<sup>42</sup>

To conclude, Jesus may very well have viewed his own violent death as a probability, but not because it was divinely foreordained as atonement for sin but because human beings, whether Israel or Gentiles, seemed poised religiously and politically to respond violently to the message and program that he represented. Thus, Jesus accepted that probabil-

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<sup>40</sup>Ibid, 298-312; Joel B. Green, “The Death of Jesus and the Ways of God,” in *Interpretation* 52/1 (January 1998), 24-37.

<sup>41</sup>Wright, 555.

<sup>42</sup>Green, “The Death of Jesus,” 32. See also Wright, 557.

ity and sought to interpret it as part of the coming of the kingdom of God. But there is still something puzzling here—the cry of Jesus on the cross, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mark 15:34). One way to interpret it would be to deny the authenticity of the cry and relegate it to Markan redaction. Only Mark and Matthew have this saying. Luke apparently perceived the difficulty and deleted it, substituting a much less troublesome saying, “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit” (23:46). Likewise, John has other words from the cross, but not this one. But why would Mark, or his tradition, create such a difficult saying? The answer is that this is part of Mark’s method of historicizing various statements from Psalm 22 and other Old Testament texts.<sup>43</sup>

Another interpretation is that God did indeed turn his back on his Son as the penalty for all the sins of the world. This so-called “cry of dereliction,” along with the prayer in Gethsemane, was Jesus’ desperate response to the ultimate punishment of separation from God.<sup>44</sup> But if this is Mark’s meaning, it is at best less than explicit. Furthermore, as Vincent Taylor put it, “it is inconsistent with the love of God and the oneness of purpose with the Father manifest in the atoning ministry of Jesus.”<sup>45</sup> “Nothing in the Gospel suggests God’s wrath against Jesus as the explanation.”<sup>46</sup> A third possibility is to acknowledge that this word of Jesus is a quote from the opening line of Psalm 22, which is a lament psalm. Some interpreters have gone so far as to say that when Jesus said the opening line of Psalm 22, he really meant the whole psalm, which turns into praise about half way through. That may be taking it too far.<sup>47</sup> Jesus does not die triumphantly as a heroic martyr. He dies in bitter anguish and turmoil. Jürgen Moltmann says:

The notion that the dying Jesus prayed the whole of Psalm 22 on the cross is surely implausible and far-fetched. For one

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<sup>43</sup>Rudolf Bultmann, *History of the Synoptic Tradition* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), 281; Lamar Williamson, Jr., *Mark* (Interpretation; Atlanta: John Knox, 1983), 275-276.

<sup>44</sup>C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Gospel according to St. Mark* (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1963), 458-459; William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 572-573.

<sup>45</sup>Vincent Taylor, *The Gospel according to St. Mark* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1966), 594.

<sup>46</sup>Brown, 2:1051, n. 54.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., 2:1050.

thing the psalm ends with a glorious prayer of thanksgiving for deliverance from death; and there was no deliverance on the cross. For another, people who were crucified were very soon incapable of speech. . . . And it is only here, on the cross, that Christ no longer calls God familiarly ‘Father,’ but addresses him quite formally as ‘God,’ as if he felt compelled to doubt whether he was the Son of God the Father.<sup>48</sup>

Luke’s omission of the cry is an indication that he did not understand it as a positive word. Furthermore, the context in Matthew and Mark precludes the positive interpretation in that the bystanders hear not a triumphant affirmation but a desperate cry for help.<sup>49</sup> We are left, then, with the option that the so-called cry of dereliction was an authentic and desperate cry of Jesus to God at the darkest moment of his life. Yet it cannot be taken to mean that God was in fact absent, or that Jesus despaired of God. After all, Jesus “continues to claim God as ‘my God’ and will not let him go. . . .”<sup>50</sup> If this were a despairing cry, it would be a contradiction of the whole tenor of Jesus’ message about the presence of the kingdom of God, even in the most unlikely circumstances. What is remarkable is that even in the hour of his greatest darkness Jesus still turned to God. It was a cry of heartache, pain, and tears. But it was still a cry to God.

My conclusion is that Jesus anticipated his own violent death and sought to interpret it as part of his mission of proclaiming and living out the coming of the kingdom of God. It is also reasonable to conclude that at some point he came to the realization that if he proclaimed his message in Jerusalem, he would most likely suffer a violent death. This death is not in and of itself mandated and foreordained by God as atonement for sin arising out of the justice and wrath of God. Rather, it would be the result of sinful humanity’s idolatry of substituting social, political, and religious institutions for the kingdom of God. In his role as servant, Jesus would give his life as a ransom for many in order to liberate humanity from such idolatry and call the “powers that be” to accept the new reality of the kingdom of God.

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<sup>48</sup>Jürgen Moltmann, *Jesus Christ for Today’s World* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 35-36.

<sup>49</sup>Hare, 322.

<sup>50</sup>Eduard Schweizer, *The Good News According to Mark* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1970), 353.

Jesus did not die as a disillusioned messiah. He died with the conviction that not even his own death was going to put a stop to the kingdom of God, that the kingdom of God is even greater than his own life. In fact, he came to the place where he believed that if the kingdom of God meant his own death, he would accept the bitter cup and drink it. Even though the following saying of Jesus is colored by Johannine theology, it contains an authentic core that goes back to Jesus because it is also attested in the synoptic gospels. Jesus said, "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life" (John 12:24-24; cf. Mark 8:34-36). Jesus died with the conviction that his own death was not the end of God's story. The eternal God was still there even if surrounded with complete darkness.

### **New Testament Interpretation**

No New Testament writer takes the position that the death of Jesus was caused only by human selfishness on the part of a treacherous disciple, obstinate Jews, or Roman politicians. The death of Jesus *fulfilled a divine purpose* in some way. Luke presents this interpretation in a variety of contexts. Earlier we noted the word of Jesus concerning Judas: "For the Son of Man is going as it has been determined, but woe to that one by whom he is betrayed!" (Luke 22:22). When the resurrected Jesus appears to the two on the Emmaus road, he interprets to them the scriptures and chides them with these words: "Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" (Luke 24:26). Later, when Jesus appears to his disciples, he says to them, "Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem" (Luke 24:46-47).

This necessity of Christ's suffering and death is also reflected in Luke's account in Acts. In his Pentecost sermon Peter says to the Jewish people gathered in Jerusalem, "This man [that is, Jesus], handed over to you according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of those outside the law. But God raised him up, having freed him from death, because it was impossible for him to be

held in its power” (Acts 2:23-24). After Peter and John are released from prison, the community of believers gathers to pray and ask for boldness to speak the word. In this prayer they recite the things that happened to Jesus their Lord: “For in this city, in fact, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place” (Acts 4:27-28).

So here we have it: the necessity of Christ’s suffering according to God’s definite plan, foreknowledge and predestination. According to these passages from Luke-Acts, it appears that the death of Jesus was not merely the result of human foul play, but in some way in accordance with divine purpose and foreknowledge. In a word, Christ’s death was predetermined by God. But how, and why?

First, the statement that “the Son of Man is going as it has been determined” (Luke 22:22) does not excuse the human role of the betrayer, even though it is God who has determined the going of the Son of Man. “Human responsibility and divine sovereignty are not to be played off against each other.”<sup>51</sup> Danker sees in this statement of Jesus a word of warning and an opportunity extended to Judas to change his mind.<sup>52</sup> Nevertheless, divine predetermination is clearly stated here.

But secondly, scholarship has long noted that Luke views the death of Jesus as part of the redemptive work of God in history.<sup>53</sup> God has predetermined to act redemptively in the world. In this respect, the passage in Acts 4:27-28 does not quite assert that Jesus’ death itself was predestined by God. It states that Herod and Pilate and the rest of the people gathered against Jesus to do whatever “your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.” *What God predestined is not primarily or exclusively that Jesus die. The purpose of God is to act redemptively in the world.* God is so committed to that purpose that even the worst case scenario, namely, the death of Jesus, could not dissuade God from his redemptive purpose. When human beings had done their worst, God still found a way to be gracious and redemptive, even to the point of turning this dastardly deed of humanity into an act of redemption. The death of Jesus becomes redemptive because God chooses to make it so. Human beings can kill Jesus, but only God can make his death into an act of sal-

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<sup>51</sup>John Nolland, *Luke 18:35–24:53* (Dallas: Word Books, 1993), 1060.

<sup>52</sup>Frederick W. Danker, *Jesus and the New Age* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 347.

<sup>53</sup>Tyson, *The Death of Jesus in Luke-Acts*.



vation. It is not so much that God predestined the death of Jesus as that God overturned the tragedy of Jesus' death by raising him from the dead and making him "both Lord and Messiah" (Acts 2:36).

Here, again, just as in Mark, so also in Luke-Acts, one does not find explicit statements that the death of Jesus was *for sins*. The eucharistic words are that the body and blood are given and poured out "for you" (Luke 22:19-20). The indication in Luke is even more emphatic than in Mark that the Last Supper was a Passover celebration (22:15), signifying that Christ's vicarious suffering and death, rather than being an atonement for sin, is intended for humanity's liberation from slavery and bondage. The significance of Jesus' suffering and resurrection is that "repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations" (Luke 24:47).<sup>54</sup> In this respect, note the way 1 Peter states the issue of the predestination of Christ and his death in these two passages:

Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that was to be yours made careful search and inquiry, inquiring about the person or time that the Spirit of Christ within them indicated when it testified in advance to the sufferings destined for Christ and the subsequent glory (1:10-11).

You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your ancestors, not with perishable things like silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without defect or blemish. He was destined before the foundation of the world, but was revealed at the end of the ages for your sake (1:18-20).

It should be noted first that the word "destined" in verse 11 is not in the Greek text. The Greek text simply says "testified in advance to the sufferings *for* Christ" (emphasis added). Michaels translates it "the sufferings intended for Christ,"<sup>55</sup> which is not that different from "destined." Secondly, it is the Spirit of Christ in the prophets that testified in advance to Christ's sufferings. That the Old Testament bears witness to Christ and his sufferings becomes understandable only after the Christ event itself. Pheme Perkins raises the issue of the Christian appropriation of the Old Testament and urges that Christians today

<sup>54</sup>Cf. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke I-IX* (The Anchor Bible; New York: Doubleday, 1981), 22-23, 219-221.

<sup>55</sup>J. Ramsey Michaels, *1 Peter* (WBC; Waco: Word, 1988), 44.

. . . need to be more self-conscious than 1 Peter about the difference between reading the prophets as witnesses to their own time . . . and reading them as witnesses to Christ. We cannot suppose, as 1 Peter argues, that God had only the Christian community of faith in mind throughout the Old Testament.<sup>56</sup>

Perkins suggests that other Jewish groups such as the Essenes also found connections between the prophets and their community. Is the Christian connection to the prophets more valid than the Essene? I am simply making the point that prophecy cannot be understood naively as prediction of the future and on that basis conclude that the future references in the prophets are predetermined.<sup>57</sup>

It was the early Christians who, after their experience of the death and resurrection of Jesus, looked back to the prophets and searched the Old Testament scriptures to make sense of their own cognitive dissonance relative to the awful enigma of a suffering and dying Messiah. In the Old Testament scriptures they found ample evidence that the vicarious suffering of the innocent for the guilty is very much the way things have been from Abel in Genesis to the suffering servant in Isaiah 53. Also, the statement in 1 Peter 1:20 clearly states that it is Christ himself who was “destined before the foundation of the world” and not necessarily his death, which is mentioned in the previous verse. The noun cases in the Greek text clearly support this translation in the NRSV. One cannot build a firm case for the idea that the *death of Jesus itself* was intended by God before the foundation of the world and predicted by the prophets. It is *Christ himself* who is in the purposes of God from eternity to eternity.

More than any other New Testament writing, Hebrews has much to say about Christ’s role as a superior high priest and sacrifice compared to the Old Testament. The passage in Hebrews most directly relevant to the present concern is 9:23—10:18. Two comments are in order. First, the purpose of Christ’s sacrifice is to remove sin from “the heavenly things,” that is, to provide a spiritual purification, perfection, and sanctification which the old ritual sacrifices could never accomplish (9:23—10:4, 14).<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup>PHEME PERKINS, *First and Second Peter, James, and Jude* (Interpretation; Louisville: John Knox, 1995), 35.

<sup>57</sup>GURDON C. OXTOPY, *Prediction and Fulfillment in the Bible* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1966).

<sup>58</sup>BRUCE, 218-220; WILLIAM L. LANE, *Hebrews 9-13* (WBC; Dallas: Word, 1991), 249; ATTRIDGE, 263-264.

Christ's sacrifice brings moral and spiritual transformation. The second comment has to do with the quotation in 10:5-7 from Psalm 40:6-8 (LXX). The point here is that God does not desire sacrifices and offerings but a readiness to do God's will, which Christ did by offering his body, through which "we have been sanctified" (10:10).<sup>59</sup> Thus the purpose of Christ's death is not primarily *judicial*. Its purpose is the *moral and spiritual transformation of the believer*.

Two statements from Paul's writings are relevant for the subject at hand. The first is Romans 3:21-26, which states the thesis for the whole letter. According to Käsemann, it is one of the most difficult and obscure sections of the letter.<sup>60</sup> Verses 24-25 are particularly significant:

They are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith. He did this to show his righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over the sins previously committed.

It is widely agreed that nearly all of verse 25, with the exception of "effective through faith" (no "effective" in the Greek) is a pre-Pauline, Jewish Christian tradition.<sup>61</sup>

Three words or phrases are especially significant for our consideration: "redemption," "put forward," and "a sacrifice of atonement." In a volume of essays growing out of the Pauline Theology Group of the Society of Biblical Literature, Andrew Lincoln and Jouette Bassler comment on these verses. Lincoln notes that in these verses Paul employs three types of imagery: (1) that of the law court—justification; (2) that of the slave market and Israel's slavery in Egypt and Babylon—redemption; (3) propitiatory sacrifice, averting the wrath of God—sacrifice of atonement.<sup>62</sup> Bassler responds with the observation that, while the atonement does reveal God's justice, "justice is not the whole of it." God's justice does not preclude forbearance (v. 25). "Now this forbearance takes an

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<sup>59</sup>Bruce, 235; Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, 270; Attridge, 276-277.

<sup>60</sup>Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 92.

<sup>61</sup>*Ibid.*, 98; James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1-8* (WBC; Dallas: Word, 1988), 163-164.

<sup>62</sup>Andrew T. Lincoln, "From Wrath to Justification," in *Pauline Theology III: Romans* (ed. David M. Hay and E. Elizabeth Johnson; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 148.

active quality, for God provides through the atonement a means to make it productive.” She goes on to point out that in Romans 5:8 the atonement demonstrates not only God’s forbearance but also God’s reconciling love. This point is powerfully made in several ways in subsequent chapters: in the confidence that nothing will separate us from the love of God at the final judgment (8:31-39); in the mediating role of mercy and compassion between God’s impartiality and faithfulness in the face of Israel’s disbelief (chaps. 9-11); and finally in the exhortations of chapters 12-15 where “God’s self-disclosure in the atonement establishes a model for human behavior” as love for one another.<sup>63</sup>

From such construal of Pauline theology it seems reasonable to conclude that penal satisfaction, with its emphasis on the justice or honor of God rather than divine love, is not the best way to understand Christ’s death.<sup>64</sup> The crucial statement in 2 Corinthians 5 is in verse 21, “he made him to be sin who knew no sin.” One should note that it is God who in Christ reconciles the world to himself. This is critical not only in understanding Pauline theology but also in articulating a theocentric view of the atonement. It is not that Christ appeases an angry God, but that it is God who initiates reconciliation of the world to himself. And yet Hughes interprets verse 21 as penal substitution: “God made Him *sin*: that is to say that God the Father made His innocent incarnate Son the object of His wrath and judgment.”<sup>65</sup> The language of Ralph Martin’s comment is much more in keeping with Pauline theology, as already indicated in the previous comments on Romans and Galatians. Martin says that the purpose of God’s appointment of the innocent Christ to be sin for our sake is twofold. First, “God identified his Son with the human condition in its alienation and lostness.” Second, “God declared that believers might become righteous with a righteousness that is his own. . . . The middle link of connection in this equation is that God in Christ has acted sovereignly to establish this new order.”<sup>66</sup>

There is a difference of opinion about the meaning of “sin” in the statement, “he made him to be sin.” It has been suggested on good

<sup>63</sup>Jouette M. Bassler, “Centering the Argument,” in *Pauline Theology III: Romans*, 167-168.

<sup>64</sup>Käsemann, *Romans*, 97.

<sup>65</sup>Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), 213.

<sup>66</sup>Ralph P. Martin, *2 Corinthians* (WBC; Waco: Word, 1986), 157-158.

grounds that sin here means sin offering, perhaps echoing Isaiah 53:10, "When you make his life an offering for sin." The observation that Paul nowhere else uses such language is countered by the argument that here Paul is using an early tradition and therefore the words are not his own.<sup>67</sup> A possible parallel to 2 Corinthians 5:21 is Galatians 3:13 where Paul says, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us." Richard Taylor says, "Jesus bore in our stead the curse of God's wrath as if the sins were his own."<sup>68</sup> It is not clear to me from Paul's statement that the curse is that of God's wrath. It is rather the law, not God, that puts Christ under a curse.<sup>69</sup> And it is God who in Christ redeems us from the curse of the law. From this brief survey of Pauline statements, I conclude that Paul interprets Christ's death as an expression of God's *reconciling love* rather than God's *wrath*. A corollary is that it is not God who predetermines Christ's death. Rather, when the death does occur, God *makes* the death an act of reconciliation.

One final passage to discuss is Revelation 13:8. One cannot be absolutely certain about the translation of this verse. The NIV and NRSV represent two different possibilities. The NIV translates it, "All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast—all whose names have not been written in the book of life belonging to *the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world*" (emphasis added). The NRSV on the other hand renders it this way: "And all the inhabitants of the earth will worship it, everyone *whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world* in the book of life of the Lamb that was slaughtered" (emphasis added). The prepositional phrase "from the creation/foundation of the world" in Greek can be linked either to "Lamb" (NIV) or to "names" (NRSV). The other English versions as well as the commentaries seem to be equally divided.<sup>70</sup> But in either case the issue of predestination is pre-

<sup>67</sup>N. T. Wright, "On Becoming the Righteousness of God," in *Pauline Theology II: 1 & 2 Corinthians* (ed. David M. Hay; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 207; Martin, 140, 157; *contra* Hughes, 214-215.

<sup>68</sup>Taylor, 66.

<sup>69</sup>Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 149. F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on Galatians* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 166; Charles B. Cousar, *Galatians* (Interpretation; Atlanta: John Knox, 1982), 75-77; Dieter Lüthmann, *Galatians* (A Continental Commentary; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 61.

<sup>70</sup>G. B. Caird, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), 168; Jürgen Roloff, *Revelation* (A Continental Commentary; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 153.

sent, whether it is Christ's death or the name of believers in the book of life. Even if the author's intention was to say that it is Christ who was slain from the foundation of the world, what exactly does that mean? How was Christ put to death from the foundation of the world? Does "from" mean "since" or "at the time of"? If it means "since," there is no issue to grapple with. If it means "at the time of," which is probably the more likely meaning, it would imply that as soon as God created the world, the possibility or even the probability of the cross entered into the picture.

### Theological Reflections

A series of articles in two recent issues of *Interpretation* (1998 and 1999) examine the atonement from a variety of biblical and theological perspectives. Charles Cousar, William Placher, and Nancy Duff in separate articles raise the question whether the church's proclamation of the atonement glorifies violence and suffering. In three different ways they all affirm our need of the atonement. Cousar argues that Paul not only does not glorify suffering but also urges his churches to refrain from violence. Paul himself as well as some of the people to whom he wrote were already experiencing suffering in their service of the gospel. Suffering is a matter of course for a community that embodies the new creation which continues to groan along with the rest of creation. Paul's theology of the cross is the basis of a power that accomplishes its purpose in weakness rather than domination and control.<sup>71</sup>

William Placher asks whether women and other oppressed groups have been called too often by the Christian faith to endure suffering. Does vicarious suffering make moral sense? His answer is that it would depend on whether the suffering perpetuates injustice, or the acceptance of suffering serves the cause of justice, peace, and liberation. In this regard, Christ's suffering is not that of a scapegoat dragged to sacrifice against its will but a volunteer in the battle against evil. Placher then responds to the question as to whether the atonement fosters the image of a vindictive God by saying that God's love becomes painful wrath, "but in Christ God takes that wrath on God's own self."<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>71</sup>Charles B. Cousar, "Paul and the Death of Jesus," in *Interpretation* 52/1 (January 1998), 48-50.

<sup>72</sup>William C. Placher, "Christ Takes Our Place: Rethinking Atonement," in *Interpretation* 53/1 (January 1999), 16-17.

Nancy Duff looks at the Reformed doctrine of the atonement from a feminist perspective. She observes that debate over the atonement now marks one of the most heated conflicts in contemporary theology. The question for her is whether the feminist critique of the atonement will receive a hearing in Reformed circles. She does not advocate rejection of the doctrine but reexamination of its salvific character in response to the feminist charge that the image of cosmic child abuse portrayed in the willingness of God the Father to sacrifice the Son glorifies suffering and condones abuse. Her answer is to appeal to Christ's prophetic office which must be rooted in the incarnation. The cross of Christ, who is fully divine and fully human, is not something that God required of or did to Jesus, but something that God did for us. By the same token, an abused wife is not the incarnate God suffering on behalf of others. Christ on the cross represents her and reveals God's presence with her. Duff understands the cross to stand for God's unconditional love. However, that does not mean permissiveness and tolerance of evil. "Humanity not only needs to be *forgiven* for guilt incurred through sin, but *freed* from the power of sin which holds the human will captive and causes some people to be victimized at the hands of others."<sup>73</sup>

Baillie rightly argues against the facile liberalism of nineteenth-century Protestantism that minimized the significance of the biblical understanding of the depth of human sinfulness and the vicarious suffering of the Son of God. Note:

When we speak of God's free love toward us, continuing unchanged through all our sin, and eternally ready to forgive us, there is always the danger that this should be taken to mean that God is willing to pass lightly over our sins because they do not matter much to Him; that it is all a matter of easy routine, about which we need not be greatly concerned and need not greatly wonder. . . . It is as if God were to be regarded as indulgent and good-natured, making as little as possible of our misdeeds, glossing over our delinquencies. Is God's love for sinners simply "kindly judgment"? Nay, it is "a consuming fire." . . . God must be inexorable towards our sins; not because He is just, but because He is loving; not in spite of His love, but because of His love.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>73</sup>Nancy J. Duff, "Atonement and the Christian Life," in *Interpretation* 53/1 (January 1999), 24-30.

<sup>74</sup>Baillie, 172-173.

Although in the history of the church satisfaction theories of the atonement, penal or otherwise, have dominated Christian theology, other voices have raised objections. Peter Abelard and J. McLeod Campbell are but two examples. A century and a half ago Campbell argued against the penal substitution theory at the cost of losing his standing as a Presbyterian minister in Scotland. Campbell said, “[W]hile Christ suffered for our sins as an atoning sacrifice, what he suffered was not—because from its nature it could not be—punishment.” Rather, Christ’s sufferings are rooted in “Divine Holiness and Divine Love.”<sup>75</sup> Moltmann says:

[I]n Christ’s God-forsakenness, God goes out of himself, forsakes his heaven and is in Christ himself, is there, present, in order to become the God and Father of the forsaken. . . . Christ’s cross stands between all the countless crosses which line the paths of the powerful and the violent, from Spartacus to the concentration camps and to the people who have died of hunger or who have “disappeared” in Latin America.<sup>76</sup>

Yet because of the influence of Greek philosophy, Christian thought over the centuries has been dominated by a concept of God who is impassible, immovable, and self-sufficient. Note:

Right down to the present day, the apathy axiom has left a deeper impress on the fundamental concepts of the doctrine of God than has the history of Christ’s passion. . . . The ability to identify God with Christ’s passion dwindles in proportion to the importance that is given to the apathy axiom in the doctrine of God.<sup>77</sup>

It is perhaps for this reason that the pervasive view of the atonement in Western Christianity has been that the death of Jesus had been foreordained by God’s demand of justice. But if one starts with the biblical understanding of a passionately loving and therefore vulnerable God, the ground upon which the satisfaction theories of the atonement have stood will have been shaken.

Long before Christ’s death, God has suffered, wept, and agonized over the sinfulness of the human race. In that sense Christ is the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. The cross of Christ bares the heart

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<sup>75</sup>Campbell, 107.

<sup>76</sup>Moltmann, 38-39.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid., 43.



of God, a heart full of love that is broken and weeping. God does not shrink back from giving himself to humankind completely and unreservedly, regardless of the risks. In the words of Frances M. Young:

God accepted the terrible situation, demonstrating that he takes responsibility for evil in his universe, that he recognizes the seriousness of evil, its destructive effect, its opposition to his purposes; that it cannot be ignored, but must be challenged and removed; that it is costly to forgive; that he suffers because his universe is subject to evil and sin.<sup>78</sup>

Geoffrey Wainwright places this understanding of the atonement in the context of contemporary hermeneutic:

[T]he sharing by Christians in the priestly office of Christ requires contemporary exercise: the question of peace and reconciliation. As those who, in Christ, know themselves to be part of a world that has been “reconciled to God by the death of his Son” (Rom. 5:10f.; cf. 2 Cor. 5:18f.), Christians have been given a “ministry of reconciliation.” . . . The case could be no more dramatic than in Northern Ireland, where there is a chance that water, bread, and wine could prove themselves more potent symbols than sashes, berets, and flags, and that hands lifted in prayer or laid on heads in forgiveness and healing could turn out closer to reality than hands that plant bombs or squeeze triggers.<sup>79</sup>

The satisfaction theories of the atonement are inadequate to express the richness of divine love that suffers because they arise out of the faulty assumption that God’s primary attribute is justice and that God must vindicate himself and his moral government and demand payment for a moral debt. On the other hand, understanding the death of Christ as an expression of God’s endeavor to reconcile the world to himself, along the lines of the moral influence theory, is not only consistent with biblical theology but is also most congenial to Wesleyan thought. First, there seems to be a consensus that Wesley did not have a distinctive doctrine of atonement. The following is Dunning’s assessment of Wesley’s position:

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<sup>78</sup>Frances M. Young, *Sacrifice and the Death of Christ* (London: SPCK, 1975) 125.

<sup>79</sup>Geoffrey Wainwright, *For Our Salvation: Two Approaches to the Work of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 152-153.

The absence of a systematic treatise by Wesley on the Atonement is a serious weakness and creates a profound tension, since it results in his apparently adopting or at least using the formulations of some form of the satisfaction theory. He was constantly having to fight against its implications. Had he developed a logical analysis of his own, he might have become aware that this view did not support, in fact was antithetical to his major theological commitments.<sup>80</sup>

Secondly, in spite of the fact that Wesley depended on some form of the satisfaction theory, he seems to have been open to a variety of formulations. For example, Maddox finds “more resonance with Abelard’s central theme in Wesley’s reflections on the Atonement than is often admitted.”<sup>81</sup> Maddox summarizes Wesley’s understanding as “a Penalty Satisfaction *explanation* of the Atonement which has a Moral Influence *purpose*, and a Ransom *effect*!”<sup>82</sup> Third, Lindström and Maddox see a link between the atonement and sanctification in Wesley’s thought. Lindström says that sanctification is indirectly related to atonement, since sanctification is primarily the consequence of Christ’s royal office.<sup>83</sup> Maddox sees the relation of the atonement to sanctification when he says, “If we will respond to this pardoning love of God and allow God’s Presence deeper access to our lives, then we will be liberated from our captivity to sin and the process of our transformation into the fullness that God has always intended for us can begin.”<sup>84</sup>

## Conclusion

I began this essay with the question as to whether the death of Jesus was historically contingent or divinely foreordained. It seems to me that the answer is that the death of Jesus was brought about through human decisions and therefore it is historically contingent. The survey of mater-

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<sup>80</sup>Dunning, 334. See also Herald Lindström, *Wesley and Sanctification* (1946; reprinted, Grand Rapids: Francis Asbury, 1980), 60-75; John Deschner, *Wesley’s Christology* (Dallas: SMU Press, 1960, reprinted 1980), 152-169; Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1994), 96-101; Kenneth J. Collins, *The Scripture Way of Salvation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 80-86.

<sup>81</sup>Maddox, 106.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., 109.

<sup>83</sup>Lindström, 83.

<sup>84</sup>Maddox, 109.

ial from and about the historical Jesus indicates that social, political and religious forces were at work to bring Jesus to his violent death. However, Jesus was not simply the victim of circumstances. At some point in his life he began to see that his message and what he represented would probably result in a violent death and that this was part of the coming of the kingdom of God. His words at the Last Supper indicate that he understood his own death in the Passover imagery of liberation for captives from the old order.

The various New Testament writings interpret the death of Jesus as atonement, understood as God's reconciling love toward humanity. It is God who takes the initiative to act redemptively through the death of Jesus. I conclude that the death of Jesus was not divinely foreordained as penal satisfaction, but was the result of God's coming into human history vulnerably through the incarnation.

In the context of contemporary theology with its concern for the oppressed and the spiral of abuse and violence, the least viable formulation of the atonement would be penal substitution. The moral influence theory with its emphasis on the suffering love of God should at least be given a renewed hearing, but without underestimating the power and seriousness of sin. Such an articulation of the atonement is a more faithful rendering of the New Testament understanding of the death of Jesus than satisfaction theories. It is also more congenial to the central commitments of Wesleyan theology than the other classical theories.

**UNA NATURA DIVINA, TRES NESCIO QUID:  
WHAT SORTS OF *PERSONAE*  
ARE DIVINE *PERSONAE*?**

by

**Michael E. Lodahl**

In her *Theology Today* article “Trinity: To Let the Symbol Sing Again,” Elizabeth Johnson has explored some of the salient strengths and possibilities of contemporary trinitarian reflection. She opens her piece with a captivating “reading” of an icon of the Trinity by fifteenth century Russian artist Andrei Rublev, “The Holy Trinity.” The icon depicts a scene inspired by the story in Genesis 18 involving Abraham’s and Sarah’s mysterious trio of visitors—a story, writes Johnson, that “recounts a tremendous encounter of shared hospitality.” Johnson’s theological rendering of this icon is well worth quoting:

What catches the meditating eye most is the position of the three figures. They are arranged in a circle inclining toward one another but the circle is not closed. What the image suggests is that the mystery of God is not a self-contained or closed divine society but a communion in relationship. Moreover, its portrayal of the figures evokes the idea that this divine communion is lovingly open to the world, seeking to nourish it. As you contemplate, you begin intuitively to grasp that you are invited into this circle. Indeed, by gazing, you are already a part of it. This is a depiction of a trinitarian God capable of immense hospitality who calls the world to join the feast.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Elizabeth Johnson, “Trinity: To Let the Symbol Sing Again” in *Theology Today* Vol. 54, No. 3 (October 1997), 299.

In this brief description Johnson captures much of what is inviting and invigorating in the revival of Christian trinitarian theology occurring in our time. What is missing from her analysis of this icon, however—if not entirely from her article as a whole—is any sense of caution about the limits inherent in such imagery. Interestingly enough, she does not mention the obvious and utterly unsurprising fact that all three figures in Rublev’s icon are males. Nor shall I dwell on this point, since it is one that generally has been well made and addressed by many feminist and egalitarian theologians. I intend to explore two other critical limitations of the icon: (1) it is not simply the problem of three *male* figures as God, but of three *human* figures as representative of the *tres personae*<sup>2</sup>; and (2) these three are not only all human, but are also virtually indistinguishable from each other, thereby implying an absolute sameness, ontologically speaking, inherent in and among the *tres personae*.

Both of these shortcomings are, admittedly, addressed in much other iconography. Especially in the West, the Trinity often has been visually represented as an older male figure with long flowing beard, a younger, cruciform male or a lamb, and a dove or a flame.<sup>3</sup> In such imagery, the “persons” of the Trinity are not all represented as *human persons*, and also are not represented as identical to one another. Nonetheless, whatever we may have portrayed iconographically, we Christians have *in our theology* tended to “personalize” the *personae* of the Trinity, and also to think of these *personae* as all “persons” *in the same way*.<sup>4</sup> It is these two predisposing tendencies that I wish to question in what follows.

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<sup>2</sup>Johnson does in fact address this issue to some extent in her article on pages 304–306.

<sup>3</sup>The larger question shall not be addressed here as to whether, given the Torah’s strict prohibition of visual imagery for God and the Christian Testament’s insistence that God *cannot* be visually objectified or represented, Christians should even attempt to fashion icons of the Triune God.

<sup>4</sup>All the ink spilt over the Father being “unbegotten,” the Son being “begotten,” and the Spirit “proceeding from” the Father—or from the Father and the Son, *or* from the Father through the Son—has not made much difference in the pronounced tendency to understand the Persons of the Triune Godhead as being different-yet-ontologically “the same.” Rublev’s icon depicting three virtually identical figures coincides well with most trinitarian thinking, especially when the focus is not on the biblical language of Father, Son, and Spirit but on the doctrinal language of Persons.

## How “Personal” are the *Personae*?

It must be difficult for most Christians—when, for example, they are singing the great hymn “Holy! Holy! Holy! Lord God Almighty,” and finish each verse with the refrain “God in three Persons, blessed Trinity”—*not* to envision a committee of three (usually all male) people who dwell together in matchless unity. Lovely as Rublev’s icon is, images like his are not of much help. Granted, there is a positive function that this social model serves; many theologians today are finding in this social model of triune communion a compelling theological rationale for rethinking the critical importance of community and shared life in both divine and human being—a value nicely represented in the earlier quotation from Johnson.

However, that social model of the Trinity greatly depends on a mental image of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as “persons” not entirely unlike—indeed, *very much like*—human persons. Again, iconic representations such as Rublev’s contribute to this anthropomorphizing of the *personae*, and tritheism cannot be far behind. If Johnson opens her essay iconically, later she ironically rehashes the truism that *person* did not mean for the early Fathers what it has come, generally, to mean to us—“a social being with a distinct center of consciousness and freedom”<sup>5</sup>—though (and this is the ironic part) in utilizing Rublev’s icon she has in fact aided and abetted precisely that misunderstanding of the Greek *prosopon* and the Latin *persona*.

Nonetheless, she does correctly remind us that theologians before us have been deeply cognizant of the allusive nature of trinitarian language. Saint Augustine, for example, admitted that all human language is inadequate to “find[ing] a generic or a specific name which may include the three together . . . because the excellence of divinity transcends all the limits of our customary manner of speaking.”<sup>6</sup> So he hesitantly used *persona* rather than be reduced to silence. Some thinkers of Augustine’s era were largely content simply to write “the three” without attempting to circumscribe just what those three are. Even more dramatically, Saint Anselm, that usually confident and forthright Archbishop of Canterbury, found himself reduced to speaking of God as “three I know not whats”

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<sup>5</sup>Johnson, 304.

<sup>6</sup>Augustine, *On the Trinity*, ed. Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), 7.4.7.

(*tres nescio quid*). Such classic examples as these remind us that the term *person* is employed not because it is adequate to the Divine Mystery but because it is the best we have been able to do, historically speaking, in our halting attempts to describe God the Father's redemptive labors through God the Son by God the Spirit.<sup>7</sup> Johnson writes, "*Person* recommends itself because it is used in tradition, Scripture does not contradict it, but most of all because we have to say *something* when the question arises."<sup>8</sup>

This difficulty is amplified, of course, by the fact that, in the case of *one* of the so-called "persons" of the Trinity, we really *do* mean "person" in our everyday sense of the word—since in the case of the "Second Person" of the Trinity, the Son or Logos, we confess that this *persona* became flesh and dwelt among us as a human being. The second of Anselm's three "I know not whats" became a person very much like the persons we experience ourselves to be. In terms of Rublev's icon, in other words, one of the three figures is more or less accurately portrayed. But what of the other figures?

Let us begin with the so-called "First Person," God the Father. What *kind* of "person" is this "First Person"? There can be little if any question that the New Testament writings assume this figure to be the God of Israel: the God who spoke and acted through the prophets, the God who delivered the people of Israel from Egypt and led them to a land of promise, indeed the God who in the beginning created the heavens and the earth. The Apostle Paul clearly reflects this identification when he writes that "there is no God but one," and that this "one God" is "the Father, from whom are all things" (1 Cor. 8:6). This one who is "the Father," then, is even more importantly (for Christians) the One who addressed Jesus at his baptism by a heavenly voice, "You are my beloved Son; in You I am well pleased" (Mk. 1:11); this is the One who revealed to Peter that Jesus is the Messiah, God's Son (Matt. 16:17); this is the One who

<sup>7</sup>John Wesley's sentiments in his sermon "On the Trinity" are apropos here. He did not believe that using terms like "Trinity" or "Person" was a necessary test of Christian orthodoxy—though, in his words, "I use them myself without any scruple, because I know of none better" (*Works*, Jackson ed., Vol. VI, 200). For him the doctrine of the Triune God, not surprisingly, was practical and soteriological: authentic Christian faith depends upon the testimony of the Holy Spirit, when "God the Holy Ghost witnesses that God the Father has accepted [one] through the merits of God the Son" (*Ibid.*, 205).

<sup>8</sup>Johnson, 304.

spoke from a cloud to Peter, James, and John, saying of Jesus, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; pay attention to him!" (Matt. 17:5).

To put it simply, this One called "Father" is a *persona* capable of speaking, of commanding, of acting in this world of this One's own making. While this "First Person" (as this Father-figure would subsequently be called) is clearly not a person as we humans are persons, this One can be said to be *personal*, i.e., sufficiently similar to human persons as to be capable of interaction with them—as strange, overwhelming, elusive, and mysterious as that interaction might in fact be. Another way we might say it is that this One called "Father" possesses the characteristic—analogically, not univocally, speaking—of subjectivity. When Jesus prays in Gethsemane, "Abba! Father! All things are possible for you; remove this cup from me; yet not what I will, but what you will, be done," it should be clear to us that there is an *intersubjectivity* of will, desire, and communication that the gospel narrative describes. To put it in the words of Hebrews, when Jesus "offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to save him from death . . . he was heard" (5:7).

It is obvious, not to mention demanded by ecumenical creed, that Jesus of Nazareth was a human being who spoke and acted, who had desires and made decisions. Further, the heart of the Christian faith is that this same Jesus "was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father" (Rom. 6:4), such that he continues to be a self-aware subject. Again, then, I submit that Jesus is a *person* in our usual sense of the term, albeit now with all the qualifications that must be guessed at when attempting to speculate about what a resurrected person might be like. This much we can say, though, with Paul: "[T]he life that [the resurrected Christ] lives, he lives to God" (Rom. 6:10). This statement implies a continuing life of devotion (if such a term is adequate), a glorious life of directionality toward God and God's will, in the subjective experience of the resurrected Christ. There is, then, an identifiable subjective continuity between the earthly human person, Jesus of Nazareth, and the resurrected Jesus; simply put, Jesus was and is a person.

God the Father, on the other hand, is most certainly not a person in the normal sense of the term. And yet our previous point still holds: this One that Jesus addresses as *Abba* is the One who declares Jesus to be his Son, who hears Jesus' prayers, who (according to Jesus) feeds the birds of



the air and clothes the grass of the field, who causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and who (most importantly) raised his son Jesus from death. To this One Jesus could pray, “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth” (Mt. 11:25)—and to this One Jesus also directs his disciples to pray. Thus, because of Jesus and in Jesus’ name, we too address God as *Abba*. We too can pray to the Father and be heard. This implies that, while the First Person is by no means a person as we are persons, this One can and does participate in inter-subjective relations not only with Jesus his Son, but also with us—and thus this One can be said to be *personal* (even better, this One can be *addressed in personal terms*). I do not mean “personal” in the popular sense of that which connotes the private or individualistic, but in the sense of entering into, and participating in, relations of communication and communion with others. Perhaps the term *interpersonal* would be more adequate. Such is this “interpersonal” nature of the Father and the Son that John the beloved could write that “our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ” (1 Jn. 1:3).

I would be quick to add that I think John should have written that “our fellowship is with the Father *through* his Son Jesus Christ,” but he did not. In any case, the fact that this text implies that it is possible for Christians to participate in *koinonia* with the Father and with the Son suggests much about the nature of them both. Their nature is such that we human beings can “have fellowship” with the Father and with his son Jesus Christ in some fashion that is not entirely unlike the fellowship we may have with one another—in fact, as far as the Johannine vision is concerned, that is probably putting it backwards, since the fellowship we may have with one another is said to be, in essence, a participation in the eternal fellowship of Father and Son (cf. John 17).

What is glaringly absent from the opening of John’s epistle, of course, is the Spirit. I do not mean to imply that John should be expected to have developed a full trinitarian doctrine a few centuries ahead of Nicea and Constantinople; I only mean to point out that John is, in fact, quite representative of the New Testament writings as a whole when he neglects to describe the Spirit as One *with* whom we have fellowship. We are never instructed by Paul to pray *to* the Spirit, but instead *in* the Spirit. Similarly, while the Spirit leads (and perhaps even more forcefully *drives*) Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted of Satan, and while Jesus does mighty works *by* the Spirit of God, and while Jesus can even be said to *rejoice in* the Holy Spirit (Lk. 10:21), he is never described as addressing

himself in prayer *to* the Spirit. In fact, when Luke describes Jesus as rejoicing in the Holy Spirit, it is as Jesus offers prayer to the Father: “I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth.” Indeed, the Spirit is never described as *speaking to* Jesus either.

Similarly, the apostle Paul’s favored preposition for our relation to the Spirit is not *to* or *with* but *in*. The Christian life is not a life of prayer addressed *to* the Spirit, nor a life of fellowship *with* the Spirit, but a life lived *in* the Spirit. Thus, the *persona* of the Spirit is even less like a human person than is the *persona* of the Father; that is, the Spirit is less like a person we speak with and more like the breath we inhale and exhale in the very process of speaking itself—which of course should be no surprise, given the etymology of “spirit.” This, in turn, raises the rather haunting question as to whether the Spirit, metaphorically speaking, has a *face*.

We can readily affirm that the Spirit is the Third Person of the Triune Godhead, remembering that “person” in this case can be very roughly translated, following in Anselm’s wake, as an “I know not what.” But if we have already established that Jesus, as a *truly human* person, is not the same sort of *persona* as God the Father is, then we should have relatively little difficulty in accepting the possibility that the Spirit is yet another sort of *persona*.

There have been various attempts within our theological tradition, however, to avoid this possibility. I cut my theological teeth as a youngster on literature that insisted, and demonstrated by selective proof-text, that the Spirit is fully a person like the Father and the Son. The ritual for The “Reception of Church Members” in the Church of the *Manual* of the Church of the Nazarene states that “we especially emphasize the deity of Christ and the personality of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>9</sup> Indeed, the doctrinal statement of the Wesleyan Theological Society is that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are “eternally existent . . . each with personality and deity.” It is bad enough that often the Christian in the pew thinks of the *personae* of the Trinity as “persons” in the modern, conventional sense (as three *people*) but it is worse when ecclesiastical and theological leaders attribute a modern psychological term like “personality” to the Spirit, or for that matter to any of the *tres personae* of the Trinity.

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<sup>9</sup>1989 *Manual* (Kansas City, Mo.: Nazarene Publishing House), paragraph 801, 245.

To be sure, in the cases of the Nazarene *Manual* ritual and the WTS doctrinal statement, the point was neither to psychologize the Spirit nor equate the Spirit in some way with human personality (though that has undoubtedly often been what has resulted), but to insist on full equality of the Persons such that the Spirit is no less self-aware, no less subjective, no less a divine agent than either the Father or the Son. But this is the very point at which I raise my first question. How “personal” are the *personae*? And does the answer to this question depend on which of the *personae* we are considering? Obviously, if we are willing to grant that these three *personae* are not all *personae* in the very same way, then perhaps we are in a position to ask, What kind of *persona* is the Holy Spirit?

### Who and What Is the Holy Spirit?

In the second volume of his *Christian Theology*, H. Orton Wiley, the dean of Nazarene theologians, wrote that “‘the finger of God’ [is] an expression which is interchangeable with ‘the Spirit of God.’”<sup>10</sup> I have often wondered whether Wiley had carefully thought through the implications of his own statement, though it is hard for me to imagine that he had not. It is certainly evident that such a claim was unavoidable, given the fact that, as Wiley himself notes, “Spirit of God” and “finger of God” are used in parallel passages in Matthew and Luke. “If I do these things by the Spirit of God,” Matthew has Jesus say (while Luke has it “finger of God”), “then the kingdom of God has come upon you” (Matt. 12:28; Lk. 11:20).

But if “Spirit of God” and “finger of God” are interchangeable and “Holy Spirit” and “Spirit of God” are interchangeable, then the Holy Spirit must be the finger of God. What might it mean to be “the finger of God”? If we consider its occasional usage in Scripture (Ex. 8:19, 31:18), “the finger of God” connotes God’s direct, perhaps even dramatic and wondrous activity in the world. What it does *not* connote is a personal, self-aware agent *per se*. This need not at all imply that the Spirit is not a *persona*, not one of the Persons in the Triune Godhead, but that the Spirit is not the same sort of *persona* as either the Son or the Father. In fact, given the often mysterious and overwhelming dimensions of the activity of the *ruach* of God in the Hebrew Bible, we might be able to agree most

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<sup>10</sup>H. Orton Wiley, *Christian Theology*, Volume II (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1952), 307.

wholeheartedly with Anselm with regard to the Third Person: the Spirit is a thoroughly inscrutable “I know not what.” At the same time, we must acknowledge that this mysterious divine presence is widely identified in Scripture both as the Spirit *of God* and the Spirit *of Christ*—and occasionally in virtually the same breath (Rom. 8:9; Gal. 3:14, 4:6). The question inevitably arises, Is this Spirit really a *persona* in any way at all distinct from God? From Christ?

Another gospel parallel, alongside the one Wiley cites, that should be considered in serious pneumatological reflection is Jesus’ instructions to his disciples regarding their impending persecution. Mark’s version says, “And when they arrest you and deliver you up, do not be anxious beforehand about what you are to say, but say whatever is given you in that hour; for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit” (13:11). Matthew varies it in this way only: “it will be. . . the Spirit of your Father speaking through you” (10:20). Luke has the teaching twice; the first time it is the Holy Spirit (12:12) but in the second instance Jesus assures his disciples, “I will give you words and wisdom” (21:15). *The Holy Spirit—the Spirit of your Father—I*. This is a remarkable instance of fluidity in the early church’s ideas regarding the “identity” of the Spirit.

One wonders, on the basis of texts like these, just how far the old trinitarian formulation that the Spirit is not the Father and not the Son can actually be pushed. Of course, none of the *personae* is who and what it is apart from the others, none dwells or acts independently of the others; but one must wonder, again, whether the Spirit has a face, whether the Spirit is a *prosopon* in the same way as the Father and the Son. Jesus the Son addresses the Father and the Father hears; the Father addresses Jesus and Jesus hears; is the Spirit addressed by either the Father or Jesus the Son—or is the Spirit more adequately understood as the “breath” that they share together in communion and communication? If we are bold to reply “perhaps so” to the latter possibility, then it is unavoidable that the Spirit, while truly God, is not the same sort of *persona* as the Father or the Son.

### **Spirit of Creation? A Brief Conversation with Mark I. Wallace**

Consider some of the other biblical metaphors beside “finger of God” that are associated with the Holy Spirit. Most obvious, of course, is the wind, the breath, the *blowing* of God that gives life. Genesis tells us that God breathed into *adam* and he became alive; John tells us that the resurrected Christ breathed on his frightened disciples and said, “Receive

the Holy Spirit” (20:22).<sup>11</sup> Surely one of the most potent instances of the breath metaphor for the Spirit occurs in Psalm 104: “When you [Yahweh] send forth your Spirit, [all the creatures] are created; and you renew the face of the ground” (v. 30). This word of praise has, in fact, found its way into Christian liturgy in the Whitsunday prayer, *Veni Creator*: “Come, Creator Spirit, and renew the face of the earth. . . . The Spirit of the Lord fills the world.” Here the Spirit is *breath* from God that fills lungs, human and otherwise, stirring and animating all creation.

Alongside “finger” and “breath” of God we may consider the more fluid imagery of the prophet Joel, quoted at Pentecost—“I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh” (2:28)—and reiterated in John’s gospel as “rivers of living water” (7:37-39). Moreover, at Pentecost there is not only a rushing *ruach* that is outpoured like flowing water, there are fiery flames on the disciples’ heads, likely a purging fire (Lk. 3:16). Let us also recall the Spirit descending as a dove (or, as Luke says, *in the bodily form of a dove*) upon Jesus as he arose from the baptismal waters. Moving finger, blowing breath, flowing water, purging flame, descending dove: all are remarkably powerful metaphors of the Spirit, and none, strikingly enough, is “personal” in the conventional sense of the term. Instead, all of them except “finger” are drawn from elements of the (nonhuman) natural world. What are the theological implications of this fact?

Scripture as a whole is virtually unanimous in its teaching that the Spirit is the Spirit of God, and John and Paul are strong in their teaching that the Spirit is the Spirit of Christ. Even so, we have not been particularly quick to read how often and widely our Holy Writ associates the Spirit with the creaturely elements and processes of our world. No matter how refined ecclesiastical reflection on the Holy Spirit may have become, I believe we lose something vital when lose the Hebraic sense that God’s breath is felt as wind on the waters and air in our lungs. “When you take away [the creatures’] breath, they die and return to their dust. When you send forth your breath, they are created” (Ps. 104:29, 30). The Spirit of the church is also the Spirit of God in creation, and thus, in a sense, *the Spirit of creation*.

<sup>11</sup>It is passages like this latter one from John, and many in Paul’s writings—not to mention certain theological and ecclesiastical interests—that have led Christian theologians virtually if not entirely to conflate the Spirit with Jesus Christ, such that the Spirit *is* the Spirit of Christ. But if all of the Spirit gets “poured” into Christ, as effectively occurs in the *filioque* clause, too many other biblical texts and metaphors get suppressed and silenced.

The ecological trajectories of these “nonhuman” metaphors should not be difficult to discern. Mark I. Wallace, in his daring pneumatology *Fragments of the Spirit: Nature, Violence, and the Renewal of Creation* has written:

To dismantle the debilitating differences that separate humankind from otherkind—this is the Spirit’s special work in a world teetering on the edge of ecological collapse. We can learn to understand the Spirit’s ministry of biotic reconciliation by resensitizing ourselves to the double identity of the Spirit as *personal agent*, on the one hand, and *inanimate* [animating?] *force*, on the other. . . . Insofar as *every* member of creation, sentient and nonsentient, is interanimated by the breath of the divine life, *all* forms of life are knit together by the dynamic power of the cosmic Spirit. . . . The point is that as the Spirit can be addressed as both an “it” and a “thou” [where I might want to argue that the Spirit cannot be *addressed as such* in either way], so also should we learn to understand every member of creation that the Spirit inhabits in both personal and impersonal terms. From this perspective, the *personhood* of the nonhuman order is signified by the Spirit’s abiding presence in creation, and the *creatureliness* of the human order is reaffirmed on the basis of its always already partnership with the wider biotic community that the Spirit indwells.<sup>12</sup>

I believe that Wallace takes his “earth-centered theory of the Spirit” too far when he submits that the Holy Spirit be interpreted “as a natural, living being . . . a natural being who leads all creation into a peaceable relationship with itself.”<sup>13</sup> In this case the divine Spirit’s solicitude and life-sharing power for creatures has been exchanged for a spirit that is itself creaturely. This in turn leads Wallace to suggest that the divine life is “at risk . . . [and] vulnerable to loss and destruction insofar as the earth is abused and despoiled.”<sup>14</sup> I, too, believe that the groaning of creation is a groaning in which the Spirit profoundly shares (Rom. 8:22, 26), but Wallace’s claim that “the specter of ecocide raises the risk of deicide; to

<sup>12</sup>Mark I. Wallace, *Fragments of the Spirit: Nature, Violence, and the Renewal of Creation* (New York: Continuum, 1996), 153, 154. [Bracketed comments mine.]

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, 136.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, 138.

wreak environmental havoc on the earth is to run the risk that we will do irreparable, even fatal harm to the Mystery we call God"<sup>15</sup> must be rejected as an error dangerous to Christian faith. I say this not simply because Wallace's notion utterly collapses the real distinction between *Creator Spiritus* and creatures, but also because it effectively reduces that Spirit to an entity living in interdependency only with our planet earth. God, I presume, is much bigger than that.

Nonetheless, Wallace challenges us to take seriously the strikingly numerous scriptural metaphors for the divine *ruach* that are lifted from the natural and "nonhuman" world. He thereby cautions us against the prevalent Christian tendencies to restrict the Holy Spirit to the church *a la* the Spirit of Christ, and to the "human" realm *a la* a distinct "personality." If his challenge and caution are on target, then we are again jolted to consider the real possibility that, whatever the *tres personae* are, they are not necessarily all the same sort of *persona*. It seems to me that the recurring desire among theologians to assume that the Father, Son and Spirit are all the same sort of *persona* derives from an extreme anthropomorphism that assumes that the highest value is inevitably associated with the realm of the personal. In this way of thinking, to think of the Spirit in other-than-personal terms is suspect because it appears to devalue or de-divinize the Spirit. That judgment, however, depends upon the mistake of equating God with "the personal" and thus also mistaking the *tres personae* for three people. That is precisely the judgment under question in this essay. The upshot of these explorations is not a denial or dismissal of the social analogy of the Trinity, but perhaps a widening of our notion of "social." If there is some kind of "diversity" (for lack of better term) among the *tres personae*, i.e., if the Father, Son and Spirit are not all "persons" *in the same way*, then perhaps we can hazard even greater richness and "difference" within the Mystery of the Godhead itself.

Two practical implications suggest themselves. First, if the *personae* do not all "look exactly alike" ontologically—and yet are one God!—then perhaps we human *personae* who live by faith in this Triune God may yet grow in God's image to live more richly and ecstatically with(in) our differences. Our obsession with conformity might be loosened up in the

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, 141.

name of (tri-)unity.<sup>16</sup> Second, if the “Third Person” somehow embraces and embodies the other-than-human elements of the world, we may sense ourselves invited to a trinitarian imagination and practice that encompasses and enriches communion not only among humans with all their differences, but also beyond human communities toward all of the Creator Spirit’s good and graced creatures.

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<sup>16</sup>See Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, “The Diversity of God,” *The Drew Gateway* (Fall 1987), 59-70. For example, “The notion of God as triune . . . has deep implications for any people naming this God as the one they serve. . . . Men and women and persons from all races and cultures, gathered as a community striving to ensure that each and all participate in love and freedom, or well-being, are required in order for the community to embody God’s call to bear the divine image.... Thus the common naming of God as triune is [also] a basis for the ecumenical nature of a church made up of diverse theological communions.” Such a church “called to be a people analogous to the mighty harmony of God’s own being” may in fact “rejoice in its diversity and find its unity in its mutual care for the fullness of well-being among all its members” (68).



# THE TRINITY AND THE MEANS OF GRACE: A SACRAMENTAL INTERRELATIONSHIP

by

Dean G. Blevins

There is a renewed interest in the practices that shape the Christian life. Traditionally practices of celebration, devotion, and ministry provide a way of responding to God's active presence by rehearsing a way of life that is Christian.<sup>1</sup> Ritual and common practices that direct how we are born and live, how we marry and bury, how we resolve conflict and restore hope, also provide an opportunity to connect faith with daily life.<sup>2</sup> In a sense each practice provides us with a different "way of knowing" something about the nature of God, about ourselves, and about the world around us.<sup>3</sup> These practices are often understood to work together from an educational standpoint as they form us and help us to "know," discern, and transform our world. The key question is whether there is a theological reason for anticipating a relational interaction between these various practices. John Wesley offers a possible answer through his understanding of the means of grace.

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<sup>1</sup>Dorothy C. Bass and Craig Dystra, "Times of Yearning, Practices of Faith," in *Practicing Our Faith*, ed. Dorothy C. Bass (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1997), 6-11.

<sup>2</sup>Dorothy C. Bass and Craig Dykstra, preface to *Practicing Our Faith*, xiii.

<sup>3</sup>Mary Field Belenky, Blythe McVicker Clinchy, Nancy Rule Goldberger and Jill Mattuck Tarule, *Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice and Mind* (New York: Basic Books, 1986); Eliot Eisner, ed., *Learning and Teaching the Ways of Knowing* (Chicago: National Society for the Study of Education, distributed by University of Chicago Press, 1985); William R. Yount, *Created To Learn: A Christian Teacher's Introduction to Educational Psychology* (Nashville, Broadman and Holman, 1996), 26-41.

Educators often acknowledge that certain practices, and the “ways of knowing” they engender, are interactive. Maura O’Neill and Nel Noddings assert that narrative and interpersonal reasoning work cooperatively in the educational enterprise.<sup>4</sup> Edward Foley and Herbert Anderson also note how ritual and narrative work together in a number of practices to convey grace.<sup>5</sup> Thomas Groome provides an educational method that relies on a dialectic of critical reasoning and narrative vision.<sup>6</sup> Maria Harris offers a version of teaching that fosters imagination and critical awareness within an aesthetic framework.<sup>7</sup> Daniel Schipani notes that liberative knowing requires both critical and creative knowing based on a prophetic stance.<sup>8</sup> Each theorist demonstrates the interdependent quality of practices and also the interdependent relationship between the various ways of knowing.

John Wesley’s taxonomy of enduring and contextual practices, known as the means of grace, provides a rich resource for Wesleyans seeking to shape others into Christian identity. While each of the practices mentioned in the means of grace has formative ability, it is the inter-relationship among these practices that collectively shape and empower Christians for holy living. Previously I have demonstrated how these practices are interrelated based on their employ of different “ways of knowing” that are mutually corrective and enhancing.<sup>9</sup> There is then a psychological rationale for understanding that these practices work together to shape the Christian life.

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<sup>4</sup>Richard L. Hopkins, *Narrative Schooling: Experiential Learning and the Transformation of American Education* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1994), 141-44; Maura O’Neill, *Women Speaking, Women Listening* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Press, 1990); Nel Noddings, “Stories in Dialogue: Caring and Interpersonal Reasoning,” in Carol Witherell and Nel Noddings, eds., *Stories Lives Tell: Narrative and Dialogue in Education* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1991), 157-69.

<sup>5</sup>Herbert Anderson and Richard Foley, *Mighty Stories and Dangerous Rituals: Weaving Together the Human and the Divine* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1998), 25-35.

<sup>6</sup>Thomas Groome, *Christian Religious Education: Sharing Our Story and Vision* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1980), 185-97.

<sup>7</sup>Maria Harris, *Teaching and Religious Imagination: An Essay in the Theology of Teaching* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987), 19-40, 95-141.

<sup>8</sup>Daniel S. Schipani, *Religious Education Encounters Liberation Theology* (Birmingham, Ala.: Religious Education Press, 1988), 22-46.

<sup>9</sup>Dean G. Blevins, “The Means of Grace: Toward a Wesleyan Praxis of Spiritual Formation.” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 32, no. 1 (Spring 1997): 69-84.

Psychological reasons alone, however, are insufficient for the practice of ministry. There remains a question as to whether there is a theological rationale to help Wesleyan ministers recognize that the means of grace are inter-related in the work of full salvation. Such a rationale is available in Wesley's understanding of the Trinity. Wesley's description of the power of the means of grace in his sermon by the same name reveals his understanding of the inter-active Trinity at work in these formative practices. By gracious analogy, the practices themselves work interactively to communicate grace. Wesley's trust that the Trinity would be interactively involved in the means of grace provides the theological rationale for our trust in the inter-active capabilities of the means of grace.

To demonstrate this thesis, we will briefly survey Wesley's understanding and classification of the means of grace, including the Eucharist as the key practice for understanding the sacramental importance of the means of grace. We will review Wesley's general understanding of the Trinity and explore the Trinity's activity within the means of grace, particularly Wesley's understanding of the Trinity in the Lord's Supper. Finally we will demonstrate that the interactive Trinity provides, by gracious analogy, the opportunity to anticipate an interactive quality in all of the practices within the means of grace. Wesley demonstrates this idea through a hypothetical case for evangelism. Wesleyan Christian religious educators will be left with a view of the means of the grace that is both sacramental and Trinitarian.

## The Means of Grace

The means of grace is a term associated with Wesley, John's most explicit definition is found in his sermon with the same title:

By "means of grace" I understand outward signs, words, or actions, ordained of God, and appointed for this end—to be the ordinary channels whereby he conveys to men, preventing, justifying or sanctifying grace.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>John Wesley, "The Means of Grace," ed. Albert Outler, *The Works of John Wesley*, Bicentennial ed., 15 vols. gen. eds. Richard P. Heitzenrater and Frank Baker (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1975-1995). 1:381. Subsequent references to this multi-volume, Bicentennial set will be cited as *Works*. Since this series is not complete, other citations are taken from editor Thomas Jackson's *The Works of John Wesley*, 3rd ed. (London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, 1872; reprint, Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1986).

The phrase's use begins primarily during a controversy with Moravians over the Fetter Lane Society and culminates with Wesley's instructions to ministers to utilize various practices (and dispositions) for Godly living.<sup>11</sup> Wesley's detailed argument for the means of grace at Fetter Lane set the stage for his continued use of this concept to emphasize an increasing number of sacramental practices. Wesley actually described the various practices in the means of grace using different categories in sermons and other writings, particularly in key documents of Methodist polity. Wesley's practice of the Eucharist is an example of his continued advocacy and emphasis of the means of grace.

The original preaching date of the sermon "The Means of Grace" is unknown. Outler dates it as 1746 but notes that the referent biblical passage was used in 1741.<sup>12</sup> It has a clear relationship to the Fetter Lane controversy. Wesley includes three "chief means" in this initial sermon—prayer, searching the Scriptures and participating in the Lord's Supper.<sup>13</sup> Church attendance is included in Wesley's second discourse on the Sermon on the Mount.<sup>14</sup> Wesley provides this list of practices in "The Scripture Way of Salvation":

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<sup>11</sup>Dean G. Blevins, *John Wesley and the Means of Grace: An Approach to Christian Religious Education*, Ph.D. diss., Claremont School of Theology, May 1999 (Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI, 1999), 136-66. See these pages for a detailed report of the Fetter Lane Controversy. See also, Ole E. Borgen, *John Wesley on the Sacraments* (Zurich: Publishing House of the United Methodist Church, 1972; reprint Grand Rapids: Francis Asbury Press, 1985); John C. Bowmer, *The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper in Early Methodism* (London: Dacre Press, 1951); Steve Harper, *The Devotional Life in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Nashville: Upper Room, 1983); Henry Hawthorn Knight, *The Presence of God in the Christian Life: A Contemporary Understanding of John Wesley's Means of Grace*, Ph.D. diss., Emory University, 1987 (Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI, 1988); Henry Hawthorn Knight, *The Presence of God in the Christian Life: John Wesley and the Means of Grace* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1992); Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1994); J. Ernest Rattenbury, *The Eucharistic Hymns of John and Charles Wesley* (London: Epworth Press, 1948). Each of these author's has contributed greatly in developing my understanding of the means of grace. Knight's book is primarily a reprint of his dissertation. This writing will draw primarily from Knight's dissertation (for the sake of scholarship).

<sup>12</sup>Outler, introductory Comment to Wesley, "The Means of Grace," *Works*, ed. Outler, 1:376.

<sup>13</sup>Wesley, "The Means of Grace," *Works*, ed. Outler, 1:381.

<sup>14</sup>Wesley, "Sermon on the Mount, II," *Works*, ed. Outler, 1:496.

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. 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, or sick, or variously afflicted; such as the endeavoring to instruct the ignorant, to waken the stupid sinner, to quicken the lukewarm, to confirm the wavering, to comfort the feebleminded, to succour the tempted, or contribute in any manner to the saving of souls from death.<sup>15</sup>

Wesley includes practices such as reading, meditation, and prayer in his sermon “On Family Religion.”<sup>16</sup> His sermon “On Visiting the Sick” demonstrates how “acts of mercy” balances his earlier emphasis on “acts of piety” in the means of grace.<sup>17</sup> Wesley’s emphasis on these two categories is evident in other sermons and is indicative of traditional Anglican nomenclature in his day.<sup>18</sup>

One interesting description of the means of grace in a printed sermon actually came much later, in 1781, with his sermon “On Zeal.” Wesley began his description with a series of concentric circles around the love of God, which is enthroned on the inmost soul of the believer. The first circle contains the holy tempers—“Long-suffering, gentleness, meekness, goodness, fidelity, temperance.”<sup>19</sup> What follows are circles of practices that Wesley described as the means of grace. First, there are works of mercy, “whether to the souls or bodies of men,” followed by works of piety—“reading and hearing the word, public, family, private prayer, receiving the Lord’s Supper, fasting or abstinence.”<sup>20</sup> He concluded:

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<sup>15</sup>Wesley, “The Scripture Way of Salvation,” *Works*, ed. Outler, 2:166.

<sup>16</sup>Wesley, “On Family Religion,” *Works*, ed. Outler, 3:340.

<sup>17</sup>Wesley, “On Visiting the Sick,” *Works*, ed. Outler, 3:385-89.

<sup>18</sup>Wesley, “On Family Religion,” *Works*, ed. Outler, 1:343, n. 68. The language of “acts of mercy” and “acts of piety” is cited in the Anglican Homily “Of Good Works.” Examples of each phrase can be found in other writers, including Joseph Mede, Thomas à Kempis, William Law, Thomas Aquinas, and even in a proverb attributed to “Plucheria.” Outler lists other citations and notes that Wesley used this language to describe a number of personal and social devotional practices, but never set the categories against each other.

<sup>19</sup>Wesley, “On Zeal,” *Works*, ed. Outler, 3:313.

<sup>20</sup>Wesley, “On Zeal,” *Works*, ed. Outler, 3:313-14.

Lastly, that his followers may the more effectually provoke one another to love, holy tempers, and good works, our blessed Lord has united them together in one—the church, dispersed all over the earth; a little emblem of which, of the church universal, we have in every particular Christian congregation.<sup>21</sup>

While specific works of mercy are not mentioned, Wesley did elaborate on works of piety and established a relationship between the two sets of practices and the affectual life (or tempers) within the believer. Wesley also provided a context for these practices, the church. The “means of grace” became a standard phrase for Wesley in Methodist polity and ministry. Wesley, in “The Nature, Design and General Rules of the United Societies,” stressed that Society members should evidence their desire for salvation in three ways: by doing no harm and avoiding evil; by doing good; and by attending upon all the ordinances of God.<sup>22</sup>

The “Larger” Minutes of 1778 may be one of the most important documents to demonstrate how Wesley incorporated the means of grace as a part of the regular examination of all lay ministers.<sup>23</sup> He encouraged his ministers to view their “helpers” as pupils and to encourage them in using all the means of grace.<sup>24</sup> In this document, Wesley revealed a description of the means of grace that differs from the language of acts of mercy and piety. He now used the language of “instituted” and “prudential” means of grace. The instituted means (very similar to Wesley’s understanding of ordinances or acts of piety) include Prayer (private, family, and public), searching the Scriptures (by reading, meditating, and hearing), the Lord’s Supper, Fasting, and Christian Conference.<sup>25</sup> The prudential means include particular rules, arts of holy living, acts of min-

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<sup>21</sup>Wesley, “On Zeal,” *Works*, ed. Outler, 3:314.

<sup>22</sup>Wesley, “General Rules of the United Societies,” *Works*, ed. Rupert Davies, 9:69-73. The ordinances Wesley list include: The Public Worship of God; The ministry of the Word, either read or expounded; The Supper of the Lord; Family and private prayer (family prayer added in the 1744 revision); Searching the Scriptures; and Fasting or abstinence (73).

<sup>23</sup>Wesley, “A Plain Account of Kingswood School,” *Works*, ed. Jackson, 13:299, “A Short History of the People Called Methodist,” *Works*, ed. Jackson, 13:322-24.

<sup>24</sup>Wesley, “A Short History of the People Called Methodist,” *Works*, ed. Jackson, 13:322.

<sup>25</sup>Wesley, “A Short History of the People Called Methodist,” *Works*, ed. Jackson, 13:322-23.

istry, and larger attitudes toward daily living listed under the headings of watching, denying ourselves, taking up our cross, and exercising the presence of God.<sup>26</sup>

### The Eucharist as a “Chief Means”

The overall influence of Wesley’s emphasis on the means of grace can best be seen in his use of the “chief means of grace,” the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper.<sup>27</sup> The Eucharist is the one formally recognized sacrament in Wesley’s original taxonomies concerning the means of grace.<sup>28</sup> Wesley’s eucharistic theology is better understood in dialogue with sacramental history, which is often overlooked by previous studies.<sup>29</sup> He regularly participated in the Eucharist and encouraged Methodist followers to do the same. He acknowledged that he was faithful to the rubrics of the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer* and had a high opinion of its Eucharistic liturgy.<sup>30</sup> Wesley was not only the leader of a Methodist movement; he was also an Anglican priest. He was making clear that Methodism was not a nonconformist sect that separated from the Church of England by diverging from its liturgy.<sup>31</sup>

While Methodists were encouraged to attend local parishes to take the Lord’s Supper, both John and Charles Wesley eventually presided over Communion services as early as 1740 in Bristol.<sup>32</sup> Often Methodists would attend special Communion services for the sick or form smaller groups in order to receive the Eucharist.<sup>33</sup> By 1745 Communion services were taking place in Methodist preaching houses in London and in Bristol and ultimately the Charles and John Wesley conducted services on a lim-

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<sup>26</sup>Wesley, “A Short History of the People Called Methodist,” *Works*, ed. Jackson, 13:323-24.

<sup>27</sup>Bowmer, 42.

<sup>28</sup>The act of Baptism is not included as a specifically repeatable practice within the means of grace. See Dean G. Blevins, *John Wesley and the Means of Grace*, 218-22.

<sup>29</sup>Borgen, *Wesley on the Sacraments*, 44-48. Borgen’s study is limited by his heavy reliance upon the *ordo salutis* as the single controlling factor.

<sup>30</sup>*The Book of Common Prayer and Administration of the Sacraments and Other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church*, (England, 1663; Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI, 1986), microfilm; Wesley, “Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion,” *Works*, ed. Cragg, 11:79.

<sup>31</sup>Bowmer, 99-100.

<sup>32</sup>Bowmer, 63.

<sup>33</sup>Bowmer, 64, 80.

ited basis throughout the countryside as well.<sup>34</sup> The vast number of communicants not only influenced Anglican Church services; they also served as a testimony to John Wesley's emphasis on this particular means of grace. Ernest J. Rattenbury includes a study of Wesley's *Journal* over the last ten years of his life. In the study, Wesley recorded celebrating the sacrament with as many as 19,300 communicants in 17 settings.<sup>35</sup> Wesley conveyed such a powerful message concerning the Lord's Supper that many Anglican ministers were embarrassed by the sudden influx of Methodist communicants.<sup>36</sup>

Although there is no detailed account of an early British Methodist communion service, Bowmer provides a detailed reconstruction of Wesley's practice of the Lord's Supper.<sup>37</sup> Bowmer notes that Wesley expected an attitude of reverence when taking the Eucharist. Wesley, however, included the unconventional practice of using hymns to establish the ethos of the service, and he inserted these hymns within the *Book of Common Prayer* liturgy.<sup>38</sup> Wesley's other addition to the liturgy was extemporary prayer. He allowed ministers to use personal prayers following the "Gloria" in his *Sunday Service*, an uncommon practice in Wesley's day. Charles Wesley also records a number of times when impromptu intercessory prayer was used.<sup>39</sup>

Wesley also varied the way that Methodists received the sacrament, both sitting in pews and kneeling at an altar rail, depending often on local custom and the type of church building (whether Anglican or Dissenting) available.<sup>40</sup> According to Bowmer, Wesley went through three stages in determining who had access and who was denied the

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<sup>34</sup>Bowmer, 65-80.

<sup>35</sup>Rattenbury, 5.

<sup>36</sup>Rattenbury, 6.

<sup>37</sup>Bowmer, 82-146.

<sup>38</sup>Bowmer, 82-89.

<sup>39</sup>Bowmer, 90-92. Apparently, this signaled a change in Wesley's position since he initially opposed extemporary prayer in 1738. Within twenty years Wesley noted he often used this type of prayer either before or after a sermon.

<sup>40</sup>Bowmer, 93-99. Wesley divided the sexes during the services and also collected alms during the Eucharist (an older practice almost ignored in his day). Methodist Communion chalices and plates from this time were modestly decorated, and Wesley would improvise with other Communion utensils if necessary. He also encouraged regular Fast days but did not require it prior to receiving the sacrament.



Lord's Supper (known as "fencing the table").<sup>41</sup> Early, Wesley followed the rubrics of the *Book of Common Prayer* and denied persons who were not baptized members of the Church of England, or who had not fulfilled their obligation to notify Wesley in advance of their intent to take Sunday Communion. Later, during the early days of the Evangelical revival, Wesley apparently offered the Eucharist to all those who wished to participate, emphasizing the converting power of the sacrament and the universality of grace in the gospel. Finally, as Methodism grew, Wesley demanded a moral and spiritual obligation of the participant (though "seekers" were admitted as well); this included a practical obligation of a Methodist class ticket or "Communion note," given by the officiating minister. Methodist services contained two parts, Matins (with preaching and singing) followed by the Eucharist. Non-Communicants could then depart, reminiscent of the early church when Catechumens were dismissed.<sup>42</sup>

Wesley viewed the practice of receiving the sacrament as an obligation. In his sermon "The Duty of Constant Communion," Wesley noted several objections to continual practice.<sup>43</sup> Some persons feared that they were not personally worthy to take the sacrament. Other persons placed such high expectations on being prepared just prior to taking the Eucharist that they feared they could not obtain the spiritual depth necessary to receive communion regularly. Wesley countered these objections

<sup>41</sup>Bowmer, 103-19. Bowmer notes, "While he called all sincere penitents, as well as avowed Christians, to partake of the Sacrament, he also devised means whereby admission was contingent upon moral and spiritual qualifications, and the Lord's Table was thus amply safeguarded against unworthy participants" (119).

<sup>42</sup>Bowmer, 118-22. Interestingly, Wesley always made provision for young children to take Communion, both in Georgia and fifty years later at Kingswood. He expected them to be carefully prepared prior to receiving Communion, but would not deny even a young nine year old girl the desired Eucharist.

<sup>43</sup>Wesley, "The Duty of Constant Communion," *Works*, ed. Outler, 3:427-39. See also Albert Outler, introduction to *John Wesley* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1964), 332-34. Outler notes the sermon was first published in the *Arminian Magazine* in 1787, but the origin of the sermon is unclear. Outler, in his smaller Oxford compend, notes that Wesley himself alludes to an original dating of February 19, 1732 (334). Outler, in his introduction to Wesley's "The Duty of Constant Communion," notes that this original work was an extract of Nonjuror Robert Nelson's *The Great Duty of Frequenting the Christian Sacrifice* written in 1707. The terminology of "constant Communion," however, refers to a 1734 tract by Tomas Bury, *The Constant Communicant* (427). The sermon itself is an interesting synergy of Nelson and Wesley's thought.

by noting that what is expected of the person prior to Communion is no more than is expected of any Christian at any time.<sup>44</sup> He addressed the objection of needing time to prepare for the sacrament, saying that “all the preparation that is absolutely necessary is contained in those words, ‘Repent you truly of your sins past; have faith in Christ our Savior.’”<sup>45</sup> For people who feared they would lose reverence or “benefit” from regular participation in the sacrament, Wesley responded, “Whatever God commands us to do we are to do because he commands, whether we feel any benefit thereby or no.”<sup>46</sup> Finally, Wesley replied to those who contended that the Church requirement was that they should participate only three times a year. Wesley argued that this number is a minimum requirement. He countered, “We obey the Church only for God’s sake. And shall we not obey God himself?”<sup>47</sup> This form of challenge summarized Wesley’s desire to observe this ordinance out of a sense of obedience.

Wesley, however, also believed that taking Communion should be practiced with a sense of expectation. Considering the Lord’s Supper as a mercy from God to humanity, Wesley wrote, “Through this means we may be assisted to attain those blessings which he hath prepared for us; that we may obtain holiness on earth and everlasting glory in heaven.”<sup>48</sup> Wesley’s desire to see his Methodist followers take Communion regularly was based both on obedience to Christ and on the hope that blessing and holiness would follow the use of this important means of grace.

Out of a sacramental heritage and a controversy surrounding the Fetter Lane Society, Wesley adopted a terminology, the means of grace, which would remain with him throughout his ministry. In each taxonomy Wesley described a number of practices that Christians would associate with spiritual formation: The Eucharist, Bible reading and proclamation, prayer and fasting, worship, service and social ministry, church and small group participation. At the heart of Wesley’s taxonomies was a desire to form Christians, transform the larger society, and also implicitly help Christians critically and creatively discern the activity of the Holy Spirit in the world. Wesley’s sacramental view, however, could not be separated from his Trinitarian belief. This belief is evident both within his general writings and in his description of the activity of God in the Eucharist.

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<sup>44</sup>Wesley, “The Duty of Constant Communion,” *Works*, ed. Outler, 3:435-37.

<sup>45</sup>Wesley, “The Duty of Constant Communion,” *Works*, ed. Outler, 3:436.

<sup>46</sup>Wesley, “The Duty of Constant Communion,” *Works*, ed. Outler, 3:437.

<sup>47</sup>Wesley, “The Duty of Constant Communion,” *Works*, ed. Outler, 3:438.

<sup>48</sup>Wesley, “The Duty of Constant Communion,” *Works*, ed. Outler, 3:432.

## Wesley and the Trinity

Little has been written concerning Wesley's understanding of the Trinity. He was clearly Trinitarian, but he rarely discussed the subject.<sup>49</sup> Wesley's sermon on the Trinity provides a logical beginning point for what addressing of this subject he did. The sermon, however, is primarily a treatise on the nature of religious epistemology (how much can we really know about the nature of the Trinity), although the existence of the Trinity is always presupposed.<sup>50</sup> Wesley does systematically elaborate on the presence of the "Three-One" God (his preferred term) in 1 John 5 during his sermon on "Spiritual Worship."<sup>51</sup> He writes that the original purpose for writing 1 John was not faith or holiness, "but of the foundation of all, the happy and holy communion which the faithful have with God the Father, Son and Holy Ghost."<sup>52</sup>

Wesley also commented on the Trinity in his *Explanatory Notes upon New Testament*. He would often use the Trinity in formula statements, superimposing Trinitarian statements either directly into the scripture or when commenting on unrelated passages in the text.<sup>53</sup> Commenting on the phrase "the Lord of Glory" in First Corinthians, Wesley writes:

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<sup>49</sup>E Byron Anderson, "Trinitarian Grammar of the Liturgy and the Liturgical Practice of the Self," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 34, no. 2 (Fall 1999), 152-74; Kenneth Collins, "Reconfiguration of Power: Basic Trajectory of John Wesley's Practical Theology," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 33, no. 1 (Spring 1998): 164-72; M. Douglas Meeks, ed., *Trinity Community and Power: Mapping Trajectories in Wesleyan Theology* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 2000), Mary Elizabeth Moore, "Trinity and Covenantal Ministry: A Study of Wesleyan Traditions," in *Rethinking Wesley's Theology for Contemporary Methodism*, ed. Randy Maddox (Nashville, Kingswood Books, 1998), 143-60; Thomas Wright Pillow, "John Wesley's Doctrine of the Trinity," *Cumberland Seminarian* 24, no. 1 (Spring 1986): 1-10; Geoffrey Wainwright, "Why Wesley was a Trinitarian," in *Methodists in Dialogue* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 261-74.

<sup>50</sup>Wesley, "On the Trinity," *Works*, ed. Outler, 2:373-86. In his Introduction to the sermon, Outler notes: "The crucial point here is that the mystery of the 'Three-One God' is better left as mystery, to be pondered and adored" (373).

<sup>51</sup>Wesley, "Spiritual Worship," *Works*, ed. Outler, 3:88-97.

<sup>52</sup>Wesley, "Spiritual Worship," *Works*, ed. Outler, 3:89-90.

<sup>53</sup>John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes on the New Testament*, 2 vols. (London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, 1780. Reprint, Hendrickson Publishers, 1986), Eph. 3:6; Phil. 2:1, 4:7, Heb. 8:8, 9:4, 1 Pet. 1:2, 1 John 4:14, Jude 1, Rev. 4:8, unpaginated. See also Pillow 1-2. Wesley (*NT Notes*) writes of Ephesians 3:6, "That the gentiles are joint heirs—of God. And of the same body—Under Christ the head. And joint-partakers of his promise—The communion of the Holy Ghost (Wesley's commentary on the passage is underlined). Ephesians 3:6 includes modifications to the text and the accompanying commentary (Pillow, 1-2).

The giving Christ this august title, peculiar to the great Jehovah, plainly shows him to be the supreme God. In like manner the Father is styled, "the Father of glory." Eph. 1:17; and the Holy Ghost, "The Spirit of glory," 1 Peter 4:14. The application of this title to all the three, shows that the Father, Son and Holy Ghost are "the God of glory;" as the only true God is called. Psalm 29:3, and Acts 7:2.<sup>54</sup>

Wesley's exegetical reading of scripture not only informed his understanding of the "Three-One" God; he also wove this concept into other scripture texts.<sup>55</sup>

There are other examples of John Wesley's use of Trinitarian language in his writings, beginning as early as his first publication of prayers in 1733. Wesley would commonly acknowledge God in Trinitarian fashion, often in the close of his prayers.<sup>56</sup> His Sunday morning prayer opens with an ascription of glory to each person of the Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.<sup>57</sup> He concludes this opening praise with yet one more ascrip-

<sup>54</sup>Wesley, I Cor. 2:8, *Explanatory Notes on the New Testament*, unpaginated.

<sup>55</sup>Collins, "Reconfiguration of Power," 167. Collins notes that Wesley's preference for the term "Three-One God" emerges from his protest to previous persecution of those who did not use the term "Trinity" and from his reluctance to engage in speculative considerations on the Godhead beyond those redemptive ramifications.

<sup>56</sup>John Wesley, *A Collection of Forms of Prayer for Every Day in the Week* (London: Printed for James Hutton at the Bible and Sun without Temple-Bar, 1738; reprint, Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House, 1992), 32, 36, 42, 47, 52, 57, 63, 68, 73, 78, 83.

<sup>57</sup>John Cobb, "The Relativization of the Trinity," in *Trinity in Process: A Relational Theology of God*, eds. Joseph A. Bracken and Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, (New York: Continuum, 1997) 1-12; Dennis R. Keller, *The Many Faces of God* (Notre Dame, Id.: Ave Maria Press, 1991), 17-60; Sallie McFague, *Models of God* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 3-21; Alister McGrath, *Christian Theology: an Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 205-07, 247-69; Ted Peters, *God As Trinity* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1993), 27-80; Bard Thompson, *Liturgies of the Western Church* (Cleveland: Meridian Books, 1961; reprint, Cleveland: William Collins Publishers, 1962), 14; John Wesley, *A Collection of Forms of Prayer for Every Day in the Week* (London: James Hutton at the Bible and Sun without Temple-Bar, 1738. Reprint, Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House, 1992), 60. The language of "Father" in describing the first person of the Trinity will be retained in this study since it was Wesley's common term. The danger of any attribution of gender has been discussed elsewhere at length (Cobb, 1-2; McGrath, 205-07; Peters, 46-55). One recognizes that maternal and female images should be attributed to God and that there is the danger of a patriarchal interpretation of God in the exclusivity of "Father" when

tion of glory to the Trinity, "Glory be to thee, O holy undivided Trinity, for jointly concurring in the great work of our redemption and restoring us again to the glorious liberty of the sons of God."<sup>58</sup>

Wesley, however, was not an unreflective Trinitarian. Geoffrey Wainwright notes that Wesley was well aware of the competing doctrinal interpretations in his day, Arians, Socians, and Deists, yet refused to acknowledge such persons as Christian in his most "catholic spirited" moments.<sup>59</sup> Wesley supported writers such as Methodist critic William Jones, who also attacked anti-Trinitarian supporters.<sup>60</sup> Charles Wesley's hymns on the Trinity also severely critiqued Arians, Socians, and Unitarians. Each member of the Trinity is also given individual consideration in John Wesley's *Explanatory Notes on the New Testament*. Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit each are both given full status as God.<sup>61</sup> Wesley acknowledges the filioque interpretation of the Holy Spirit (proceeding from the Father and the Son).<sup>62</sup> Scholar Rob Staples, however, notes that Wesley's overall view of the Holy Spirit probably mirrored the Eastern tradition, giving more freedom to the Spirit.<sup>63</sup>

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other terms might be practiced as well (Cobb, 6; Keller, 38; McFague, 20). This term, however, is Wesley's and so bears merit for this study. Wesley would occasionally use the economic description of the Trinity, "To these, O God, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier, I give up myself entirely" (Wesley, *Forms of Prayers*, 60). These economic terms will be later investigated, but there is a resistance to continually classifying the Trinity in these terms. One reason will become evident in attempting to show the interdependent nature of the Trinity. The other resistance is that Wesley would have been cautious that such language might result in another heresy, Monarchianism, where the full personhood of each member is denied (Thompson, 14).

<sup>58</sup>Wesley, *Forms of Prayers*, 9-10.

<sup>59</sup>Wainwright, "Why Wesley was a Trinitarian," 261-62.

<sup>60</sup>Barry Bryant, "Trinity and Hymnody: The Doctrine of the Trinity in the Hymns of Charles Wesley," *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 25, no. 2 (1980), 65.

<sup>61</sup>Wesley, *Explanatory Notes on the New Testament*, unpaginated. Notations concerning the divinity of Jesus Christ include: Mark 14:32, John 1:2, 14, 4:26, 5:23, 11:36, 14:10, Acts 13:33, 1 Cor. 15:24, Romans 1:7 and Hebrews 5:8. Notations concerning the divinity of the Holy Spirit include: Luke 1:35, Acts 5:4 and 1 Cor. 7:19.

<sup>62</sup>Wesley, John 15:26, *Explanatory Notes on the New Testament*, unpaginated.

<sup>63</sup>Rob Staples, "Wesleyan Perspectives on the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit," in *The Spirit and the New Age*, eds. Alex R. G. Deasley and R. Larry Shelton (Anderson: Ind.: Warner Press, 1986), 200-01.

Wesley acknowledges God's "Trinity in Unity and Unity in Trinity" in his "Sermon on the Mount, IV" where he uses Genesis 1:1 as his reference.<sup>64</sup> True to his analogy of faith, he moves beyond this one verse to the larger canonical concept of unity in Trinity. Wesley argues that this concept is also revealed "in every part of his subsequent revelations, given by the mouth of all his holy prophets and apostles."<sup>65</sup> He and Charles also promoted explicitly Trinitarian language in their 1780 *Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People Called Methodists*.<sup>66</sup> David Tripp, in a critical analysis of the hymnal, notes that approximately twenty-four percent of the hymns are "explicitly Trinitarian" in content.<sup>67</sup> Wesley's description of the activity of the Trinity, whether explicit or implicit, does impact the purpose and process of the means of grace. His general description of the Trinity enriches any understanding of how God both provided the purpose of the means of grace and participated within the process of the means of grace to insure its goal. Wesley's Sunday prayer, mentioned above, is illuminative of just how John understood the nature of the Three-One God. Wesley would almost always relate the personhood of God to the activity of salvation.<sup>68</sup> In his sermon "On the Trinity," "Wesley writes:

But I know not how anyone can be a Christian believer till he hath (as St. John speaks) the witness in himself; till the Spirit of God witnesses with his spirit that he is a child of God—that is in effect till God the Holy Ghost witnesses that God the Father has accepted him through the merits of God the Son—

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<sup>64</sup>Wesley, "Sermon on the Mount VI," *Works*, ed. Outler, 1:581. Exegeting the Hebrew phrase, *elohim bara*, Wesley writes, "'The Gods created,' a plural noun joined with a verb of the singular number."

<sup>65</sup>Wesley, "Sermon on the Mount VI," *Works*, ed. Outler, 1:581.

<sup>66</sup>Frantz Hildebrandt, Oliver Beckerlegge and James Dale, eds., *Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People Called Methodists, Works of John Wesley*.

<sup>67</sup>David Tripp, "Methodism's Trinitarian Hymnody: A Sampling, 1780 and 1989, and Some Questions," *Quarterly Review*, 14 (Winter 1994-95): 359-85, see especially 370.

<sup>68</sup>Wainwright, "Why Wesley was a Trinitarian," 267-73. Wainwright includes not only soteriology but also doxology (true worship) and personal communion. Wainwright also concludes, "Salvation thus consists in being given, by grace and in glory, a share in that divine communion of Father, Son and Holy Spirit such as had enacted our redemption in the incarnation, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ" (273).

and having this witness he honours the Son and the blessed Spirit even as he honours the Father.<sup>69</sup>

### Trinity in the Means of Grace: A Eucharistic Understanding

Wesley not only connects the activity of the Trinity with the experience of the believer's salvation. His view is also consistent with his understanding of the activity of the Trinity in the Eucharist. Wesley alludes to the Trinity in his understanding of the sacraments (in ordaining, securing, and conveying grace).<sup>70</sup> He describes the activity of the Trinity as a cooperative effort in communicating grace. John Wesley's Eucharistic theology is derived from his writings and his practices as an Anglican priest. Horton Davies has noted that Wesley combined a number of Puritan and Anglican practices in his approach to worship.<sup>71</sup> This synthesis would not have been difficult in regards to the Eucharist since both Anglicans and Puritans were close to agreement on this rite by Wesley's day.<sup>72</sup> Wesley's sacramental practices, however, actually agreed more with an Anglican High-Church group, the Nonjurors, than with the Nonconformists. Horton Davies notes that Wesley actually preferred the first *Prayer Book* of

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<sup>69</sup>Wesley, "On the Trinity," *Works*, ed. Outler, 2:384.

<sup>70</sup>Borgen, *Wesley on the Sacraments*, 66-67. See also Ole E. Borgen, "John Wesley: Sacramental Theology, No Ends without the Means," in *John Wesley: Contemporary Perspectives*, ed., John Stacey (London: Epworth Press, 1988), 67-82.

<sup>71</sup>Bowmer, 191, Horton Davies, *Worship and Theology in England*, Book 2, Pt. 3 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961; revised, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1996), 10. Bowmer states that the Wesleys were, "high churchmen of the Andrews and Laud tradition, impatient with both Roman and Genevan innovations and...they were ritualists in the sense that they insisted that all things be done decently and in order...[admixture, laying-on hands in ordination, manual acts of consecration]—yet matters of ceremonial were to them, after all, incidental.

<sup>72</sup>Richard F. Buxton, *Eucharist and Institution Narrative*, (London: SPCK, published for the Alcuin Club, 1976), 142-44; John F.H. New, *Anglican and Puritan: The Basis of Their Opposition, 1558-1640* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1964), 59-81. Buxton contends that much of the vitriolic language concerning Puritan and Anglican differences over the eucharistic liturgy had more to do with political power and ecclesiastical concerns than with specific theological differences concerning communion. New argues that the two groups actually agreed on a number of key points: the categorical rejection of transubstantiation and consubstantiation; an intolerance toward Zwinglian interpretations of the Eucharist, and a high regard of the sacraments as "an efficacious means of grace" (59-62).

Edward VI written by Bishop Thomas Cranmer.<sup>73</sup> Wesley favored Cranmer's collects and traditional lections when he wrote the *Sunday Service* for American Methodists.<sup>74</sup> Wesley was influenced by the view of a group of Nonjurors known as the "Usagers" that held an elaborate and lofty appreciation for the Lord's Supper.<sup>75</sup> He clearly observed practices consonant with the tenor of the earlier 1549 *Prayer Book*, even when at variance with the 1662 *Prayer Book*. Wesley's preferences indicate a clear need to describe the activity of the Holy Spirit and the specific work of Jesus Christ as well as God the Father's gracious activity.

The Eucharist, like the other means of grace, exists simply through the grace of the Father that is communicated by the Spirit through an act that is both demonstrated and secured by the merit of the Son.<sup>76</sup> It appears that the Trinity cooperates in the redemptive activity of the individual as each person within the Trinity contributes a role (as provider, securer and communicator). Wesley's conception of the Trinity is complicated when the seemingly independent functions of each member of the Godhead are interchanged. In the opening paragraph of the "The Means of Grace," Wesley interchanges Christ and God as the one that ordains the practice of these ordinances.<sup>77</sup> Wesley also accepted an understanding of the "real presence" of Christ in the Eucharist that was more than a conveyed presence by the Holy Spirit. In some way the "person" of Jesus Christ is also active in the Eucharist.<sup>78</sup> With this emphasis, Christ not only secured the

<sup>73</sup>G. J. Cuming, *A History of Anglican Liturgy*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Macmillan Publishers, 1982), 45-66; Horton Davies, 187; Ronald C. D. Jasper, *The Development of the Anglican Liturgy, 1662-1980* (London: SPCK, 1989), 19. Cuming offers a description of Cranmer's work.

<sup>74</sup>James F. White, *Sacraments as God's Self Giving: Sacramental Practice and Faith* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1983), 27.

<sup>75</sup>Bowmer, 35; Horton Davies, 187; Jasper, 28-39. Davies summarizes the Usagers perspective on the practices that are essential for the Eucharist: "Like them he [Wesley] believed in intinction (that is, the mixed chalice), the necessity of a prayer of oblation as appropriate for the re-presentation of Christ's sacrifice, the need for an "epiclesis" or explicit invocation of the Holy Spirit on the elements, and, finally, in prayers for the departed to be included" (187).

<sup>76</sup>Wesley, "The Means of Grace," *Works*, ed. Outler, 1:389-90.

<sup>77</sup>Wesley, "The Means of Grace," *Works*, ed. Outler, 1:378.

<sup>78</sup>Buxton, 217-23, Rattenbury 50-51. The "consecration" of the means of grace in Wesley *Prayer Book* abridgement to North America required a christological acknowledgement since Wesley not only modeled the *BCP* words of institution but also included the insistence that any additional elements would have to be consecrated as well, a requirement unique to Anglicanism.



foundation for the means of grace (by the merits of his sacrifice) but also, with the Holy Spirit, communicated the efficacy of the means of grace (i.e., Christ's benefits).

Wesley, however, also advocated that the Holy Spirit must be equally active in the Eucharist through the addition of the epiclesis conveyed indirectly through hymnody.<sup>79</sup> Rattenbury notes the complexity of the Trinity in the Eucharist when he writes, "In fact, the whole Trinity is present and acting, bestowing upon men the benefits of the incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection."<sup>80</sup> Wesley's description of the relational, interdependent nature of the Trinity in the Eucharist also suggests that the different sacramental practices within the means of grace work co-operatively to communicate grace.

Wesley understood that the means of grace were practices established by the Trinity. In his sermon, "The Means of Grace," he is compelled to address an objection to the need for any ordinances since "Christ is the only means of grace."<sup>81</sup> His response first acknowledges that Jesus Christ establishes the possibility of the means of grace through his death and resurrection, the "sole price and purchaser of (grace)."<sup>82</sup> Grace, for Wesley, comes from God the Father and the first member of the Trinity ordains the means of grace.<sup>83</sup> The agent of communicating grace is the Holy Spirit. There is a need to rely upon all three members of the Trinity when using the means of grace. Wesley would caution:

The mere work done, profiteth nothing; there is no power to save but in the Spirit of God, no merit but in the blood of Christ; that consequently even what God ordains conveys no grace to the soul if you trust not in him alone.<sup>84</sup>

The complex description of the redemptive work of the Trinity is not surprising. For Wesley, the Trinity worked as an interactive unity for the sake of salvation. Each person of the Trinity did have a dominant function, as

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<sup>79</sup>Bowmer, 86-87.

<sup>80</sup>Borgen, *Wesley on the Sacraments*, 67.

<sup>81</sup>Wesley, "The Means of Grace," *Works*, ed. Outler, 1:391.

<sup>82</sup>Wesley, "The Means of Grace," *Works*, ed. Outler, 1:391.

<sup>83</sup>Wesley, "The Means of Grace," *Works*, ed. Outler, 1:378-79.

<sup>84</sup>Wesley, "The Means of Grace," *Works*, ed. Outler, 1:396.

the early taxonomy suggests.<sup>85</sup> The collaborative nature of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, however, was demonstrated through Wesley's own description of their activities (noted above), ordaining, securing, and mediating salvation to persons.<sup>86</sup> Kenneth Collins asserts that Wesley envisioned the redemptive activity of the Trinity as a communal exercise since the essence of God is relationally established through love.<sup>87</sup>

Eschatologically, this interrelated, collaborative Godhead will be in personal communion with the redeemed in "The New Creation." Wesley writes in this sermon:

And to crown all, there will be a deep, an intimate, and uninterrupted union with God; a constant communion with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ, through the Spirit; a continual enjoyment of the Three-One God, and of all the creatures in him!<sup>88</sup>

From a more immediate perspective, the Trinitarian objective for Wesley is that persons become "Transcripts of the Trinity," embodying this love relationship within themselves.<sup>89</sup>

Acknowledging the interactive nature of the Trinity opens the possibility that the practices involved in the means of grace are also interactive for the sake of salvation. This analogical step between Trinitarian activity and human practice is taken cautiously. For one, there is an ongoing caution against relating human practices to God's gracious activity. A logical equal caution would be to deduce that theological activity automatically

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<sup>85</sup>Pine, 7; Wainwright, "Why Wesley was a Trinitarian," 273. Pine writes, "Wesley's experience of the Redemptive Trinity is indeed that the Father purposes, the Son purchases, and the Holy Spirit applies salvation!" Wainwright echoes this sentiment: "Trinitarian doctrine corresponds, on the divine side, to what Wesley in another context called 'The Scripture way of Salvation': The Father saw the human need for redemption, the Son supplied it, the Holy Spirit applies it; and all this within their own loving communion, into which the Three-One God desires to bring us as our true worship."

<sup>86</sup>Outler, "A New Future for Wesleyan Studies," 43-45; Pine, 4-5. Interestingly, Pine asserts that prevenient grace is christologically oriented (5). Outler, however, has noted that all grace is by definition prevenient in nature (44). Grace would then also be revealed in the creative and governing activity of God, two functions associated with the first member of the Trinity. It would seem reasonable to acknowledge that the Godhead then would be equally active in preventing grace.

<sup>87</sup>Collins, "Reconfiguration of Power," 165-72.

<sup>88</sup>Wesley, "The New Creation," *Works*, ed. Outler, 2:510.

<sup>89</sup>Tripp, "Methodism's Trinitarian Hymnody," 370-71.

infers similar human practice. The practices in the means of grace may not automatically be interrelated, even if the Trinity is the model of such interactivity. Wesley, however, provides a “gracious” analogy to bridge the activity of God with human action and understanding.

### A Gracious Analogy

For all of his sacramental emphasis, Wesley himself holds a bifurcated understanding of the spiritual and the material world. Wesley, however, did “close the gap” between theological and human activity for the sake of God’s saving grace. Grace could be conveyed in human activity, so that humanity, by gracious analogy, could possess a heightened understanding of the spiritual world. Logically, the activity of the Trinity could then be anticipated in the means of grace, if for no other reason than to assist in the conveyance of grace.

In sermons like “The New Birth,” Wesley reviews his epistemology of spiritual senses, noting the “impenetrable veil” that obscures these senses prior to salvation.<sup>90</sup> But with salvation this situation changes, Wesley writes: “but as soon as he is born of God there is a total change in all of these particulars. The ‘eyes of his understanding are opened.’ ”<sup>91</sup> This new spiritual understanding signals that new meaning occurs within the individual. Wesley would describe the redeemed life as if the world had qualitatively changed due to a change in spiritual perception and personal temperament.

Wesley cautions against reducing the conveyance of grace to purely human terms. Drawing from his own understanding of the sacrament of Baptism in relation to the New Birth (outward sign and inward work), Wesley writes:

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<sup>90</sup>Wesley, “An Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion,” *Works*, ed. Cragg, 11: 46-47; Wesley, “The Great Privilege of Those that are Born of God,” *Works*, ed. Outler, 1:434-35; Wesley, “The New Birth,” *Works*, ed. Outler, 2:192. See also Maddox; 27-28; Runyon, *The New Creation*, 74-80. Wesley uses the metaphor of spiritual senses in other sermons, such as “The Great Privilege of those Born of God.” In “An Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion.” Wesley writes: “faith is that divine evidence whereby the spiritual man discerneth God and the things of God. It is with regard to the spiritual world what sense is with regard to the natural. It is the spiritual sensation of every soul that is born of God” (Craig, 11:46).

<sup>91</sup>Wesley, “The New Birth,” *Works*, ed. Outler, 2:192.

That the one is a visible, the other an invisible thing, and therefore wholly different from each other: the one being an act of man, purifying the body, the other a change wrought by God in the soul. So that the former is just as distinguishable from the latter as the soul from the body, or water from the Holy Ghost.<sup>92</sup>

Wesley is obviously open to the criticism of bifurcating the spiritual and material in this selection, a persistent danger noted in other studies of spirituality.<sup>93</sup> However, he seems more concerned in an unwarranted trust in the mere observance of the physical act.<sup>94</sup> Wesley wishes to preserve the freedom of God and communicate “a lively sense that God is above all means.”<sup>95</sup> Wesley is adamant that there is no intrinsic worth (“*ex opere operato*”) in the means for salvation apart from the Trinitarian work of God.<sup>96</sup>

Wesley does anticipate that grace creates new meaning within the individual on a human level. This meaning occurs not only cognitively but includes a change in human “affections” or “tempers.” Wesley summarizes this change at multiple levels of human existence in his description of holiness:

Gospel holiness is no less than the image of God stamped upon the heart. It is no other than the whole mind that was in Christ Jesus. It consists of all heavenly affections and tempers mingled together in one. It implies such a continual thankful love to him who hath not withheld from us his Son, his only Son, as makes it natural, and in a manner necessary to us, to love every child of man; as fills us with the “bowels” of mercies, kindness, gentleness, long-suffering.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>92</sup>Wesley, “The New Birth,” *Works*, ed. Outler, 2:197.

<sup>93</sup>Robert McAfee Brown, *Spirituality and Liberation: Overcoming the Great Fallacy* (Louisville: Westminster Press, 1988), 23-42.

<sup>94</sup>Wesley, “The Means of Grace,” *Works*, ed. Outler, 1:396. Wesley writes: “before you use any means let it be deeply impressed on your soul: There is no *power* in this. It is in itself a poor, dead, empty thing; separate from God, it is a dry leaf, a shadow. Neither is there any *merit* in my using this, noting intrinsically pleasing to God, noting whereby I deserve any favour at his hands, no, not a drop of water to cool my tongue.”

<sup>95</sup>Wesley, “The Means of Grace,” *Works*, ed. Outler, 1:395.

<sup>96</sup>Wesley, “The Means of Grace,” *Works*, ed. Outler, 1:396, n.96.

<sup>97</sup>Wesley, “The New Birth,” *Works*, ed. Outler, 2:194.

It is clear that grace works within the individual at multiple levels, including the co-mingling of heavenly affections and human tempers (a standard Wesley phrase), creating new awareness and new meaning.<sup>98</sup>

Keeping in mind Wesley's caution of undue trust in outward formality, it is still reasonable to assume that grace is conveyed through various avenues of human awareness as well as through spiritual awareness.<sup>99</sup> This assumption is based on Wesley's own concession that human expressions, such as childbirth, are analogous to spiritual expressions, such as being born of the Spirit.<sup>100</sup> Wesley would even go so far as to characterize human growth and maturation to the transition from the new birth to sanctification.<sup>101</sup> He believed that God's spiritual conveyance of grace could also be discerned analogically through our human senses because of God's gracious desire for us to know God-self for the sake of salvation. While retaining a distinct separation between the spiritual realm and the material world, Wesley overcame his own dichotomy through *analogia gratia*, or the analogy of grace.

### Analogia Gratia

Scholars are deeply divided on the possibility of developing analogical relationships between God and the created world. If there is no connection between the activity of this world and that of God, then the hope of realizing God's grace seems remote. If the relationship between God's activity and the activity of creation are synonymous, then the possibility of recognizing God's grace is problematic. Wesley, living in a deeply dualistic society, provides a remarkable alternative grounded in the gracious activity of God, *analogia gratia*, or the analogy of grace.

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<sup>98</sup>Gregory S. Clapper, *John Wesley on Religious Affections: His Views on Experience and Emotions and Their Role in The Christian Life and Theology* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1989), 69-75.

<sup>99</sup>Wesley, "On the Discoveries of Faith," *Works*, ed. Outler 4: 29-34; Wesley, "Walking by Sight, Walking by Faith," *Works*, ed. Outler, 4:49-54. Wesley asserts that the spiritual world cannot be discerned through the human senses. See also Wesley, "The Imperfection of Human Knowledge," and "The Case of Reason Impartially Considered," *Works*, ed. Outler, 2:568-600. Wesley says that reason alone cannot reveal God's full nature and intent.

<sup>100</sup>Wesley, "The New Birth," *Works*, ed. Outler, 2:192; Wesley, "Justification by Faith," *Works*, ed. Outler, 1:183. Wesley uses the birth of a child to express the awakening of spiritual senses.

<sup>101</sup>Wesley, "The Great Privilege of Those that are Born of God," *Works*, ed. Outler, 1:432-35; Wesley, "The New Birth," *Works*, ed. Outler, 2:198. Wesley describes the awakening of the senses much like that of a child's emergence from the womb and into the awareness of the surrounding world.

One may define *analogia gratia* as the relationship that describes both God's action through human activity for the sake of salvation and, vice versa, the anticipation of human action that mirrors the activity of God. Human actions do not automatically mirror God's action, but they may be similar when used by God for God's gracious redemptive work. Wesley understood that God used parallel or analogical activities in the activity of the major sacraments, water, wine and bread.<sup>102</sup> To extend this concept to the rest of the means of grace is a logical step.<sup>103</sup>

If God might be active in common practices such as the washing of water or the partaking of the bread and wine, God might also analogically be active (indeed interactive) in the reading of Scripture, prayer, or Christian conversation. Further, all these practices invite the participant to gain new knowledge concerning oneself and also God. It would be reasonable to assume that God analogically would be graciously active in this new awareness for the sake of redemption and that persons could discern how these actions mirror the Trinity's interactivity.

Wesley alludes to the possibility of our discerning God's activity in human action in his understanding of the cognitive and moral capacity of humanity. In his sermon "On Conscience," he notes that the human conscience has three "offices" by which it assists human beings.

First, it is a *witness*, testifying what we have done, in thought, or word, or action. Secondly, it is a *judge*, passing sentence on what we have done, that is good or evil. And thirdly, it in some sort *executes* the sentence, by occasioning a degree of complacency in him that does well, and a degree of uneasiness in him that does evil.<sup>104</sup>

While Wesley acknowledges that these are normal "public" or "moral" functions of the conscience, he would not call them natural.<sup>105</sup> He writes, "Yet properly speaking it is not natural; but a supernatural gift of God,

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<sup>102</sup>Borgen, *Wesley on the Sacraments*, 52.

<sup>103</sup>Henry S. Spaulding, "To Shew the Fly out of the Fly Bottle: A Reconstruction of the Wesleyan Understanding of Christian Perfection," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 33, no. 2 (Fall, 1998): 152-55. Spaulding, summarizing Ludvig Wittgenstein, calls this a rule theory. Following Wittgenstein we can say that once the grammar of "gracious" analogical activity is discerned in Wesley's original three means of grace, then one can "go on" to include the other means of grace.

<sup>104</sup>Wesley, "On Conscience," *Works*, ed. Outler, 3:483.

<sup>105</sup>Wesley, "On Conscience," *Works*, ed. Outler, 3:484.

above all his natural endowments.”<sup>106</sup> He attributes these capabilities, once pristine before the fall, to the preventing grace of God.<sup>107</sup> Wesley also describes conscience in a distinctly Christian sense. Note:

Conscience implies, first, that faculty a man has of knowing himself, of discerning both in general and in particular his own tempers, thoughts, words and actions. But this it is not possible for him to do without the assistance of the Spirit of God. Otherwise self-love, and indeed every other irregular passion, would disguise and wholly conceal him from himself.<sup>108</sup>

Wesley continues by stating that the Holy Spirit assists in identifying the source of the “rule” in Scripture and assists in “executing” what is consistent with that rule,<sup>109</sup> concluding:

In all the offices of conscience the “unction of the Holy One” is indispensably needful. Without this neither could we clearly discern our lives or tempers, nor could we judge of the rule whereby we are to walk, or of our conformity or disconformity to it.<sup>110</sup>

It appears that the processes of the human mind have not changed in the transition from one under preventing grace to one under saving grace. What has changed is perhaps the depth of capacity and the referent of judgement (now Scripture). Wesley does not abandon the cognitive processes but merely liberates them under the presence of grace and the power of the Holy Spirit. He obviously understood consciousness as a cognitive activity. Wesley’s description would not rule out the possibility that the same form of tacit awareness, perhaps through a different form of human knowing (emotions, somatic awareness, etc.).<sup>111</sup> His emphasis on the change of human affections or tempers as evidence of salvation would

<sup>106</sup>Wesley, “On Conscience,” *Works*, ed. Outler, 3:482.

<sup>107</sup>Wesley, “On Conscience,” *Works*, ed. Outler, 3:484.

<sup>108</sup>Wesley, “On Conscience,” *Works*, ed. Outler, 3:485.

<sup>109</sup>Wesley, “On Conscience,” *Works*, ed. Outler, 3:485.

<sup>110</sup>Wesley, “On Conscience,” *Works*, ed. Outler, 3:485.

<sup>111</sup>Clapper, 58. Clapper confirms this when discussing Wesley’s understanding of the “spiritual sense” in relation to the affections. Clapper writes, “It turns out that the spiritual sense is inextricable related to such everyday Christian emotions as peace, joy, and love.”

imply that emotional awareness and responsiveness are also governed by the same theological framework as cognitive awareness.<sup>112</sup>

The claim that the means of grace may convey grace at a human level that analogically mirrors spiritual activity proceeds under three warrants. First, Wesley believed that the common practices in the means of grace were analogically compatible with the supernatural activity of God for the sake of redemption. Second, since grace was by definition relational, the means did not transmit grace substantively (as a cup dispensing water); instead, in the practice of the ordinances, God in Christ becomes present so that the quality of the relationship was revealed. Finally, Wesley also believed that our human capacities of awareness, always active under the preventing grace of God, are now heightened under God's redemptive activity. Stated another way, because of one's spiritually heightened awareness and the understanding that God was present in the practices of the means, any form of awareness in the practices of the means might analogically compare to the redemptive work of the Trinity.

## Conclusion

—The idea of an interactive or collaborative Trinity working through love to convey grace for the sake of salvation reveals the character of the Godhead and also indicates, by gracious analogy, the relationship of the different practices within means of grace. Since the quality of grace is relational and the character of the Godhead is communally collaborative, the practices described within the means of grace would also be interactive and relational in nature.

There appears to be justification for this view from more than one perspective. Borgen, for instance, asserts that the entire Trinity is at work providing salvation to humanity through the means of grace.<sup>113</sup> Henry Knight also asserts that, for Wesley, the means of grace provide an inner logic that asserts that the means to Christian life (salvation) and the ends of the Christian life (holy living) are intertwined within the practices of

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<sup>112</sup>Clapper, 73. Clapper overcomes Wesley's separation of the spiritual from the physical by creating three categories, supernatural, physical and spiritual. Clapper then argues that the Christian affections "need not be understood as supernatural and mystical infusions from God" (73). Clapper's concern is dichotomies (75), but his understanding of distinctly different supernatural and spiritual categories does not appear consistent with Wesley.

<sup>113</sup>Borgen, *Wesley on the Sacraments*, 46-50, 83, 94-120.



the means of grace.<sup>114</sup> If so, the Trinitarian outcome for holy living described above would easily imply a corresponding interactivity within the practices themselves. Wesley supports this in his own unique example of evangelism in his sermon on the means of grace. He posits a hypothetical scenario where a person is drawn to living faith through a gradual process. The unsuspecting convert begins this journey through hearing a sermon (which awakens the person's interest), to further reading, prayer and conversation, and finally to awakening faith during a celebration of the Lord's Supper. "And thus he continues in God's way—in hearing reading, meditating, praying and partaking the Lord's Supper—till God, in the manner that pleases him, speaks to his heart, 'thy faith has saved thee, go in peace.'"<sup>115</sup>

Wesley understood that each means of grace could work together to convey grace. This appears to be the case in Wesley's own taxonomy. He does acknowledge that any of the means may bring the believer to the point of salvation. However, he also writes, "whenever opportunity serves, use all the means God has ordained."<sup>116</sup> Christian religious educators within the Wesleyan tradition should recognize that all educational practices, indeed all ministry practices, are related not only psychologically and sociologically, but also theologically. The interactive nature of the Godhead reinforces a sacramental view of education that is relational, at least for the sake of communicating grace in the lives of the practitioners. As the Three-One God is active in the Eucharist, the Trinity is also active in each practice. The various "ways of knowing" God, by gracious analogy, are used relationally and collaboratively by a God who "ordains, secures and provides" those selfsame practices. Educators would be wise to consider the full activity of the community of faith as potential "means of grace," as well as other activities that the Three-One God might ordain for salvation.

<sup>114</sup>Henry Knight, *Presence of God*, 2-8, 168-96.

<sup>115</sup>Wesley, "The Means of Grace," *Works*, ed. Outler, 1:394-95.

<sup>116</sup>Wesley, "The Means of Grace," *Works*, ed. Outler, 1:395.

# **POINT/COUNTERPOINT: “BAPTISM OF THE SPIRIT” LANGUAGE**

by

**Randy L. Maddox and Laurence W. Wood**

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## **An Historiographical Correction**

by Randy L. Maddox  
Seattle Pacific University

In the Fall 1999 issue of the *Wesleyan Theological Journal* (pp. 111-35) Laurence Wood lodged twenty-two historiographical criticisms against my response to his earlier essay “Pentecostal Sanctification in Wesley and Early Methodism” (*WTJ* 34.1 [Spring 1999]: 24-53). I believe that my answers to these criticisms are readily evident to interested readers in my original response (*WTJ* 34.2 [Fall 1999]: 78-110). There is one point, however, that can now be updated. Wood relies heavily in making his case on a letter of 11 October 1783 that he claims is from John Wesley to John Fletcher and includes the line “I am quite satisfied with your motives and you had from the beginning my Imprimatur” (*WTJ* 34.1: 48). I noted in my response that the curator of the Methodist archives in the John Rylands Library was unable to locate such a letter for me to consult (*WTJ* 34.2: 101 note 57). While recently in Manchester, England, Gareth Lloyd and I located this letter. The letter Wood cites turns out not to be

from John Wesley but from Charles!<sup>1</sup> Moreover, it has a very specific context and scope. Charles is endorsing Fletcher's proposal to circulate to members of Parliament a pamphlet on "Three National Grievances" calling for improved conditions for working people.<sup>2</sup> It is historiographical missteps like this (and others noted in my original response) that render Wood's thesis less than compelling.

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<sup>1</sup>I am indebted to Peter Forsaith and Gareth Lloyd for help in sorting out this confusion and locating the letter in question (it exists only in manuscript and is stored in JRULM MAW F1 Box 18 at the John Rylands Library).

<sup>2</sup>Cf. the discussion of this letter in Patrick Philip Streiff, Jean Guillaume de la Flechere (Frankfort am Main: Peter Lang, 1984), 468. The actual wording of the line in question is "I am quite satisfied about your motion, and you had from the beginning my Imprimatur."

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## **A Response to the Historiographical Correction**

by Laurence W. Wood  
Asbury Theological Seminary

I welcome this correction. I requested a copy of the letter in question from the archivists before this excerpt was printed, but at that time they could not find it in the portfolio of loose letters. Subsequently, archivist Gareth Lloyd informed me that he had found the letter and that it was from Charles Wesley. I immediately notified Randy Maddox, who replied that he also had become aware that it was by Charles. I am surprised that this is so troublesome to Maddox, especially in light of the historiographical "missteps" in his earlier article, which he cannot easily set aside simply by referring the reader back to his original article since his "missteps" involved factual errors—such as his mistaken claim that Wesley did not edit and correct Fletcher's manuscript on *The Equal Check*. This "misstep" disproved his speculation about Wesley's alleged dissatisfaction with it. In regard to my "misstep," this excerpt was not an essential part of my discussion and makes no virtual difference. This letter reveals Fletcher's practice of sending his manuscripts to Charles and John Wesley, asking approval in accordance with Wesley's insistence that no

Methodist preacher publish anything without official approval.<sup>1</sup> It was a practice for the Wesley brothers to share the responsibility of offering “correction” of the writings of Methodist preachers.<sup>2</sup> John and Charles Wesley jointly edited Fletcher’s writings and Charles supervised the printing.<sup>3</sup> Maddox notes that the letter in question had “a very specific context and scope.” The context was the practice of getting the Wesleys to approve his writings before they were published. The scope was that Fletcher had been given “from the beginning” Charles Wesley’s “Imprimatur.”

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<sup>1</sup>See the Minutes of the Methodist Conferences (London, Mason, 1862), 1:153.

<sup>2</sup>*Works* (Jackson edition), 12:142.

<sup>3</sup>Cf. Thomas Jackson, *Life of Charles Wesley*, 2:293f.

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## BOOK REVIEWS

Stanley Hauerwas. *Sanctify Them in the Truth: Holiness Exemplified*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998. 267 pages. ISBN 0-687-08223-4

Reviewed by Henry H. Knight III. St. Paul School of Theology, Kansas City, MO.

Like many such collections, these essays by Stanley Hauerwas may seem eclectic. Their topics range widely, from the relation of theology and ethics, to living with the handicapped, and from how the Decalogue enables truthful speech to the place of theology in the modern university. Just under half have been previously published in an array of journals and edited volumes. While most seem intended for the printed page, some were originally oral addresses and six are sermons. Even so, this is a strongly unified book. Its interwoven arguments all revolve around a single theme: truth cannot be separated from sanctification, and sanctification requires practices because holiness (and truth) is necessarily embodied. By assembling these essays in the order he does, Hauerwas does more than make a case. He immerses us in his vision, taking us into it layer by layer until we begin to see with new eyes.

In Part I Hauerwas argues against the modern separation of doctrine and ethics, an error he attributes to Kant and Schleiermacher. Rather, he insists, "To speak truthfully and intelligibly of one will always require speaking of the other" (36), here identifying with a tradition that includes Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, and Barth. Thus the content of ethics is governed by theology and liturgy; doctrines can only be understood insofar as they are embodied in worship and ethics. Beliefs are not universal principles whose truthfulness has no relation to life, nor can Christian ethics be grounded elsewhere than in the particular narrative of God's relationship with the world through Israel and Jesus Christ.

Hauerwas insists we can know neither God nor ourselves apart from concrete practices that enable our lives to be shaped by that narrative. To show this, he draws on both Aquinas and Luther, arguing that it is only as we practice the last nine precepts of the Decalogue that we truly understand the first and thereby know God. Likewise, he says we come to truly know ourselves as sinners in and through the practices of confession, forgiveness, and reconciliation. Thus he denies the identification of sin with the “human condition” which marked the theologies of Niebuhr and Tillich. The truth about God or ourselves cannot be found in universal concepts but only in the stories and practices of a community.

Part II looks more directly at sanctification and how it is actually embodied. Hauerwas uses “body” in contrast to two misunderstandings. He denies the body/soul dualism that has so dominated Western thought. For Hauerwas, we do not *have* bodies; we *are* bodies. Second, he opposes the autonomous individualism and rationalism fostered by the Enlightenment that believes “our lives are the outcome of choices we have made” (74) and “the church is a collection of individuals in which each person gets to determine their relation to God” (80). Instead of each of us being a “self,” the church itself is a body whose stories and practices shape the character of those within it. We are not self-sufficient, he insists, nor are we in control, but dependent on God and one another.

This last point is one reason Hauerwas continues to reflect on the mentally handicapped. “No group exposes the pretensions of the humanism that shapes the practices of modernity more thoroughly than the mentally handicapped” (145). That they “are constituted by narratives they have not chosen, reveals the character of our lives.” We, like they, are born not to be autonomous but dependent. As creatures “we are created for and with one another,” and are thus communal “by necessity.” Indeed, we “cannot help but desire and delight in the reality of the other . . .” (147).

One might ask where one would find a church that actually reflects this vision. After all, Hauerwas draws upon Jean Vanier and the L’Arche community in his essay, not a typical local church. But he is convinced that wherever Christians gather in worship, “God cannot be kept away” (7). Christians in the church are “surrounded by extraordinary riches, not the least being worship, through which we can discover a God who has made us more than we can ‘will’ or imagine on our own” (10-11). The problem is that we often lack the vision to see what is before us. He endorses Catholicism for its maintaining “that Christianity is finally not

something that I get to make up my mind about but rather a set of practices to which I submit my life" (166). It is as we are shaped by these practices that we are sanctified and thereby given the vision to discover God through those riches. To illustrate this, he describes at length the life and practices of the local church he attends in North Carolina.

Because so much of the Hauerwas argument is focused on the church and its practices, the essay on Christian perfection in the lives of individuals may seem out of place. It was written earlier than any of the others, and hardly mentions the church at all. Yet Hauerwas sees its inclusion as helping to maintain a balance "between a Catholic and pietistic account of holiness" (10). In it he offers a critique of John Wesley. Hauerwas sees Wesley as attempting to overcome the tension described by Gilbert Meilander between the Christian life as journey and as dialogue. Wesley does this by making justification one of a number of stages on the way to perfection, thereby subsuming dialogue within the journey of sanctification. Hauerwas has read Wesley carefully, noting that "Wesley was acutely aware that our lives can hardly be laid out with such exactness" (128). However, Hauerwas sees stages as too abstract, and seems to regret Wesley's attempt to harmonize the two traditions. On this I must disagree with Hauerwas. I believe Wesley's way of relating justification to sanctification to be theologically fruitful and do not see him emphasizing "stages" of salvation as much as trying to depict the interrelation of instantaneous and gradual works of God. I'm not at all clear that Hauerwas has a place for instantaneous works in his theology, although he well may at least allow for them.

Hauerwas does make a significant contribution to the contemporary depiction of sanctification by pointing to the work of William Law. Through the insightful characterizations in his *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*, Law offers nuanced descriptions of holy and unholy lives and the kinds of practices that sustain them. These life-like narratives communicate sanctification with greater nuance and depth than do the more abstract depictions of Wesley.

Parts III (essays) and IV (sermons) have a more polemical edge than the first two parts, which is not to say they lack careful reasoning. As an example, the Hauerwas defense of Christian fanaticism, calling it "non-violent terrorism," certainly gets one's attention, but it includes a careful development of Alasdair MacIntyre's account of traditions and epistemological crises. Hauerwas links this to Christian witness as an alternative to

the false choice between an allegedly universal ethic and the violence of war and terrorism. Another essay, “Christians in the Hands of Flaccid Secularists,” offers an extensive discussion of the place of theology in the modern university. Here he argues that the role of the theologian is “to show the difference God makes about matters that matter” (214). The sermons are designed to illumine the essays, a task that they accomplish with lively clarity.

There is, of course, much more in a book such as this than can be indicated even in an overly long review. It is all worth reading. Not only does Hauerwas in so many ways expose the hidden hold that the culture of modernity has on our lives, but he describes an array of practices through which holiness is embodied. In this he is an ally of all who wish to see a recovery of holiness for the church and world today.



The W. L. Bonner Literary Committee, *And the High Places I'll Bring Down. Bishop William L. Bonner: The Man and His God* (n.p.: n.p., 1999). 295 pp. ISBN: 0-9673182-9-7.

John W. Brooks, *Mighty Moments: God's Leading Through A Life of Faith* (Franklin Springs, GA: Advocate Press, 1999). 239 pp. No ISBN.

Willis Collins Hoover, *History of the Pentecostal Revival in Chile*, trans. and ed. Mario G. Hoover (Lakeland: n.p., 2000). 293 pp. ISBN: 0-9678759-0-0.

Lloyd H. Knox, *Building Relationships: Prayers, Sermons and Other Writings*, edited by Chet Martin with Ruth Sparrow (Indianapolis: Light and Life Press, 1999). 391 pp. ISBN: 0-89367-255-2.

Reviewed by David Bundy, Christian Theological Seminary, Indianapolis, IN.

The Wesleyan/Holiness tradition continues to shape the daughter traditions to which it gave birth at the turn of the twentieth century as well as develop its own identity. The biographies/autobiographies discussed here provide cases in point. These represent four quite distinct traditions: The Church of Our Lord Jesus Christ of the Apostolic Faith (headquarters in Detroit, MI); the Pentecostal Holiness Church (headquarters in Oklahoma City, OK); the Methodist Pentecostal Church of Chile (headquarters in Santiago, Chile); and the Free Methodist Church of North America. These writings suggest the sources required and the problems that attend any serious effort to write a meta-history of the Wesleyan/Holiness traditions.

The volume on Bonner is a theological biography of a Georgia farm boy, born 12 Nov. 1921, who grew up in during the Great Depression. He came to faith in the Colored (now Christian) Methodist Episcopal Church and served as Sunday School Superintendent of his home congregation. In 1942 he immigrated to New York City and a year later experienced baptism in the Holy Spirit at Bishop R. C. Lawson's Refuge Temple. In 1944 he became an associate minister of the church and in 1946 was sent to pastor in Detroit. From then on his ministry prospered. Other "Refuge Temples" were started around the country. W. L. Bonner Bible College was established in Columbia, South Carolina, in 1995. The denomination now ministers in 26 states and twenty-five foreign countries. The narrative is based primarily on oral history interviews with persons who have

known Bonner through the years, including fellow clergy, his mother, and with Bonner. It significantly supplements what can be known about Bonner from other published sources. This is a crucial source for the history of the Church of Our Lord Jesus Christ of the Apostolic Faith.

The work by Brooks is autobiographical. It traces the story of the son of a Holiness evangelist, born 18 Feb. 1899, grandson of a Methodist Episcopal Church South evangelist who studied at Holmes Bible College and became a well-known missionary in the Pentecostal Holiness Church. His father and grandfather were close friends of George D. Watson and Bud Robinson. Shortly after graduation from Holmes, Brooks married Erna Mae Holt in 1924 and headed to South Africa where they served as missionaries from 1924-1947. They had a significant impact in Natal Province. They returned to the USA in 1947 and remained to 1955 working to lay the financial support needed to establish a Bible School in Nigeria. The new ministry in Nigeria began in 1955 when West African Bible College became a reality. When they returned to the USA in late 1966, the Holiness Pentecostal Church of Nigeria included 1500 adult members, five ordained and eight licensed Nigerian ministers. Throughout the book, one gains insights into the mission theory and praxis of the Pentecostal Holiness Church.

Hoover's book is quite another matter. The Pentecostal revival in Chile was one of the defining moments for several groups. For the Methodist Episcopal Church, it marked a definitive missiological decision to avoid revivalism and Pentecostalism and to exorcise those elements from its midst; for Chileans, it demonstrated that a Chilean church could survive and prosper; for Pentecostals it was proof that Pentecostalism was more complex than a formula of American revivalist experience. In the midst of the events of 1909-1911 (and until his death in 1936) was the towering figure of Willis Collins Hoover. Hoover had gone to Chile as a missionary with the "Self-Supporting Mission of William Taylor." This was a Wesleyan/Holiness mission enterprise that was later incorporated under the control of the Methodist Episcopal Mission Board. After the revival broke out, Hoover was forced to leave the Methodist Episcopal Church. Then, influenced by the Chileans who had experienced Pentecostal baptism of the Holy Spirit, and encouraged by his wife, Hoover accepted the call to pastor the fledgling Pentecostal church and to guide it in its new reality.

The original edition of the book has been known in Spanish and cited in that form since 1930, primarily by Latin American historians.

Despite the worldwide fame of Hoover and the importance of the revival, his book discussing those events was not translated for seventy years! There are probably interesting reasons why that translation was delayed, but now, thanks to Hoover's grandson Mario G. Hoover, those whose Spanish is not sufficient to read the original can have access to the narrative. The book is rich in primary sources. Extensive quotations are provided from the documents that deal with Hoover's judgement and condemnation by the Methodist Episcopal bishop, missionaries, and Mission Board. However, this book is far more than a translation of Hoover's *Avivamiento*. Also included are translations of five theological articles written by Hoover and published in Chile. Three of these were editorials in the periodical *El Chile Pentecostal*. The first, "Ecclesia Church" (pp. 130-137), defends the separation of the Pentecostal churches from the other churches. The second, "Christian Love" (pp. 138-144) argues against ecumenical involvement with those who belittle the Pentecostal revival. The third, "The Poison of the Old Serpent," (pps. 145-151) argues that the upper classes are not privileged in regard to goodness or evangelism. He summarized his thesis: "[God] always wants that our faith be not in the wisdom of men but in the power of God" (p.150). The other two articles are translations of articles published in the periodical *Fuego de Pentecostes*. The first discussed the origin and development of the periodical that served as the primary Pentecostal organ of communication and theological reflection for decades. The second article gives Hoover's perspective on the Pentecostal movement as well as autobiographical data.

Finally, and most importantly, there is the personal reflection of Mario Hoover on his Grandfather Willis Hoover. When Mario was but a child his father died and he and his siblings were raised as the children of Willis Hoover and adopted his name. The recollections, some telling, others poignant, others ordinary, reveal aspects of Willis Hoover that we could otherwise not know. The resulting picture does not change the standard historiography, but it does nuance the figure of Hoover. Willis Hoover died on Mario's eighteenth birthday. A useful selection of photographs is included (pp. 276-288). While the book is of significant usefulness, the true added value of this translation is the memoirs of Mario G. Hoover. These add significantly to our knowledge both of the Pentecostal revival in Chile and of the revivalist. The translated volume will now hopefully find its way to the desks of scholars of the Wesleyan/Holiness and Pentecostal movements. It is an important case study

of the transitions and evolutions of the Wesleyan/Holiness tradition outside North America.

The volume on Lloyd Knox (1914-1994) is composed primarily of reprints of texts or the first publication of manuscript material. Biographical notes included in the tributes provide some access to the life and ministry of Knox. The texts are both revelatory and frustrating to the reader because so many of them are provided in alphabetical order of the title and without reference to the context in which positions were taken. The volume does not do justice to the changes in theological position observable in his ecclesiastical and personal lives. What comes through clearly in the book is his passion for the issues he engaged and his understanding and practice of piety. Knox was an important figure in the Free Methodist Church, where he served as publisher and as an influential theologian. The volume, while less useful than the others discussed here, is still an important landmark in the study of the history and practices of the Free Methodist Church.

These volumes are problematic sources for the historian. They are at once primary and secondary literature. Each is written, it would appear, in an effort to prepare to encounter more detail about saints and heroes. Each is quite important in its own ways. All should become significant parts of the corpus of Wesleyan/Holiness historiography.

Barry L. Callen, *Following the Light: Teachings, Testimonies, Trials, and Triumphs of the Church of God Movement*, Anderson, IN: Warner Press, 2000. 440 pages. ISBN: 0-87162-847-3.

Reviewed by James W. Lewis, Anderson University, Anderson, Indiana.

Barry L. Callen, Editor of the *Wesleyan Theological Journal* and Anderson University Press and University Professor of Christian Studies at Anderson University, once again steps to the plate with this provocative documentary history of the Church of God (Anderson). Serving as compiler and editor for this publication, Callen continues his dizzying pace of producing memorable books. This reviewer takes special pleasure in reviewing a book by both a valued colleague at Anderson University and a committed churchperson in that expression of the wider church called the Church of God (Anderson).

Those especially interested in the histories of diverse Christian communions in the Holiness tradition and how they engage others of the Christian faith will find this work a necessary addition to their reading lists. Callen's description of his work as a "documentary history" is particularly apt. It is replete with documents of all kinds (teachings, confessions, biographical sketches, General Assembly position statements, analytical essays, and so forth) spanning the one hundred and twenty-year history of the Church of God Reformation Movement. That in itself is noteworthy, but what this reviewer finds most useful is the way Callen arranges this prolific amount of information.

The editor employs "light" as an organizing motif, which divides the work into five major divisions: "Seeing the Light," "Clarifying the Light," "Implementing the Light," "Honoring the Light," and "Spreading the Light." In the Church of God Reformation Movement, the theme of light is a familiar one. From songs ("Walking in the Light") to terms of self-identification ("Evening Light Saints"), light has been and continues to be a regnant theme that illuminates the landscape of this movement's history. In addition to these major divisions, Callen further divides some of the parts for clarity, development, and readability. This reviewer found this organization very helpful in getting a handle on this voluminous material.

Callen's overview essay at the beginning of the book orients the reader into a provocative introduction of the movement's twists and turns, highs and lows. This reviewer found the essay extremely helpful in providing a perspective for integrating all the diverse entries to follow. A key reason

why this history maintains reader interest is the skillful insertion of sixty-nine photos of mostly pivotal characters in the story of the Church of God Reformation Movement. The decision-making polity of this tradition in its North American expression makes the General Assembly a necessary focus for a large section. The many documents in this area provide the reader with the pulse beat of the ordained ministry of the Church of God in relation to the shifting dynamics of social, cultural, global, and moral phenomena. In the midst of all this information, one must credit Callen with an earnest effort at unfolding the telling of a story. For the most part, he succeeds. The past, present, and future are all well represented. This gives the “feel” of a story being lived out with real people, plots, movement, tragedy, and a movement’s reflections on and experiences with the Trinitarian God.

As this reviewer further surveyed the breadth of the material, at points I wished for more original reflections from other parts of the church’s diverse membership. Certainly there are historical reasons for some of this silence. Further, this reviewer wondered why a movement with the theological distinctives of Christian unity and holiness would have such distinctives represented in only nineteen entries of the book’s total content. To be fair, such concerns point less to the limitations of Callen’s approach and more to the availability of material—especially theological material from a “non-creedal” movement. To his credit, Callen’s opening essay is rich in offering a critical reflection on how this tradition experiences the tension between its vision and the living out of that vision. In addition, Callen includes a major bibliography of the tradition and an extensive “user-friendly” index. He earnestly attempts (much to this reviewer’s delight) to broaden the scope of previous publications by providing key information and photos of women, Hispanics, Blacks, and non-North Americans.

Overall this book has much to commend it. Callen’s *Following the Light* deserves a place among other key works of this genre. It is beneficial for Wesleyan/Holiness people by helping them to locate the common ground where we have “walked together.” It certainly is a must for persons and institutions of the Church of God Reformation Movement, and for anyone, lay or professional, who value God’s reconciling agenda in the world. This is particularly true when such concern is grounded in a particular history that shines additional light on the journeys of God’s people generally. For its content, organization, and bibliographic aids, this book is a seedbed for anyone who desires to broaden understanding of how people live out their faith in a changing world. Read, follow the light, and, above all, enjoy the journey.

Kevin M. Moser and Larry D. Smith, compilers. *God's Clock Keeps Perfect Time: God's Bible School's First 100 Years*. Cincinnati: God's Bible School, 2000. 456 pp. \$70.00. Order from [revivalist@gbs.edu](mailto:revivalist@gbs.edu).

Reviewed by William C. Kostlevy, Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore, KY.

As historian Charles Edwin Jones has continually reminded us, much of the Holiness Movement has aspired to upward social mobility since its infancy. Among the many signs of this quest has been the tendency to downplay and often abandon urban missions, relocate churches and educational institutions outside of urban areas, drop sectarian-sounding names, and establish corporate administrative structures. Cincinnati's God's Bible School (GBS) has long stood as a monument to the integrity of the earlier radical vision of the Holiness Movement.

GBS is an educational institution in the heart of a great urban center, with a name that invites ridicule, that still operates urban rescue missions while expecting that its staff and faculty will live truly sacrificial lives at or below the poverty line. This fact alone makes GBS worthy of study, but it is more than a museum. As a missionary training and sending institution, GBS has deeply touched Asian Christianity through the Oriental Missionary Society, the ministry of Jugi Nakada, and the Korea Evangelical Holiness Church. It has left its mark upon missions in the Caribbean through the work of Irene Blyden Taylor and Richard Taylor, and missions in Africa through the work of such graduates as Lillian Trasher and Lula Glatzel Schmelzenbach.

*God's Clock Keeps Perfect Time* is far more than just another coffee-table book. It is a carefully constructed and beautifully executed pictorial history of God's Bible School and its first century of ministry. Kevin Moser has wisely selected photographs that tell a compelling story. The captions, often written by *God's Revivalist* editor Larry Smith, are well written and very informative. In it, we find the stories of GBS founder Martin Wells Knapp, significant entries of such early GBS personalities as M. G. Standley, Bessie Queen Standley, Lewis Standley, and faculty members such as Oswald Chambers, Robert McNeil, Nettie Peabody, "Mom" White, E. G. Marsh, Kenneth Stetler and Leslie D. Wilcox. Significant material is included on the early GBS missions and missionaries.

Effective vignettes tell the stories of W. B. Godbey's birthday party, the role of military hero Alvin "Sergeant" York in the GBS story, and the

famous GBS Thanksgiving Day dinners. Other vignettes capture the ministries of Bud Robinson, E. E. and Julia Shelhamer, and Native American Charles Pamp on the GBS campus. Although not dwelling on the negative, the work honestly reproduces newspaper accounts of early controversies on the “Mount of Blessing” and the unfortunate end of the administration of M. G. Standley in 1950.

This book is an essential document for anyone who wishes to understand the mass appeal to early twentieth-century Christians of a radical religious movement that many believed was dangerous to the social order. I highly recommend it.



Robert Jenson, *The Triune God*. Vol. 1 of *Systematic Theology*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997. 236 pages. Vol. 2, *The Works of God*, Oxford, 1999. 369 pages.

Reviewed by Henry W. Spaulding, II, Trevecca Nazarene University, Nashville, TN

The publication of Robert Jenson's *Systematic Theology* is an important event at many levels, including for the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition. These volumes are ambitious to the extent that Jenson attempts to materially connect theology from the triune God to the eschaton. One will notice immediately that Jenson's theological conversation is broad. References to Origen, Augustine, Aquinas, and the Cappadocians characterize his work. He is just at home in modern theology as well with citations from Schlieremacher to Barth. This is a theological project of a person who knows the terrain of both Western and Eastern theology. Most of all, Jenson understands the importance of the church for theology. He sets the tone early when he says, "The church has a mission: to see to the speaking of the gospel, whether to the world as message of salvation or to God as appeal and praise. Theology is the reflection internal to the church's labor on this assignment" (1:11). While it will not be possible to fully relate the richness of these volumes, I will attempt to discuss the themes which are most important for Jenson's work and for those who are attempting to work in the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition.

Volume One begins with a provocative statement, one that serves as an underlying theme throughout Jenson's *Systematic Theology*: "theology may be impossible in the situation of a divided church, its proper agent not being extant . . ." (1:vii). This is a question that Jenson forces us to ask, even if it requires us to admit that much of our theological work at the very least leans toward self-contradiction. The force of this contradiction is the absence of the church as the agent of much theological work. Jenson asks theologians to take up the ecclesiological question. In fact, he observes in the second volume, "It could be argued that in the system here presented, also ecclesiology belongs in the first volume" (2:167). This is an indication of the deep ecumenical spirit that informs his theological work. This makes theology more than an intellectual achievement intended for the academy or for society. Jenson wants us to grapple with the importance of theology for the church, the whole church. It is important to understand this context in order to appreciate fully these two volumes.

The major concern of Jenson's first volume is apparent by its title, *The Triune God*. In fact, the presence of the Trinity is materially connected to everything that he does in both volumes. The way he raises this question is clearly linked to his fundamental interest in the church. He says, "The church is the community and a Christian is someone who, when the identity of God is important, names him 'Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.' Those who do not or will not belong to some other community" (1:46). He is not so much interested in apologetics as he is proclamation. One immediately notes in Jenson's work a deep confidence in the Triune God of the gospel. The affirmation of the Triune God is fundamental for Christian theology. By making this statement Jenson is not so much breaking ground as he is suggesting that theology does not begin with Greek metaphysics, but with Triune identity. He is also naming as necessary the material link between a Triune God and a churchly theology. It is, therefore, important to see what he has to say about the Trinity.

Jenson offers an extended and helpful discussion of time as "the metaphysical horizon of specifically human life" (1:54). This discussion extends to the second volume where he talks about creation. He says, "God takes time in his time for us. That is his act of creation" (2:35). He goes on to say, "Personal life posits an embrace around created time, to clasp its doings and sufferings in dramatic coherence" (1:55). The importance that this has for revelation is obvious. The way in which it impacts the distinction between the essential and the economic Trinity becomes evident as Jenson makes his case. This point is clearly indicated by the following: "As it is, God's story is committed as a story with creatures. And so he too, as it is, can have no identity except as he meets the temporal end toward which creatures live" (1:65). Here Jenson introduces a term that assumes some importance in his work, "dramatic coherence." This is about the Triune identity and revelation. He explains in the second volume, "The actual life of the triune God with us is a true drama. . ." (2:23). In other words, the Triune God unfolds in time, "he is eternally himself in that he unrestrictedly anticipates an end in which he will be all he ever could be" (1:66). The Triune God "is not salvific because he defends against the future but because he poses it" (1:67). Time describes the way God's infinity unfolds in dramatic coherence with creatures made in the image of God. The triune God's identity is a story told with creatures. It is a story which unfolds in the person's of the Trinity. According to Jenson, "The life of God is constituted in a structure of relations, whose own referents are narrative" (218).

Jenson makes a clear distinction between Greek religion (philosophy) and Christian theology. Instead of placing God outside of history like the Greeks, an understanding of God as Triune means that the narrative unfolds in history. Jenson goes on to discuss the partological, christological, and pneumatological problem. He is not so much talking about problem as difficulty as a particular set of issues and even opportunities. Throughout these chapters it is evident that dramatic coherence centers on the unfolding of the persons. Clearly, the centrality of Jesus in the narrative must be understood. Jenson says early in the book, "to attend theologically to the Resurrection of Jesus is to attend to the triune God" (1:13). He says later, "The identity of the crucified Jesus and the risen Jesus is nothing other than the oneness of God" (1:200). These two comments mean that any reflection on the Triune God is at the same time christological.

While dealing with divine identity, he talks about God's capacity to accommodate other persons in his life. This idea carries into the second volume: "God makes narrative room in this triune life for others than himself; this act is the act of creation, and this accommodation is created time" (2:34). According to Jenson, God can do this without distorting his life. In other words, God is roomy (1:226). This comment must be understood in light of Jenson's emphasis on dramatic coherence and temporal infinity. The knowability of God is a double movement; God is known to himself as he is known to the church. He says, "There is speaking and hearing in God, and the knowledge of God is participation in this discourse" (1:229). There is a sense in which this brings Jenson's understanding of Trinity to its clearest expression. This roominess of God is a testimony to the vitality of God's harmonious life as it continually breaks into our life.

The last chapters of the first volume raise the question of being. There is some discussion these days regarding onto-theology. Jenson lines himself up with those who begin not with metaphysics but with revelation. He clearly wants to evacuate all philosophy which seeks to position itself in some independent field. At this point, he sounds much like John Milbank and Radical Orthodoxy. Onto-theology describes for some the way in which the concept of Being captured God in Christian theology. It is the tendency to restrict theology by allowing philosophy some independent status. One manifestation of this is the evident use of the conceptual tools of Greek metaphysics in order to define the Triune God. Such an

approach tends to diminish the importance of dramatic coherence. Jenson prefers to talk about event, person, decision, and conversation in order to define being. Accordingly, “The Son is God’s Word to us and himself, and is not impersonal but personal, so that he is a speech just in that he is a speaker. The Spirit is the one who liberates the Father and Son for each other, and whose liberation is the gift of himself. The Spirit is that achievement of mutuality that is perfectly free-speaking the Spirit; proceeds also from the Word” (1:223). He closes by saying, “God is beauty” (1:234). This speaks both to the harmony of the Father, Son, and Spirit as well as to our enjoyment of God through “triune singing” (1:235). This description of “concrete abstraction” (1:236) refuses to allow timelessness to capture the Triune God within a concept of Being. These issues reach into Volume 2 where Jenson discusses the works of God: creation, church, and fulfillment. In order to more fully understand his contribution, we must look to these concerns.

The second volume begins by an extended discussion of creation. This includes the cosmos, human personhood, and all creatures. This is once again explicitly Triune, “We are ‘worked out’ among the three” (2:25). Jenson reveals the dependence of all upon God throughout this section. He answers the question of what it means to be human, not with rationality, but with response to God. He always makes the point that, as we transcend ourselves to God, we also reach toward others. The significance of understanding our relation to others through our relation to God is hard to overstate for Wesleyan-Holiness theology. Jenson works some of these ideas out in a very interesting chapter entitled “Politics and Sex.” He says, “If I am created by a word from beyond me, I must hearken to what is beyond me, and then I hear not only God but you” (2:76). He extends this idea by saying that, when a person hears God, they hear the other. This ties morality to the polity of the church. Those who want to define Wesleyan-Holiness in terms of the moral imperative would do well to hear Jenson at the point. He says, “politics are the process of that mutual moral address by which . . . God speaks to us to initiate and sustain humanity. The polity is nothing less than the public space in which God calls us to be human in that we call each other to come together in justice” (2:79). Jenson is dependent on Augustine for his understanding that polity and eventually ecclesiology are the arena for understanding the moral imperative. In other words, as Stanley Hauerwas says, the church does not so much *have* a social ethics as it *is* a social ethic. Jenson’s treat-

ment of ethics is not developed at this point. This is an area where one might hope for more work later.

The other side of this most interesting chapter is sex. The family is essential to polity for Jenson. Here he makes a powerful point: "we should deprecate the recent 'sexual revolution' not so much for the behavior released, pitiful though most of it is, as for its consequences as a political choice" (2:91). The kind of sexual freedom espoused by this revolution leads not to freedom, but to bondage, according to Jenson. He goes on to talk about promise. Intercourse is the "ultimate creaturely gesture" (2:92) of promise. Jenson adds a third consideration: "a just society will encourage and insofar as possible enforce heterosexual monogamy as the paradigmatic socialization of sexuality" (2:92). The point of this analysis for Jenson is not so much an attempt to develop a sexual ethic as it is an attempt to understand the connection between politics and sex. It is, perhaps, the separation of these that has made much reflection on sex in the Christian context pointless. He sums it up as follows: "As love is the fulfillment of our self-transcendence toward God, so it is also the fulfillment of our self-transcendence toward one another" (2:94). This is certainly one of the more interesting chapters in the book.

There is much in the chapters on human personhood, other creatures, and sin which space does not allow me to develop. Suffice it to say that these chapters are well worth the reader's time. Jenson closes his reflection on creation by looking at "God's Speech in Creation." Here he makes an important comment: "God is not hidden because we can see only some of him through the metaphysical distances. He is hidden because his very presence is such that as at once altogether to reveal and altogether to hide him" (2:161). He adds at the end of the section, "God is not hidden from us by his absence but by the fullness and character of his presence" ((2:162). Once again it appears that Jenson comes down on the side of revelation instead of Being as the key for understanding God.

I have already called attention to the importance of the church for Jenson. The particular way in which he develops this section is dependent on the Triune character of God. As such, it is a communion. There is much in these chapters worthy of comment, but space will allow only two issues to be discussed. First, "the church exists in and by anticipation" (2:171). Jenson understands the church as "an event within the event of the new age's advent" (2:171). He is walking the line between a disparagement of the church and an idolatry of the church. He says, "If we think

of the church as a community, we may call the church herself the gate of heaven” (2:172). The church is the body of Christ and the Temple of the Holy Spirit. The only way to understand this is by appealing to the Triune character of God. This allows Jenson to develop the importance of the church without getting lost in alien social theories.

The second issue that we need to look at closely concerns the church and polity. Here Jenson talks about the importance of peace and discipline. Peace is constituted by anticipation in an imperfect world. Of course, this peace flows out of the peace of a Triune God, a point that Jenson does not fully develop. Discipline is also important for the polity of the church. He observes, “The practice of excommunication is thus an absolute if wrenching necessity” (2:205-206). This is difficult to hear, but it arises out of a participation in the “divine discourse of eternal mandates and free obedience, which I am allowed to overhear” (2:210). Both issues I have treated are dependent on understanding the church as communion. He says explicitly, “A body that is a polity is a communion” (2:220). This is understood through the Triune character and the sacramental life of the church. The sacraments transcend the earthly and heavenly; they constitute the “logic of the triune God’s conversation with his people” (2:259). All of this makes the point that the church is not a metaphysical idea, but a polity or a practice. God’s conversation is sacramental and as such it is eschatological.

This leads us to the final section of the second volume. Jenson makes the point that theology attempts to answer the question of what the gospel promises. The first volume suggests that the business of theology is to see to the speaking of the gospel, which turns out to be promise. When this is appropriately understood, it has great significance for the history of salvation. Jenson speaks to this issue: “The triune God is too intimately involved with his creation for its final transformation to be founded in anything less than an event of his own life” (2:338). Salvation is a promise of transformation; it is an event in the life of the Triune God. This is about the “restored life of the community” (2:354). Understanding this is poetically rendered on the last page of the book. It is too lengthy to quote, but understanding it will open the work of Jenson to the reader. It pulls together all of the most significant themes in Jenson: Trinity, time, participation, church, and salvation.

There are several reasons why reading these books is important for Wesleyan-Holiness theologians. First, the maturity of his theology should

encourage us to do theology for the whole church. The temptation is always present to bring theology to the service one's own agenda. The breadth of Jenson's work should be an encouragement to see the contradiction of sectarian theology. Second, the emphasis on the Trinity can lead Wesleyan-Holiness theologians to a deeper understanding of holiness as beauty and as engendered in a Triune God. Third, understanding the Trinity as our point of departure might help us avoid onto-theology. The inherent atheism of onto-theology reads like a history of modern theology. Jenson's work reads like a theological manual for "faithful theology."

Johann Christoph Arnold, *Seeking Peace: Notes and Conversations Along the Way*. With a Preface by Thich Nhat Hanh. Farmington, PA: The Plough Publishing House, 1998. xiv + 248 pps.

Reviewed by David Alstad Tiessen, Sunnyside Wesleyan Church, Ottawa, ON.

Perhaps the most significant idea in the title of this book is conveyed by the word “seeking.” Indeed, Arnold’s book is not a “how to” manual on finding peace, but a guidebook for a journey toward an ultimate goal. The emphasis on the seeking of peace is reflective of life lived, not in some ideal vacuum, but in the realities of everyday life which tend toward the destruction of peace. Thankfully, Arnold reminds us throughout the book that “we will never arrive at a perfect state of peace, or find it once and for all” (181). Such reminders serve to keep readers from despairing in the midst of an extended meditation on the ideals of peace.

In many ways a book on peace cannot help but be idealistic, yet Arnold’s vision for peace is not a “pie-in-the-sky” idealism. It is a far-reaching vision of what the dawning of the reign of God should look like in this life. It takes the “not yet” of kingdom ideals and calls us to begin applying them in the “now” as we follow the way of Jesus, especially as expressed in the Sermon on the Mount. As a member of the Bruderhof community in the United States, Arnold writes from the perspective of one who lives in a common-purse community dedicated to the conscious practice of “brotherly love and love of enemies, mutual service, nonviolence and the refusal to bear arms, sexual purity, and faithfulness in marriage” (240). As such, he is perhaps uniquely qualified to critique the self-serving, individualized search for peace that marks society at large. As one who has rejected the definition of peace as individual happiness, emotional gratification, monetary comfort, and a mere absence of conflict, his “notes and conversations along the way” are worth hearing as an alternative that, if heeded, can alter one’s vision of the centralities of life, even if in small ways.

Arnold begins with the far-reaching concept of peace found in the Bible. In the Old Testament, *shalom* conveys the idea of completeness or wholeness and is tied to individuals, relationships, and justice for all. In the New Testament, the term “rest” conveys the varied senses of *shalom* and is centered in Christ the Messiah, who is our peace. Peace, in other words, is a grand and multifaceted concept addressing all of life. It is a concept that



cannot so much be defined as lived, and Arnold includes numerous stories along the way that illustrate a lived peace. He also seeks to be religiously broad, acknowledging that Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists, and even atheists and agnostics can know and act upon the peace and love of Jesus. Yet, while seeking breadth, the book remains profoundly Christ-centered. Christ's is a call to peace for all. The peace of Christ speaks to individuals (where peace must first be sought) and also to communities and the world at large. With Christ as example, it becomes clear that seeking peace is an activity, and a difficult one at that. It requires self-sacrifice and service to God and others. It is borne in active loving. Choosing to accept Jesus' offer of peace—and consequently choosing to love—will always affect our other choices: economic, personal, political, social. In all of this, perhaps it is most important to realize that we each play but a small role in the larger kingdom of God. Relinquishing control of our lives in surrender and trust in God is a fundamental step to living at peace with and serving others. In moving toward this vision, Arnold discusses numerous helpful “stepping stones” as practical guides to our search for peace.

Along the way, Arnold also addresses some of the sacred cows of North American life. He points to private property and capitalism as root causes of war. He suggests that the good life of “limitless choices and excessive consumption for a privileged few” corresponds to a life of “hard labor and grinding poverty for millions of others” (11). He challenges the focus on personal salvation and piety where it neglects (as it often does) caring for others. In short, he reminds us that “Jesus' values stand in direct opposition to ours” (226-227) and that “the peace of the kingdom calls for a new social order and a new relationship among people” (222). Beginning to implement that vision is always the challenge, and while some might question Arnold's perspective on such things as capitalism, property, and poverty, there can be no doubt that North American life often proceeds unaware of the many unjust and implicitly violent structures on which it rests, and that the church has largely bought blindly into the dominant cultural values without much thought about the broad call to care for the poor and oppressed. For the most part, though, Arnold chooses to focus on the individual seeking peace, from which place it is hoped that peace will begin to spread to all of life, including the biggest structures and systems. *Seeking Peace* is a book worth not only reading, but also meditating upon as it inspires us toward a grand vision of life in the kingdom of God, based on the grace and peace of Christ.





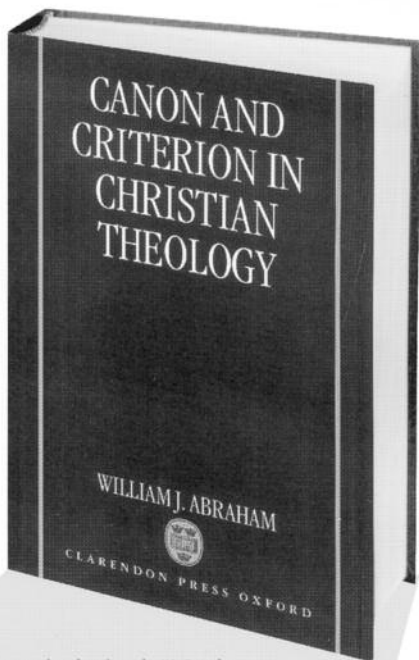
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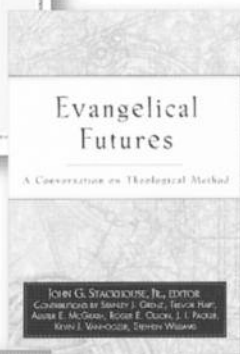
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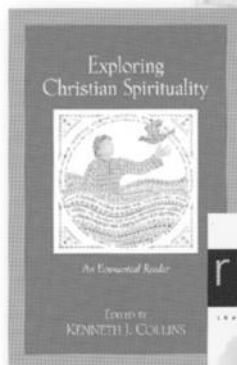


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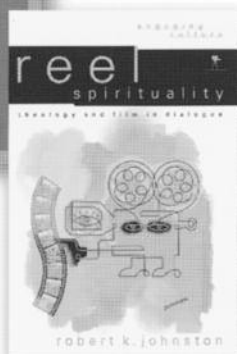
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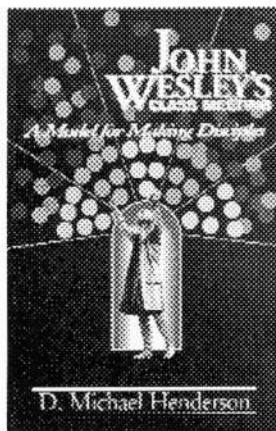
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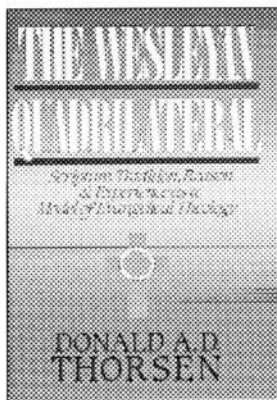
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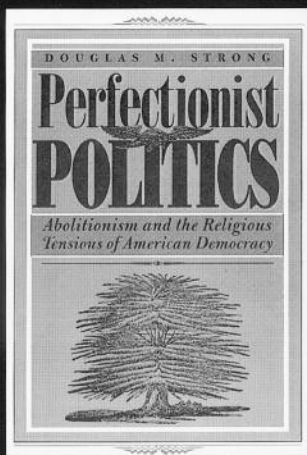
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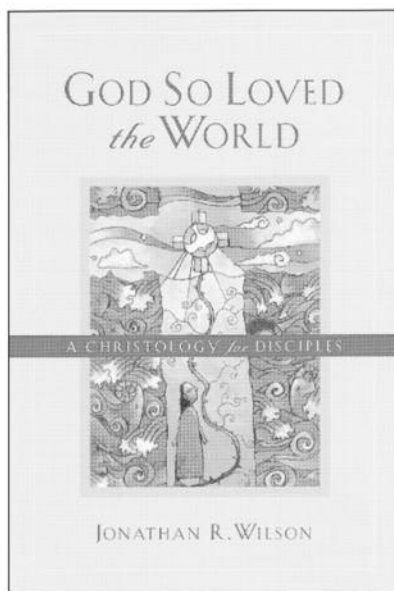


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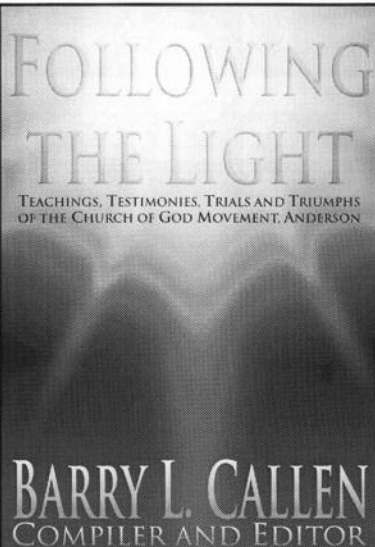
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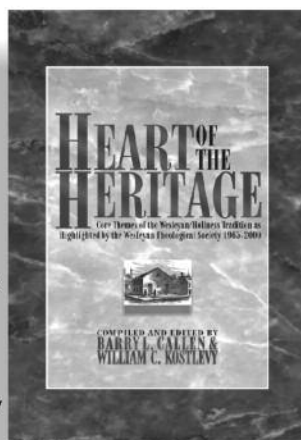


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