

WESLEYAN THEOLOGICAL JOURNAL



Published by the Wesleyan Theological Society
3900 Lomaland Drive
San Diego, CA 92106

© Copyright 2011 by the
Wesleyan Theological Society

ISSN-0092-4245

This periodical is indexed in the *ATLA Religion Database*, published by the American Theological Library Association, 300 S. Wacker Dr., Chicago, IL 60606. E-mail: atla@atla.com, or visit <http://www.atla.com/>. Available on-line through BRS (Bibliographic Retrieval Series), Latham, New York, and DIALOG, Palo Alto, California.

Available in Microform from University Microfilms International, 300 North Zeeb Road, Dept. I.R., Ann Arbor, Michigan 48106. Other than the most recent issues, the journal is available electronically at this online address: <http://wesley.nnc.edu>

WTS on the Web: www.wesley.nnu.edu/wts

Views expressed by writers are not necessarily those of the Wesleyan Theological Society, the Editor, or the Editorial Committee.

Printed by
Old Paths Tract Society
Shoals, Indiana 47581

CONTRIBUTORS TO THIS NUMBER

ARTICLE WRITERS:

William J. Abraham	Perkins School of Theology (SMU)
Jeffrey A. Conklin-Miller	The Divinity School of Duke University
Patrick Eby	Drew University
Richard B. Hays	The Divinity School of Duke University
Kevin Twain Lowery	Olivet Nazarene University
David B. McEwan	Nazarene Theological College (Australia)
Mark A. Maddix	Northwest Nazarene University
Thomas A. Noble	Nazarene Theological Seminary
Mark K. Olson	Nazarene Theological Seminary
Andrew C. Thompson	The Divinity School of Duke University
Richard P. Thompson	Northwest Nazarene University
David F. Watson	United Theological Seminary
Sarah Whittle	Nazarene Theological College (England)

BOOK REVIEWERS:

Brian Clark, Kenneth J. Collins, Benjamin B. DeVan, William Kostlevy, Philip N. LaFountain, Suzanne Nicholson, Brent D. Peterson, Jennifer L. Woodruff Tait, Robert Webster, and Laurence W. Wood.

EDITORIAL NOTES

The 2010 annual meeting of the Wesleyan Theological Society convened at Azusa Pacific University on March 4-6, 2010. Under the careful guidance of Dr. Rob Wall of Seattle Pacific University, the program was organized around the theme “The Future of Scripture” with guest keynoters William J. Abraham and Richard B. Hays. These two presentations, the Presidential Address by Thomas A. Noble, and nine select others appear in this Spring 2011 (46:1) issue.

Our thanks goes to the twelve article writers and ten book reviewers who have made outstanding scholarly contributions to this present journal issue. The subjects may be wide-ranging in their time reference and discipline focus, but all are highly relevant to understanding more fully the history and current relevance of the Wesleyan/Holiness tradition of Christianity. Of particular focus here is the doctrine of Scripture.

Be aware that all issues of the *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 1966-2010, are now available on a searchable CD (see the Wesley Center, Northwest Nazarene University, at <http://wesley.nnu.edu>). This is a rich research tool and will continue to be updated! Many new books have been published recently from within or about some aspect of the Wesleyan/ Holiness tradition. Ten are reviewed in this issue.

Whatever information is needed about the Wesleyan Theological Society is readily available in these pages, including the identity of all officers of the Society and their email addresses. The WTS web site is wesley.nnu.edu/wts. Also found here is an application for membership in the Society. The WTS officers to contact for particular needs you may have are:

1. If you wish to apply for society membership—Dr. Sam Powell
2. If you wish to write a book review—Dr. Richard Thompson
3. If you wish to place a book ad—Dr. Barry Callen
4. If you wish to submit material for publication—Dr. Barry Callen

Barry L. Callen, Editor
March, 2011

THE FUTURE OF SCRIPTURE: IN SEARCH OF A THEOLOGY OF SCRIPTURE

by

William J. Abraham

In the interpretation of John Wesley's vision of Scripture two themes have sat side by side from the very beginning, the epistemological and the soteriological. In terms of the epistemological, Scripture has been construed first and foremost as a ground and criterion of theology; in terms of the soteriological, Scripture has been viewed first and foremost as a means of grace. It is easy to find both in Wesley; and it is easy to see that for Wesley they can be entirely complementary. Think of it in this fashion. The purpose of Scripture is soteriological; its goal is to show us the way to heaven, to lay out the *via salutis*, to draw us into the life of faith. However, the theological content governing the *via salutis*, the doctrines that describe it, are secured as true because they come from the mouth of God; they are secured by a thoroughly robust vision of Scripture as special revelation. Wesley had a vision of Scripture that neatly integrated the epistemological with the soteriological.

To be sure, there were all sorts of complicated elements lying below the surface. Thus, Wesley provided varied summaries of what he called the analogy of faith, the scope or content of scriptural doctrine. The most telling contrast within these summaries is between those many instances where he articulates the doctrine of salvation as the content and those very few places where he gives us a wider network of doctrines, as when he endorses the Apostles' Creed, or expresses his commitment to the doctrines of the Church of England, or when he provides a set of twenty-four Articles of Religion for

his people in the United States.¹ Equally, he wobbles when he comes to his epistemological commitments. On the one hand, he is a hard-headed biblicalist, worried that if he finds one error in Scripture, then there could be many. On the other hand, he is a hard-headed empiricist, tracing knowledge of God back foundationally, not to the Scriptures but to the spiritual senses rightly reordered by the work of the Holy Spirit.

There is a third dimension of Wesley's work that needs mention at this point. The object of our studies will have a significant bearing on the nature of our studies. This principle applies to Scripture as much as to mathematics or history. Hence, Wesley's interrelated epistemological and soteriological vision of Scripture led to a certain stance in how he read, interpreted, and studied Scripture. He did not read Scripture as an agnostic or functional atheist; he read it as the grammar of the Holy Spirit and sought within it to find the way to heaven.

At one level, this means that he sought to decipher the meaning of Scripture, not just in terms of the intentions of the original authors, but in terms of the speech acts of God. At another level, Wesley attempted to read Scripture as a whole. Given that he believed that there was a single author behind the text, he expected to find a coherent overall message. These in turn required immersion in the languages and grammar of Scripture and immersion in the life of the Holy Spirit; the former was needed to get access to the speech acts in the text; the latter was needed because coming to understand God required the decisive operation of divine grace at the depths of the human agent. In this instance I shall forbear from explicating the vast undergrowth of assumptions and ambivalences that informs his hermeneutical practices.²

The history within Methodism after Wesley reflects the ambivalences that are visible below the surface in Wesley and other early Methodist theologians; they give birth to a host of competing visions of Scripture on both the soteriological and epistemological levels. In part this is a reflection of the success of the people called Methodists as an evangelistic and

¹Robert W. Wall has made the provocative suggestion that Wesley works with a canon within the canon in which he privileges 1 John. See Robert W. Wall, "Wesley as Biblical Interpreter," in Randy L. Maddox and Jason E. Vickers, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to John Wesley* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 117.

²For a useful overview see Scott J. Jones, *John Wesley's Conception and Use of Scripture* (Nashville: Kingswood, 1995), chap. 7.

ecclesial agency. They moved across time and across cultures; they divided into a host of churches and movements; they found themselves facing a host of new moral, theological, and philosophical challenges. Not least within the latter they found themselves as readers of Scripture drawn into the vast world of biblical scholarship with its array of various methods: critical, post-critical, and popular. As I have argued at length elsewhere, a crisis point now has been reached where precarious decisions have to be made and there is no consensus in sight.³ On the contrary, even the very identification of a crisis and any robust solution thereto is likely to evoke a blistering response.

These disputes often come to a head, to a point of focused concentration, in our disputes about Scripture, about what it really is, and about how best to interpret it. It is as if Scripture is the site where a host of other disputes come home to roost; and some are desperately afraid that a vulture may sneak in and devour us in the dead of night. So, in this paper I want initially to identify one of the vultures or set of vultures that are alive in our midst. Over against this I want to defend a much more robust vision of Scripture that is Wesleyan in orientation. Beyond that I want to identify three desiderata which together constitute an important research agenda on a theology of Scripture for the future.⁴

A Future for Scripture?

As a point of entry into my first aim, consider the title of this paper, "The Future of Scripture." How can Scripture have a future? To borrow a phrase on identity from Bishop Butler, Scripture is what it is and not something else; it does not change with time. There it is before us on the lectern, in the pulpit, and on the desks of our offices. It is a book, a list of books, a book of books, a canon of texts. It is written in various languages, translated into many tongues, carried across oceans, accompanied by endless books of commentary. At one level it stands out there, over against us, secure, *extra nos*, a host of authors and editors speaking to us from the

³"The End of Wesleyan Theology" in *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 40 (2005), 7-25.

⁴John Webster has made a great start in this arena, developing what he calls an ontology of Scripture. See his programmatic essay, "Reading Scripture Eschatologically (1)," in David F. Ford and Graham Stanton, eds., *Reading Texts, Seeking Wisdom* (London: SCM, 2003). For the fuller version of his position see his *Holy Scripture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

past. To speak of the future of Scripture is odd. We can speak of the future of the USA or of the Wesleyan Theological Society or of the New Orleans Saints. However, these are living entities that shift and change; they have their own agency. Scripture is first and foremost a set of texts, a book, a body of literature. It is not something that shifts and changes like a person or an institution. Its authors and editors are dead, long gone; they no longer have intentions and purposes as living agents. Their future is limited to our interpretations of what they have left us. If anything does have a future here, it is our interpretations that have a future.

Our interpretations and our responses shift and change and in that sense the text changes. To be sure, our interpretations and responses are logically distinct from that which they interpret; but it is our interpretations that are now at issue when we speak of the future of Scripture. We might say that there is no text, or there is not one text but many texts. There are as many texts as there are readers and interpretations of texts. Our texts are epiphenomena; they are byproducts of our interpretative traditions. There is no text in the room; there are myriad texts constructed out of our interpretations.

On this analysis, the future of Scripture really means the future of our interpretations of Scripture. All we have here are *phenomena* generated by an unseen, inaccessible *noumenon*. The phenomena shift and change with time and circumstances. Scripture has a future if we develop a deflationary vision of its nature, collapsing it into our interpretations of Scripture.

The deployment of Kantian language at this juncture is quite deliberate; it furnishes a historical allusion to the genesis of the move I have just sketched and operates as a provocative intervention to give us pause. It deliberately lodges the interpretation of Scripture in a meta-interpretive tradition. In fact, our comments about the future of Scripture have morphed into a research program (or family of research programs) in the interpretation of Scripture. That research program is alive and well in the current academy, flying under a host of banners: deconstruction, postmodernism, reader-response criticism, post-critical hermeneutics, interpretation after Babel,⁵ and the like.

This is not the place to unpack the important insights (and illusions) buried in this research program. What is worth noting is that John Wesley

⁵See John J. Collins, *The Bible After Bible: Historical Criticism in a Post-modern Age* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005).

would not have been comfortable with this outcome. He was pre-Kantian, well aware of the fallibility of all interpretation, but not smitten with the skepticism and speculative metaphysical dogma of Kant. For Wesley, Scripture was the Word of God, dictated by God, authored by God even as it was written by human authors. To speak of Scripture was to speak of God; more accurately, it was to speak aptly and rightly of God, for Scripture gives us access to God. More abruptly, to refer to Scripture was to refer to the foundations of theology, the touchstone of theology; to invoke Scripture was to speak from and for God; it was to exercise the vocation of the theologian.

It would have appeared hopelessly thin and deflationary to Wesley to think of Scripture as the interpretation of a text or set of texts; to speak of Scripture was to speak of God, of divine revelation, and of the awesome salvation God had wrought in his Son through the Spirit. By contrast, all we have on this new set of ontological renderings and readings is access to a myriad set of human interpretations of multiple texts constructed by contemporary readers in different cultures, social locations, and epistemological regimes. Of course, some of the old shibboleths still haunt the air; the interpretative industry as a whole, for example, still rests on a tacit appeal to the authority of Scripture or to some kind of privileging of Scripture; there may even be the ghost of a vision of divine revelation; but we should be fooled by this. The truth of the matter is that access to the divine mind and will has been killed off; the vultures have taken over the roost.

A More Robust Wesleyan Vision

In terms of the options before us—either a rich, theological, and academically embarrassing construction of Scripture or a thin, deflationary, and academically luscious vision of Scripture—I unapologetically take my stand with Wesley. To speak of Scripture is to speak of God and of a singular and unique access to the will of God. I am not satisfied to speak merely of the future of the myriad interpretations of a book; what is at issue is the deliverances of the mind of God and our access to them. This is the place I want to occupy and defend; this is the horizon I think we should occupy. It is imperative that we keep alive the study of Scripture as pivotal to the ministry of the church and to theological vocation, a ministry and vocation which need to recover their nerve and speak aptly and truthfully of God drawing decisively on Scripture as an indispensable and effective bearer of special divine revelation. If this means rescuing

Scripture from the hands of functional atheists and theologically deflationary biblical scholars, then so be it. If this means challenging the long-standing impact of Kant on modern and postmodern theology, so be it.⁶

We have only begun to sketch the course I want to follow. So let me now try and spell out what taking this horizon seriously might mean. I shall first sketch what is generally at stake and then flesh it out by way of three particular proposals. What is generally at stake is the need to engage in a very particular research program within theology broadly conceived. I hinted at this earlier in my reference to post-Kantian forms of hermeneutics as an interesting research program, so let me now be more explicit.

In a research program one identifies a multi-faceted problem or newtwork of problems and then sets about resolving the connected tissue of issues comprehensively and critically. Consider the claim that systematic theology should be construed as an effort in time and space to speak aptly and truthfully about God. The aim is speak the truth about God and everything else, insofar as it relates to God and insofar as it finds its place in the great divine drama of creation, freedom, fall and redemption. However, theology more broadly conceived can also embrace research programs in, say, the epistemology of theology, or in ascetic theology, or in theological hermeneutics. Such research programs are the lifeblood of our work. They are methodologically diverse; they are multi-disciplinary, cross-generational, and multi-faceted; they are generally tacit rather than explicit; they are contested from the outside and from the inside; they have complex histories; they develop in surprising directions; they generate from within their own unique forms of rebellion and passionate enthusiasm; they become embodied in churches and ecclesial movements; they get embedded in academic institutions and virtual spaces; they cluster around networks of themes and leaders. Deeply original research programs in turn generate other research programs or mini-programs; and they rise and fall leaving wheat and chaff all over the theological threshing floor. It is a tribute to the intellectual labors of John Wesley that he generated not only a remarkable spiritual and evangelistic movement but a theological tradition that is now at long last getting the attention it deserves. The legacy is fecund and ongoing.⁷

⁶For a spirited discussion of this issue see Nicholas Wolterstorff, "Is it Possible and Desirable for Theologians to Recover from Kant?" *Modern Theology* 14 (1988), 1-18.

⁷One of the unfortunate lacuna of our work to date is the dismissal of the nineteenth-century tradition of Methodist dogmatics. Happily, there are signs in the wind that this will be corrected in the next generation of scholarship.

Much of the Wesleyan legacy revolves around the topic of Scripture; Wesleyans worry about folk who go soft on Scripture. With Scripture as our focus, let me now try to identify a research program that clearly begins from within the Wesleyan heritage and focuses on developing a robust theology of Scripture. Let me do this initially by returning to the three dimensions of Wesley's vision of Scripture that I mentioned earlier, the epistemic, the soteriological, and the hermeneutical. Each is essential to the research program I have in mind; while logically distinct, they are intimately inter-related.

Wesley's particular epistemological construal of Scripture is a dead-end. On this score his vision of Scripture is simply beyond repair. This is not because Wesley is some kind of fundamentalist (that is a much later and historically intelligible development); it is because his particular work is embedded in a wider tradition that identified Scripture with divine revelation, that construed the production and outcome of Scripture as a matter of divine speaking, and that therefore proceeded to think of Scripture as a criterion of truth without qualification. He inherited and internalized a vision of Scripture that rendered it captive to epistemological categories which paradoxically subverted Scripture and which have led to significant loss of faith within our own ranks across the generations. To put the matter candidly, the classical idea of the authority of Scripture as a technical matter has outlived its usefulness.⁸

At the risk of causing offense on this score, I want to reiterate here that we cannot salvage Wesley's theology of Scripture by adding reason,

⁸It is interesting to watch how a leading British Methodist, George Jackson, unwittingly moves radically away from Wesley in the early twentieth century. In a short paper on "The People Called Methodists," written in 1786, Wesley asks, "What was their fundamental doctrine?" and his answer is, "That the Bible is the whole and sole rule of Christian faith and practice." This is a statement to which every Methodist with whom I have any acquaintance would subscribe as heartily and unreservedly as Wesley himself. At the same time, it leaves us, as do all our theological standards, with no rigidly defined and fettering theory of inspiration. We today are as sure that the Bible is the Word of God as were the first Methodists; but we state our reasons very differently. Some of us might say with Robertson Smith, "If I am asked why I receive Scripture as the Word of God, and as the only record of the redeeming love of God, I answer with all the fathers of the Protestant Church, 'because the Bible is the record of the redeeming love of God; because in the Bible alone I find God drawing near to man in Jesus Christ, and declaring to us, in him, his will for our salvation.'" See the Reverend George Jackson, "The Old Methodism and the New," in Wesleyan University, *1703-1903, Wesley Bicentennial* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1904), 73. This is surely a case where the content of the theology is governing the appeal to Scripture rather than the appeal to Scripture governing the content of the theology.

experience, and tradition to the mix. It would be redundant for me to restate my case against that option and the damage it has done. Nor can we salvage it by the Barthian device of seeing Scripture as a witness to the Word of God or as an occasion for divine speaking.⁹ That vision of Scripture cannot do justice to the actual nature of Scripture as we have it; moreover, it trades on older, suppressed notions of divine authorship and dictation that have long been abandoned. Nor will it do to simply pass over in silence Wesley's vision of Scripture in an effort to update the rest of Wesley for our own day and generation in the spirit but not the content of Liberal Protestantism.¹⁰ We need a clean break with Wesley's particular epistemic conception of Scripture.¹¹

Acknowledging the need to abandon Wesley's epistemological vision of Scripture is not a recipe for skepticism, relativism, or believing whatever we like. On the contrary, it is the occasion to get serious about the epistemology of theology. On this score we have much to learn from Wesley, beginning with his tenacity on the place of divine speaking and special revelation in any substantial vision of knowledge of God. Equally, we can learn from Wesley's other epistemic insights as they show up, for example, in the narrative of his heart-warming experience at Aldersgate.

No less than four different strands of argument for the truth of the Christian faith are buried in that narrative. Thus, Wesley argues to the truth of Christian teaching from the fulfillment of divine promises, from the repair of our cognitive capacities, from varied forms of perception of the divine, and from divine revelation. All of these have received extended attention in some of the very best work in the epistemology of theology over the last forty years.¹² So we can dispose immediately of the canard

⁹John Webster's variation within this trajectory is especially interesting. ". . . a dogmatic account of Scripture is an account which displays the ontology of Scripture by talking of divine activity, and above all, by talking of God's communicative presence, of which presence the creaturely reality which we call Holy Scripture is the textual auxiliary." See "Reading Scripture Eschatologically (1)," 245.

¹⁰On first sight this would appear to be the strategy of Kenneth J. Collins in *The Theology of John Wesley, Holy Love and the Shape of Grace* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2007). Surprisingly, Collins has nothing of substance to say on Wesley's theology of Scripture.

¹¹For the extended argument, see my *Canon and Criterion in Christian Theology* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1999).

¹²See my *Aldersgate and Athens, John Wesley and the Foundations of Christian Belief* (Waco, Tx: Baylor University Press, 2010).

that abandoning an epistemic conception of Scripture leaves us tongue-tied on epistemic issues or issues of authority. On the contrary, they create both the space and impetus to deliver on what we really need, namely, the best work we can muster in the epistemology of theology.¹³

The Future Research Agenda

1. The Relation of Scripture to Divine Revelation. With this in place we can then aptly relocate Scripture within an appropriate vision of general, special, extra-special, and person-relative revelation. One way to proceed would be to say that Scripture mediates special revelation and provides a divinely inspired response to that revelation. Scripture is much more than a witness to revelation, where the revelation never reaches us. What is at issue is something much more robust: revelation is genuinely enshrined in Scripture.¹⁴ This revelation is robust enough in terms of its mediation within Scripture to operate in principle as a criterion of what we want to say theologically and morally, robust enough to convert us and require theological and moral submission to the mind of God, robust enough to bring us across a threshold in which everything right down to the very conception of our intellectual capacities will have to be enriched and rethought from top to bottom.

In short, we are invited to fresh work in the epistemology of theology that shatters the old, standard units of philosophy of religion and that requires Christian theologians to think out afresh the warrants of their beleaguered discipline, not least the warrant supplied by divine revelation. So, one desideratum in the research agenda that beckons is that of thinking through the relationship between Scripture and divine revelation; or, if we want to reverse the ordering, thinking through the relation between divine revelation and Scripture.¹⁵ Here the critical work in a theology of Scripture should be drawn from the epistemology of theology.

¹³For my own more recent contribution to this, see *Crossing the Threshold of Divine Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007). It cannot be sufficiently emphasized that I have no interest in canonizing this or any other epistemology of theology. Least of all should research programs be canonized.

¹⁴It is sufficient in this context to see divine revelation as constituted by the revelatory speech acts and non-speech acts of God. Scripture, of course, gives us no grand theory of divine revelation. While we can draw on Scripture to this end, this work is inescapably epistemological in nature and belongs within the arena of the epistemology of theology.

¹⁵I deliberately juxtapose the relation because both Scripture and revelation need to receive appropriate attention to avoid premature closure and to avoid one being swallowed up in the other.

2. Scripture as a Means of Grace in the Church. In the neighborhood of this desideratum we can name another, that is, we need to pick up and extend Wesley's soteriological vision of Scripture.¹⁶ In this instance the issue that beckons is that of working out what it means to see Scripture as a means of grace in the church. Our first task in responding to and using Scripture is to use it as an indispensable means of grace. To use Wesley's categories, we should think of Scripture first and foremost as a network of texts designed and inspired by God to mediate justifying and sanctifying grace. Their purpose is to make us wise unto salvation, to bring us to repentance, to teach us the truth of the gospel, to initiate us in the glorious kingdom of Christ, and to make us fit for heaven itself.¹⁷ Here I think we can take our stand full-square in the Pietist tradition, as Donald Dayton has inimitably articulated it.¹⁸ For this we should make no apology, bearing whatever offense we must in the academy, in mainline Protestantism, and in ecumenical circles. At heart we are Pietists, and we should own up to this without apology.¹⁹

However, we are Pietists, not of a higher but of a lower order. I mean here of a lower order in two senses. First, as best we can, we identify with the poor of this world, the outcast, and the suffering teeming masses of

¹⁶It might well be that this should be the first item, logically speaking, in a theology of Scripture. For rhetorical reasons I have placed it second in the schema developed here.

¹⁷Consider in this respect the famous, provocative passage in which Coleridge depicts his quest for wisdom in Scripture: "With such purposes, with such feelings, have I perused the books of the Old and New Testaments, each book as a whole, and also as an integral part. And need I say that I have met everywhere more or less copious sources of truth, and power, and purifying impulses, that I have found words for my inmost thoughts, songs for my joy, utterances for my hidden griefs, and pleadings for my shame and my feebleness? In short, whatever finds me bears witness for itself that it has proceeded from the same Spirit, 'which remaineth in itself, yet regenerateth all other powers, and in all ages entering into holy souls, maketh them friends of God and prophets.'" S. T. Coleridge, *Confessions of an Enquiring Spirit* (1840) (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988). Coleridge's criterion for identifying the work of the Holy Spirit is problematic but the description of his readings of Scripture provides one fine point of entry for thinking through what it means to say that Scripture is a means of grace.

¹⁸Donald Dayton, "The Pietist Theological Critique of Biblical Inerrancy," in T. Collins Winn, ed., *From the Margins, A Celebration of the Theological Work of Donald Dayton* (Eugene, Or.: Pickwick, 2007), 193-206.

¹⁹For a fine recent treatment of one form of Pietism, see Hans Schneider, *German Radical Pietism* (Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2007).

humanity. We desire and are committed to their transformation, their liberation, their dignity, and their destiny as children of God. On this score, we can make common cause with the interests but not the normative commitments of liberation theology. Liberation theology is far too committed to a vague epistemic conception of Scripture, too trapped in passé socio-political analysis, and too bound up with facile analyses of empires, ancient and modern, to be little more than a temporary catalyst for better work on economics, politics, and social transformation. On this score, Wesley's Burkean sensibilities may be far more helpful than our current political fads, whether of the Left or the Right.

Second, we are Pietists of a lower order in that we should not share the high-brow allure of Liberal Protestantism that was once the natural descendent of the appeal to soteriology and religious experience in Western Christianity. As Donald Mackinnon once noted, the great orthodox creeds of the church are the poor person's protection against the ingenuity of the wise and the intellectually superior.²⁰ Wesley was right to rail against dead orthodoxy, but railing against orthodoxy in and of itself is spiritually disastrous. Even Albert Outler, whose commitment to a relativistic version of liberal Protestantism was well concealed, came to see the mistake that it was to rail against orthodoxy in the late twentieth century.²¹ It is hard at this point to improve on the comment of Jarislov

²⁰D. M. MacKinnon, *The Church* (London: Dacre Press, 1940), 50. The fuller point is made with exquisite felicity. "The whole exterior framework of the Christian Church is the poor man's protection against the tyranny of the wise who would rob him of the heritage of the Gospel. In a sense one might say, too, that her visible structure, her articulate doctrinal standards, her ordered sacramental life, represents the very lashing of the Church herself to her historical moorings. The whole Church is an organ of the Gospel. . . . Those aspects of her life that most perplex hankerers after 'spiritual religion' are due to the fact that she proclaims, not a possibility of spiritual achievement, but a work of redemption wrought by the Son of God in human flesh and blood. Again and again we have seen the pressure of external circumstances upon individual members of the church who have held high office within her and have usually been endowed with great personal gifts, a pressure which issues in individual demands that the Gospel of God be transformed in a human philosophy. And it has been the external organization of the church, in itself attesting the character of the Gospel, that has preserved its saving truths for Christ's little ones. It is through the institutions of the church that the Gospel is preserved from the idiosyncrasies of its members."

²¹ I discuss this change of mind in "United Methodism, Ecclesiology, and Ecumenism," unpublished.

Pelikan: “When, in the interest of the authenticity of the experience of Christ as my personal savior or of some other such definition, faith is drained of its doctrinal content, neither the personal experience nor its authenticity can long endure.”²²

We need, however, a much better way to find a place for commitment to orthodoxy than the ways that governed Wesley’s soteriological and ecclesial commitments, both as an Anglican and as the founder of the Methodist Episcopal Church in North America. There is an easy way to do this once we abandon his particular epistemic conception of Scripture. We simply expand our vision of canon to embrace the Nicene Creed as fully canonical, that is, as an indispensable identifying marker of the God who saves and in whom we put our faith. To use the technical language of the tradition, we need not just a *fides qua creditur* but also a *fides quae creditur*. We need not just a subjective faith with which one believes (*fides qua creditur*) but also the objective faith which one believes (*fides quae creditur*).

The object of our faith, as well as the model of our faith, is Jesus Christ, the second Person of the Triune God, and we put our trust in Him because of the inner working of the Holy Spirit. This, however, makes best sense inside the generous, canonical faith of the church. The best way forward is not to try and ground the Nicene Creed in Scripture, but to receive it for what it is, a great gift of grace, a vital means of grace in our life together as believers and confessors of the faith. We do not need to prove the doctrine of the Trinity from Scripture; it grew up with the canon of Scripture and in part determined the boundaries of the canon of Scripture.²³ Of course, as theologians it is right and proper to explain how we do actually ground it; but we receive the creed initially not because we are able to defend it; we receive it as a gift of grace in our conversion and in our baptism into the church.

I have only begun to touch the hem of the second network of issues that deserve attention as we explore the soteriological dimension of our

²²Jaroslav Pelikan, *Credo, Historical and Theological Guide to Creeds and Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 65.

²³The point is very well presented in Paul L. Gavrilyuk, “The Dialectic of *Lex Orandi* and *Lex Credendi*,” in William J. Abraham, Jason E. Vickers, and Natalie Van Kirk, eds, *Canonical Theism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 61-72.

vision of Scripture. The core of that work will involve a fresh immersion in Wesley's ascetic theology, not least his unique and remarkable doctrine of Christian perfection. We need to take that backward into the theological heritage of East and West, which, as Norman Russell has argued to such telling effect, shared a common commitment to *theosis* or *deification*.²⁴ Within this we can revisit the doctrine of original sin, finding—one may hope—genuine and fresh avenues, if not solutions, for capturing what sin is that are coherent and credible.²⁵ We then need to take our research forward into the Holiness tradition, most of all into the theology of Phoebe Palmer as brilliantly reconstructed by Elaine Heath.²⁶ In this we should not ignore the way the doctrine played itself out in the political arena right up to and including the bizarre and morally obscene efforts of Ted Jennings to get Wesleyans to learn from Vladimir Lenin.²⁷ The happy outcome of all this work would be a fresh restatement of the doctrine of holiness as part of a bigger project in ascetic theology. Within all this we can loop back and tackle the primary issue before us, namely, what does it mean to look upon and use Scripture as a means of grace? So the second desideratum is the updating of our theology of Scripture with appropriate input from ascetic theology.

3. Explorations in Theological Hermeneutics. We also need to attend to a third dimension of our project, namely, explorations in theological hermeneutics. We can begin with the platitude that our objects of study set the agenda for our methods of study. If we see Scripture as mediating divine revelation and as a pivotal means of grace given to us in the church, then this will have significant repercussions on how we read, interpret and study Scripture. So the third desideratum is to think through the significance of construing Scripture both as a medium of divine revelation and as a pivotal means of grace for the interpretation of Scripture. We will

²⁴Norman Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

²⁵One of the searing problems with the classical doctrine of original sin is that it does not go deep enough; it does not go all the way to the bottom to demonic possession as a manifestation of evil.

²⁶Elaine Heath, *Naked Faith: The Mystical Theology of Phoebe Palmer* (Eugene, Or.: Pickwick, 2009).

²⁷I deal briefly with Jennings' position in "Christian Perfection," in William J. Abraham and James E. Kirby, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Methodist Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 587-601.

need to be cautious because it is easy to be eaten up by the vultures of interpretation that sit in the trees on the edge of our research program.

Consider the suggestion of Rowan Williams that the point of divine revelation is to call into question all our claims about God. Rather than revelation providing answers, revelation evokes endless queries and questions.²⁸ These in turn, in Williams' case, are swept up into a peculiar English appropriation of Hegel's dialectic wrapped into a typically Anglican appeal to civility and other carefully selected intellectual virtues. We are back in a world where access to God is cut off, only this time it is done in the name of divine revelation and intellectual virtue. The vulture that cuts off access to the mind of God this time comes disguised as a delightful archbishop and learned theologian.

Williams is right to call attention to the way in which a vision of divine revelation will radically affect our theological work in general and our theology of Scripture in particular. For my part, however, the deity he invokes is an incompetent deity. This is a God who cannot get through to us. Given a serious doctrine of sin and its noetic effects, this will be disastrous all around. Happily, I see no compelling reason to accept Williams' move, other than as a sharp reminder of the apophatic character of theology, a position well attested in the midrash of the canonical heritage of the church and one we can readily secure without his vision of divine revelation. So, my first suggestion is that we recover our cataphatic nerve and approach Scripture not with a hermeneutic of skepticism or deadly dialectic but with a hermeneutic of confidence. Wesley clearly shared this confidence, but it is important that we state our confidence with circumspection and with appropriate humility.

That caution, aside from recognizing our fallibility, begins by insisting that Scripture really does stand over against us. At one level this means that we cannot dispense with all the historical tools and skills that are essential to reading ancient texts that come to us from radically different cultures from ours, in languages that are different from our native tongues, in genres (like

²⁸See Rowan Williams, "Trinity and Revelation," *Modern Theology* 2 (1986), 197-211.

²⁹Here I want to register at least two cheers for the work of classical forms of historical criticism. My reluctance to register three cheers only stems from the inaccurate appropriations within biblical scholarship of Troeltsch's vision of criticism, analogy, and correlation that rule out basic divine action in history as an epistemological and metaphysical principle. If we were to take the formal as opposed to material proposals of Troeltsch, an option available within Troeltsch's own work, then I can add my third cheer.

apocalyptic) that truly baffle us, and in concepts that are relative to the common understanding of the day.²⁹ The texts of Scripture, the speech acts of human authors in space and time, require historical investigation of what the authors of these texts were doing when they wrote and as they wrote. We get at the divine revelation mediated in and through the text precisely by reading these texts historically. There is no getting around figuring out what they said in the past, in their context, and in their culture.³⁰ This was what the old hoary debate about original intentions was meant to capture.³¹

Receiving these texts will also mean working through all of Scripture in the church as a means of grace. In recent years it has become fashionable to exploit the ecclesial location of Scripture by insisting that we read the Scriptures through the lens of the creeds and through the commentaries of the Fathers. Indeed, some claim that the latter should be used both as source for resolving ambiguities in Scripture and as a negative norm of accurate interpretation.³² The claim is that appeal to the tradition of the church is normative for the reading of Scripture and will provide an apt deal-breaker for contested interpretations of the text. I reject these moves categorically.

³⁰Graham Stanton states the matter felicitously: "Our explorations have warned us . . . not to allow the strength of particular strands of the later Christian tradition to determine our biblical exegesis. On the other hand, we have seen that later interpretation and development of a biblical tradition may stimulate theological reflection in unexpected directions." See his "The Law of Christ: A Neglected Theological Gem?" in David F. Ford and Graham Stanton, eds., *Reading Texts, Seeking Wisdom* (London: SCM, 2003), 183.

³¹I argue this case in "Intentions and the Logic of Interpretation," in *Asbury Theological Journal* XL (1988), 11-25.

³²Clearly there are passages in Wesley that fit with this, most notably when he appeals to Scripture as interpreted by the primitive tradition and the Church of England. However, on occasion Wesley can insist that these had little role in his thinking. In a letter to the Rev. Mr. Venn, he noted: "If anyone will convince me of my errors, I will heartily thank him. I believe all the Bible, as far as I understand it, and I am ready to be convinced. If I am a heretic, I became such by reading the Bible. All my notions I drew from such thence; and with little help from men, unless in the single point of justification by faith." Quoted in Frank W. Collier, *John Wesley Among the Scientists* (New York: Abingdon, 1928), 314. Collier makes much of "the supremacy of the individual judgment" (226) both in Wesley and in his own normative proposals. He runs the temptation of confusing the inescapability of individual judgment with the inescapability of personal judgment. No matter how many sources we bring to the reading of Scripture, informed personal judgment in determining what they mean is inescapable. This does not license the move to limit ourselves to ourselves (dressed up as the supremacy of individual judgment) in reading Scripture. Collier can appeal to Wesley because Wesley too is not entirely clear on this distinction.

First, this vision at its best and most coherent is dependent on a Roman Catholic vision of divine revelation and of the epistemology of theology that I find not at all convincing.³³ Second, it is very easy to read into Scripture later theological developments, ironically suppressing the evidence for the actual development to which it appeals and upon which it generally insists. Third, and most importantly, it is epistemically flawed in that it does not see that the same hermeneutical problems break out all over again in the appeal to later developments and that precisely the same historical tools will be essential for reading the later developments as we have for reading the biblical materials.³⁴

What these brief comments show is that we are off exploring the hermeneutical element of our research agenda and this will take us not just deep into the nature of historical investigation, but into wider debates about meaning, which will quickly spread over into issues in the philosophy of mind, epistemology, and theories of truth.³⁵ Hermeneutical exploration will also lead into important queries about the place of our current scientific understandings of the world and of ourselves in reading the text of Scripture. The latter bleeds into what we might call the metaphysics of common sense, a factor vital in sorting through one of the most fundamental hermeneutical distinctions, the distinction between the figurative and the literal. It is precisely by noting the difference between what is said and our understandings of the world that we distinguish between the figurative and the literal. If I say, "It is raining cats and dogs," you immediately know it is figurative because, read literally, it makes no sense whatsoever.

Considerations like these have led Joel Green and his research colleagues to call for a fresh reading of scriptural texts on human agents, on sin, and on the intermediate state.³⁶ The research agenda is complicated, but it is

³³It is no accident that the appeal to tradition eventually has to be supplemented by appeal to the epistemic office of the papacy in that problems arise concerning what element in the tradition to take as hermeneutically privileged. For a splendid treatment of papal infallibility, see Mark E. Powell, *Papal Infallibility: A Protestant Evaluation of an Ecumenical Issue* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009).

³⁴This applies to the declarations of popes as much as to declarations limited to authoritative tradition. Consider in the latter instance the contested reception of the materials from Vatican II over the last forty years.

³⁵This is the great merit of Bruce Marshall's widely acclaimed *Trinity and Truth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

³⁶See Joel Green, *Body, Soul, and Human Life* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008).

predicated on the assumption that certain highly debatable interpretations of neuroscience provide us with the truth about the world, and thus call for a different reading of the relevant biblical materials. What Green minimally is looking for is a cogent form of reflective equilibrium between his contested reading of contemporary neuroscience and his Barthian-oriented theological construal of Scripture.

Sorting through this nest of issues is not the end of the matter, for we still need to consider what dispositions and spiritual factors are needed to read Scripture as a means of grace. At a minimum it means that we come to Scripture in repentance, in humility, in dependence on the Holy Spirit, and immersed in a whole raft of spiritual practices and dispositions. On the one hand, this will take us deep into our commitments to ecclesiology, into what we consider to be the constitutive practices of the church. On the other hand, it will take us into the debate about reliabilism and virtue epistemology that has become commonplace in recent analytic epistemology. The crucial insights in play here are, first, that it is the pure in heart who see God, and, second, that is in part through seeing God that we are purged of our sins and made holy. These, and other related insights, pursued both historically and philosophically, deserve extended attention and exploration.³⁷

What then is the future of Scripture? Scripture is what it is and not something else. It has its own integrity and nature. It has a future in our midst because it continues to mediate reliably the revelation of God and because, in and of itself, it operates as a decisive means of grace in the great drama of creation, freedom, fall, and redemption. That horizon in effect amounts to an opening summary of a theology of Scripture, and as such it alters how we see Scripture and study it. At a minimum, that horizon calls forth all the creative energy and rigor we can muster in a research agenda that explores its place, *qua* medium of divine revelation, in the epistemology of theology, and that articulates its role, *qua* means of grace, in ascetic theology. Both of these in turn drive us into very deep waters in theological hermeneutics. If I am even half right in these ruminations, then there is plenty to keep us busy for decades to come in developing an adequate theology of Scripture.

³⁷As there are hosts of interesting epistemic claims and proto-suggestions in Scripture, these also deserve attention. For one of my own forays into this domain, see “The Epistemology of Jesus: An Initial Investigation,” in Paul Moser, ed., *Jesus and Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 149-168.

THE FUTURE OF SCRIPTURE

by

Richard B. Hays

“The grass withers, the flower fades;
but the word of our God will stand forever.” (Isa. 40:8)

I. “The Future of Scripture” as Paradox

The theme appointed for this conference of the Wesleyan Theological Society, “The Future of Scripture,” is a phrase that has about it the faint whiff of paradox. Viewed from one angle, “Scripture” belongs to the past. The texts in our biblical canon are ancient texts, composed to bear witness to the origins of our faith. Their authoritative role depends precisely on their “pastness.” They anchor the church’s identity in the apostolic message that was once for all entrusted to the saints (Jude 3). For that reason, we are accustomed to thinking of Scripture as something that we encounter by looking backward in time, ideally with the aid of historians adept at interpreting ancient writings.

But also, the provocative phrase, “The Future of Scripture,” reminds us that to encounter the Bible as *Scripture* is not to encounter an inert artifact of the past, like a stone inscription unearthed in an archaeological dig. Rather, when we speak of *Scripture*, we are already making a confessional affirmation: we are naming this particular collection of texts as a word that is living and active in the present. Precisely as the *Scripture* of the community of faith, these texts challenge us, call us to account, console us, heal us, carry promises—and therefore draw us on into an *eschatological future* that we can glimpse only darkly.

Insofar as the texts of Scripture continue to generate communities of witness and service, Scripture has a future, a future as the lifeblood of the

living body of Christ. And, conversely, only insofar as the body of Christ continues to draw life from the past testimony of Scripture will the church have a future, for—to shift the metaphor—the branch can bear fruit only if it abides in the vine. Cut off from Scripture, the church has no life and no future. But likewise, cut off from the church, Scripture has no future, either. It remains alive *as* Scripture, as David Kelsey has rightly observed, only insofar as it is received, honored, and interpreted within a community of faith. Apart from that living community of interpretation, it would be only a crumbling scroll in a glass museum case, like the Dead Sea Scrolls or the Nag Hammadi Gnostic gospels—studied by a few curious scholars, but hardly life-giving. And so, between Scripture and church God has providentially ordained a symbiotic relationship in which each sustains and gives life to the other.¹

That is why we can have great confidence that Scripture and church have a common future. On the one hand, because Jesus has promised that the gates of Hell can never prevail against the *church*, we may confidently expect that *Scripture* will continue to be read and cherished as long as the present age endures. On the other hand, the Psalmist sings that even though the grass withers and the flower fades, the word of our God will stand forever; therefore, the unwithering word of *Scripture* will sustain and support the *church*, a community of ephemeral mortals, into a future that stretches far beyond human reckoning.

This paradoxical living nexus between Scripture and community is one of the most significant discoveries—or perhaps I should say rediscoveries—of the current renaissance of theological interpretation of Scripture, and it has far-reaching hermeneutical implications. My task here is to offer some reflections on this renewal of theological interpretation, and perhaps even to offer some predictive remarks about the way forward as we seek to discern what the Spirit is saying to the churches about the immediate future of Scripture in the interpretive communities that all of us represent.

But can such predictions really claim any validity? As my favorite philosopher, Yogi Berra, once said, “Making predictions is hard—especially about the future.” And so, rather than making predictions, I want to

¹I am tempted to use the metaphor of marriage, except for the fact that Scripture has already claimed that imagery for the union between Christ and the church. We should not confuse the role of Scripture with the prerogative of Christ, who is the one true bridegroom.

offer some *prescriptive proposals* about the ways in which we as the church—particularly as church formed in the Wesleyan tradition—ought to read Scripture if we seek to read it faithfully and well. Then I will offer a small demonstration of the kind of interpretation I envision as fruitful for the church in our generation.

II. Getting Our Bearings: Scripture as the Story in Which We Live

Before I start making prescriptive recommendations about how to read Scripture, we need first to consider what sort of thing Christian Scripture is. Much of the confusion surrounding the interpretation of the Bible arises from a basic misapprehension about the character of the texts with which we are dealing. It is not uncommon for interpreters to conceive of the Bible in one of the following four ways: chiefly as a book of moral advice and principles; or as a map telling us how to get to heaven; or as a script for the events of the end-time; or chiefly as a source of raw data for the reconstruction of past history. These conceptions are not wholly wrong; each bears a grain of truth. The Bible really does offer advice and principles about how to live, and it really does point towards an eternal life promised by God. It really does orient our thinking towards the end of the present age. And the Bible is in fact a rich source of information about events of the historical past. But when any one of these conceptions becomes dominant and exclusive, it produces a strange distortion of the biblical witness, as though we were looking at the text being reflected in a fun-house mirror.

In contrast to these ways of approaching the Bible, I want to propose an alternative model for understanding what Scripture is: *Scripture is the story in which we live*. Both parts of the sentence are crucial. Scripture is the true story of God's action to redeem the world; and the way we then lead our lives within that world is reshaped by that story. Those of you who are familiar with the book that Ellen Davis and I edited, *The Art of Reading Scripture*,² will recognize that I am reiterating a central thesis of that book, a thesis informed by the emergence of narrative hermeneutics in the past generation, particularly under the inspiration of the work of Hans Frei and George Lindbeck. I would suggest to you, however, that this way of understanding the character of Scripture is not simply a pass-

²E. F. Davis and R. B. Hays, *The Art of Reading Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003).

ing theological fad that can be pigeonholed as “postliberalism.” Instead, this way of understanding Scripture is the church’s characteristic mode of interpretation from the first century right up until the late eighteenth century. So, if the approach I am recommending is to be determinative for the future of scriptural interpretation, that future will necessarily entail a recovery of some important elements of the past.

If Scripture tells a story, we might be able to summarize its plot line. I want to take a stab at giving you a summary of the plot line of Scripture. I am going to summarize it in three sentences. I do not mean to imply that this rough summary can replace reading the Bible, but it gives us a road map to see what the biblical story is all about. So, here is the plot line of the Bible in three sentences.³

1. The God of Israel, the Creator of the world, has acted astoundingly to show his love and faithfulness by rescuing a lost and broken world through the election of Israel and the death and resurrection of Jesus.
2. The full extent of that rescue is something we do not yet see, but God has created a community of witnesses to this Good News, and that community is the Church.
3. While we are waiting for the conclusion of the story, the Church, empowered by the Holy Spirit, is called to reenact the loving obedience of Jesus Christ and thus to serve as a sign of God’s faithful desire to redeem the whole world. The end.

That is the story of Scripture. This basic plot line unifies the whole biblical story.

It follows that, if we are to know who we are and how we should live, we need to understand ourselves as living inside that story as characters carrying forward the plot line. We are “performing the Scriptures.”⁴ We are the ones who have been given this commission to reenact the loving obedience of Jesus Christ. We are the ones who are empowered by the Spirit to tell and retell that story to the world. And reading and telling the story well is an *art*, an art that has to be learned and practiced together in community.

³This summary appeared originally in R. B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation* (San Francisco: HarperSan-Francisco, 1996), 193.

⁴The phrase appears as the title of an essay by Nicholas Lash in his book *Theology on the Way to Emmaus* (London: SCM, 1986), 37-46.

III. Prescriptive Proposals about the Future of Scripture

I turn now to my prescriptive proposals about how we might move into a future of scriptural interpretation that recovers with integrity the church's past traditions while also attentively listening to the eschatological witness of the Holy Spirit.⁵

Proposal One. First, Scripture is about *God*. I tell the first-year divinity students in my "Introduction to the New Testament" course to take a 3x5 card, tape it on their bathroom mirrors, and write: "It's about God, stupid!" The Bible is not about me. It is not about my needs. It is not about my experiences. Scripture may inform my experiences, but first of all the Bible is a story about God who created the world, called a people out of bondage, gave them the Law, and raised Jesus of Nazareth from the dead. This same God is still at work in the world, and Scripture is pervasively telling us the story about that God. That is what Brevard Childs means when he insists rightly that any attempt to grasp the subject matter of the Bible must deal with the "*theological* reality to which scripture bears witness."⁶

Proposal Two. Second, Scripture is a *coherent* story, a complex but coherent dramatic narrative that runs from Genesis to Revelation. The Bible has to be read in its wholeness. If you just start reading randomly at any one chapter, you may not understand what is going on, unless you can see what came before and what follows. This means that the New Testament narrative cannot rightly be understood apart from the Old, nor can the Old Testament narrative rightly be understood apart from the New.

In one of my classes, I had a student say, "You know, that God of the Old Testament that the Jews worshiped was a terrible, angry God who simply pronounced violence, destruction, and judgment on people. Thank goodness Jesus came along to tell us that we could love God with all our heart and mind and soul and strength." This student did not realize that Jesus, in Mark 12:30, was quoting from the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 6:4-5). In fact, Deuteronomy 6:4-5, the Shema—"Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all

⁵The six proposals that follow are influenced by and adapted from the "Nine Theses" articulated in Davis and Hays, eds., *The Art of Reading Scripture*, 1-5.

⁶B. S. Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 723, emphasis mine.

your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might”—is part of the fundamental prayer life of the Jewish community from ancient times. Jesus was not rejecting the God of the Old Testament; rather, he was reaffirming the deep truth of Israel’s understanding of God. And because my student didn’t know that, he understood neither the Old nor the New Testament.

So the Bible must be read from front to back, starting with the Old Testament and moving into the New Testament. But we also must read it from back to front. Once we see how the plot ends, then we can better understand things that happened in the beginning. My colleague David Steinmetz likes to draw the comparison of reading the Bible to reading a murder mystery novel. It is not until you get to the last chapter of the novel that the detective goes back and retells the story, explaining how all the clues fit together into a pattern that you did not understand until the detective explained it. Reading the Bible is something like that. In light of the New Testament, we reread the Old Testament and we say, “Oh, now I see where this was going. I didn’t get it before.”

Because this assertion of the overall coherence of Scripture is controversial in our time, I want to elaborate a little more fully on what I mean. I have said that Scripture is to be understood as a coherent dramatic narrative. How does a dramatic narrative work? It will contain numerous voices, diverse characters, and many discrete scenes. It will unfold across time, and its words and images will gather denser significations as the plot develops. Consequently, its meaning can be grasped only when the totality of the action is considered from its endpoint. No one supposes that every character who speaks in a drama must represent the playwright’s own point of view. For example, if we read the speeches of Polonius in *Hamlet* and think we are meant to accept everything he says as true, we are singularly bad readers of Shakespeare. Indeed, even the speeches of the drama’s hero do not necessarily articulate the full meaning of the play. On the contrary, the play’s meaning comes to the audience through a complex interplay of character, speech, and action. The complexity of viewpoints in a drama is not necessarily a sign of incoherence; it may be instead a sign of the drama’s depth of engagement with human life. The more complex the drama, the more is required of the audience by way of patient, mature, reflective reception.

Thus, if we fail to find unity in Scripture it may be because the unity we are looking for is too simple; our criteria for coherence are too flat and

literalistic. We are like the beginning student who grumbles, “Why can’t Shakespeare just say what he means?” But even more fundamentally, we may fail to find unity in the Bible because we are looking for it in too narrow a textual field. We are looking for coherence at the level of the conceptual articulations of the individual authors such as Isaiah, Mark, and John, who are themselves—in terms of the metaphor of the overarching dramatic narrative—only characters in the play, albeit very important characters. Instead, the unity we seek must be discerned through the texture and structure of the whole divinely scripted performance. It is this totality that bears witness to the identity of the God rendered in the dramatic narrative.

My first two proposals are, I would suppose, squarely in line with classic Wesleyan hermeneutics: Scripture is about God, and it has a deep coherence. But now I am going to suggest something that I am not sure Mr. Wesley would have approved of.

Proposal Three. My third proposal is this: Scriptural texts do not necessarily have a simple meaning limited to the intent of the original author. Both Jewish and Christian traditions have classically insisted that Scripture has multiple meanings and that these meanings are given by God, who is the author of the drama. An example of this is the Suffering Servant passage in Isaiah 53. There is no documentable tradition of Jewish readers before the time of Jesus understanding Isaiah 53 as a prophecy about a coming Messiah. The passage was understood as either a self-description of the prophet or a picture of the fate of the corporate people Israel, suffering as God’s righteous servant. Sometimes the rabbis interpreted this passage with reference to the figure of Moses. The Jewish people in the first century did not have an expectation that there would be a future Messiah figure who would be a Suffering Servant. But, in light of the story of the New Testament, we are enabled to read retrospectively and discern a new level of meaning in that text that was not necessarily part of what the author of the Book of Isaiah consciously intended. As Philip explained to the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8, the words of the prophet take on a new meaning, once we read Isaiah 53 overlaid with the story of the cross (Acts 8:26-40).

This is a hard concept for some of us because we are used to reading dumbed-down texts. We like reading publications, like *USA Today*, that write in the simplest language possible, in sentences that have one, and only one, meaning. But the Bible is not like that. One cannot ask, “What

does the story of the Suffering Servant mean?” assuming that it must have one and only one meaning, any more than one can demand of Shakespeare’s *King Lear*, “What does it mean? I want only one meaning, no equivocation.” Someone might say, “Well, the moral of the story of *King Lear* is that you should not give away all your possessions to your children while you are still alive.” But that would be an incredibly thin and reductive reading of the play.

Proposal Four. Fourth, in order to interpret Scripture rightly, one has to be part of the community that has been brought into being by the power of the resurrection. That community is the Church. I know that this is a very controversial claim, controversial on two fronts. On one front, the modernist academy has sought to develop and advocate objective *wissenschaftlich* methods that will ensure even-handed, unbiased interpretation. From this point of view, “faith-based” readings can only be skewed and over-determined by dogmatic considerations.

On the other front, there are people who have no objection to faith-based interpretation, but who are suspicious of the specific constraints imposed by the Christian tradition. They say, “I’m a very spiritual person, but I don’t trust the institution of the Church. Surely I don’t have to submit to the traditions of any community. I can read the Bible myself and find out what it means.” But that is an illusion. You can never read the Bible in a vacuum; you are always reading it within *some* community of interpretation—even if that community is the community of Americans shaped by an illusory tradition of rugged individualism! The Bible is not meant to be read by isolated individuals. It can only be read rightly when we are participating in the ongoing life of a worshipping community that is shaped by the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper. In this way, Scripture is like a musical score that can be understood only when it is played. And it is a complex musical score that has many parts. As Lash has rightly insisted, you can no more interpret Scripture rightly as an isolated individual than you, as an isolated individual, could play a Beethoven quartet.⁷ It cannot be done. We need the diversity of all the parts, overlaid with one another in a complex performance, in order to read it rightly.

The saints of the Church are like the “first chair” players in the orchestra. By their example of reading and living the texts, they provide

⁷Lash, *Theology on the Way to Emmaus*, 43.

guidance in how to perform Scripture well. Now, when I say “the saints,” I am using the term in its NT sense: the community of God’s faithful people across time. We are taught how to read Scripture by people who exemplify, in the holiness and dedication of their lives, the meaning of the scriptural witness. And here, Mr. Wesley would certainly approve.

Proposal Five. Fifth (and this is implied by all I have said up to this point), reading Scripture well requires us to be shaped as *disciples*. Here again, if Wesley were in the audience, he would heartily agree. Markus Bockmuehl helpfully speaks of the implied reader of Scripture as “the implied disciple.”⁸ The *telos* of Scripture is the formation of communities of disciples, and reading well is therefore itself an act of *discipleship*. This has several implications. It means, *inter alia*, that we must always be prepared to be surprised, judged, and *changed* by our encounter with the text. As Ellen Davis likes to say, if we open up the Bible and say, “Yes, that’s just what I thought,” we are probably already in trouble. God surprises us and calls us again and again to have our minds made new as we read Scripture, the living word that cuts to the heart. Why is such ongoing transformation necessary? Because we find ourselves living in the tension between the *already* and the *not yet* of the Kingdom of God. And so, because we have not yet arrived at the end God has prepared for us, we are called to a process of ongoing discernment. The Holy Spirit continues to be at work through Scripture in the Church. As we encounter changing circumstances, we are called constantly to fresh re-readings of Scripture in light of the Spirit’s work in the world.

Proposal Six. When we speak of “fresh re-readings,” that leads to my sixth and final proposal. If Scripture is not simply a closed deposit or system of doctrine, its openness to future interpretations within the community of faith can best be realized through practices of close reading that explore the *intertextual interplay*, the *counterpoint* of different voices in the canon. Surprising new semantic possibilities arise when the different stories and voices in the Bible are placed in dialogical relation with one other.

The multi-vocality of the scriptural dramatic narrative is an integral part of its communicative strategy. Any attempt to collapse the multiple

⁸M. Bockmuehl, *Seeing the Word: Refocusing New Testament Study* (Studies in Theological Interpretation; Grand Rapids, Baker, 2006), 91-92.

voices of the Bible into univocal propositional statements is a hermeneutical mistake. Such propositional “translations” can yield only flat, reductive readings that are unfaithful to the character of the text they seek to interpret. The very tensions within the canon belong to the sort of unity that the Bible manifests. It is a dynamic unity in difference, grounded in common reference to the God whose identity is adumbrated precisely through the diversity of voices in the texts. To return to our metaphor of musical performance, the dramatic unity of the biblical canon may include not only variations, but also *inversions* of themes. The unity of the canon is a *symphonic* unity: Scripture is like a symphony that includes different movements, featuring many different instruments. Themes are recapitulated, reworked, transformed across the span of the total work.

I am not speaking here simply about the phenomenon of *Vetus Testamentum in Novo receptum*, such as the interpretation of the Psalms in Peter’s Pentecost speech in Acts 2. Canonical intertextual reading includes but is not limited to descriptive accounts of that sort of explicitly articulated intertextuality. It must also include interpretations that listen closely to the different voices in the canonical “orchestra,” combine them in fresh ways, and give new constructive performances that sound out unforeseen harmonies.

This is precisely the sort of hermeneutical performance described by Luke’s Gospel when the risen Jesus says to the dejected disciples trudging away from Jerusalem on the road to Emmaus, “Oh foolish and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared,” and then “beginning with Moses and all the prophets he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the Scriptures” (Luke 24:25, 27). The things about himself *in all the Scriptures*! Jesus (apparently) undertakes a retrospective reading of Scripture from back to front, unveiling complex intertextual resonances that had previously eluded his earnest but hermeneutically clueless disciples. That is the sort of reading that opens Scripture’s past towards a mission-directed future, as the rest of the story in Luke-Acts will narrate.

But we cannot be content merely to state such claims at a formal level; they must be demonstrated through actual readings of texts—as Luke frustratingly fails to do in Luke 24! So, in the final part of my reflections, I want to illustrate the sort of narrative interpretation that might—if more fully explored—suggest a way to imagine the past and future of Scriptural interpretation. I will offer a reading of some parts of the Gospel of Luke in counterpoint with the scriptural stories of Elijah

and Elisha. I won't belabor my reading out by pointing out explicitly how it illustrates and embodies the proposals I have made. But let those who have ears hear.

IV. An Intertextual Probe: the Gospel of Luke and the Elijah/Elisha Stories

Luke patterns several episodes of his Gospel on the scriptural stories of the prophets Elijah and Elisha.⁹ This is a distinctive element of Luke's telling of the story of Jesus, one not significantly paralleled in the other Gospels. For example, it is only Luke who narrates the account of Jesus' raising the dead son of a widow at Nain (7:11-17). This story closely resembles the scriptural tradition of Elijah's raising the son of the widow of Zarephath (1 Kings 17:17-24). And yet, when the two stories are juxtaposed, one salient difference looms. Jesus' mighty act requires no stretching himself out on the body, no anguished cries and prayers to God; instead, he speaks a direct word commanding the dead man to rise. Thus, while Jesus' act is reminiscent of Elijah's—so strongly reminiscent that we may speak of a typological relationship between the two figures—the typological link already begins to suggest both likeness and unlikeness. Jesus, the antitype, fulfills the pattern found in the Elijah story, but does so in a way that surpasses the type and leads readers to ponder how to interpret this prophetic figure who seems to possess even greater authority than the greatest of Israel's miracle-working prophets.

In the events following the transfiguration, where Elijah appears along with Moses to talk with Jesus, Luke tantalizes us with further allusions to the Elijah/Elisha cycle, while continuing to mark Jesus' difference from these typological predecessors.¹⁰ Since the great Elijah had summoned fire from heaven to annihilate his adversaries (1 Kings 18:36-

⁹The exegetical material in this last section was first delivered in a lecture at the Johann Wolfgang Goethe Universität in Frankfurt-am-Main, Germany, June 18, 2009. It was subsequently published in S. Alkier and R. Hays in 2010 and is used here by permission.

¹⁰T. L. Brodie remarks, "Just as *imitatio* was almost invariably shadowed by *emulatio*, by a desire to rival and, if possible, surpass the ancient text, so . . . there is a considerable ambiguity in [Luke's] general treatment of the Elijah theme: in Luke's text, Jesus is both identified with and differentiated from Elijah" ("Towards Unraveling Luke's Use of the Old Testament . . ." (NTS 32, 1986, 247-267).

39, 2 Kings 1:10-12), Jesus' disciples wrongly assume he will do the same. Their question "Do you want us to call fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" (Luke 9:55) closely echoes the language of 2 Kings 1:10,12. Firmly rejecting their suggestion, Jesus rebukes them. In this story, he appears as the anti-Elijah, the bearer of salvation rather than violent retribution.

It would be wrong, however, to infer that Luke's use of the Elijah/Elisha typology is entirely contrastive or dissociative in its effect. For example, Jesus' weeping as he contemplates the coming destruction of the city of Jerusalem (19:41-44) evokes memories of Elisha's weeping over the atrocities that he foresees Hazael will perpetrate against the people of Israel (2 Kings 8:11-12). There is no explicit verbal echo beyond the word "wept," but the two prophetic visions of coming catastrophe are eerily similar, and the image of Jesus as a prophet weeping over Jerusalem allies him metaphorically with Elisha.

Or, to take another example, when the Jewish authorities bring the captive Jesus before the Roman governor Pilate, they begin their accusation against him with these words: "We found this man perverting our nation" (23:2). Given the numerous earlier associations of Jesus with Elijah, the charge resonates with the accusation made by King Ahab when Elijah finally appears before him: "Is it you, the perverter of Israel?" (LXX, 1 Kings 18:17). This intertextual juxtaposition elegantly illustrates a characteristic Lukan literary technique: Luke projects a flickering precursor image on a backdrop behind the center-stage action. Those who perceive the connection between the two images will gain a deepened sense of the scene's dramatic complexities.

In the case under consideration here, the subtext of the authorities' complaint suggests that Jesus, like Elijah, is to be characterized as a subversive troublemaker, prophesying against the duly established ruler—in this case Caesar, whose interests Pilate represents. Surely, however, this allusion is a bit of delicious Lukan dramatic irony.¹¹ The speakers cannot intend the unfortunate echo, for if they did they would recognize that in 1 Kings 18 it is the troublemaking Elijah who is the true bearer of God's word, and it is the power-wielding accuser who is the true perverter.

¹¹On Lukan irony, see J. M. Dawsey, *The Lukan Voice: Confusion and Irony in the Gospel of Luke* (Macon, GA: Mercer, 1986).

Elijah fires this response back at Ahab: “I am not perverting Israel; but rather you and the house of your father have perverted it, because you have forsaken the LORD your God and gone after the Baals” (1 Kings 18:18 LXX). In light of this echo of the Elijah narrative, the authorities’ charge against Jesus boomerangs back on them: *they*, in collaboration with the unjust pagan powers, are corrupting Israel, and they will ultimately pay the penalty, as did Ahab and the prophets of Baal. Luke explains none of this, and hearing the echo is not necessary to follow his story. But the reader who does hear it will appreciate the narrative irony and the final reversal of fortunes that it foreshadows.¹²

Finally, let us ponder an echo of 2 Kings that will stretch our imaginations a bit further. In Luke 24, at the conclusion of the risen Jesus’ encounter with the Emmaus disciples, after Jesus has broken bread with them, the scene reaches its dramatic climax in a moment of *anagnoresis*: “Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him, and he vanished from their sight” (Luke 24:31). The story stands powerfully on its own and there is no overt allusion to any Old Testament precursor. Yet, in view of the scene’s own explicit thematic emphasis on the *scriptural* antecedents of Jesus’ career, might we hear one more faint allusion to the Elijah/Elisha cycle? In 2 Kings 6, Elisha finds his city surrounded by the hostile army of the king of Aram. His servant, dismayed, cries, “Alas, master, what shall we do?” Elisha mysteriously assures the servant that “there are more with us than there are with them,” and then prays for God to open the servant’s eyes. “So the Lord opened his eyes and he saw, and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha” (2 Kings 6:17).¹³

¹²In this case, there is a possible secondary echo as well, of one more scene in which the true spokesmen of Israel’s God are accused by a wicked ruler of perverting the people. It is Exodus 5:4 LXX where Egypt’s Pharaoh dismisses the request of Moses and Aaron to let the people go into the wilderness to worship. If indeed we hear this secondary echo in the scene of Jesus’ arraignment before Pilate, we see once again an intricate metaleptic foreshadowing of a coming reversal of power, in which the mighty will be put down from their thrones and the people of God vindicated and set free.

¹³This image, which also occurs in 2 Kings 2:11, was employed by William Blake in his poem *Jerusalem*. The poem was subsequently used as the text of a hymn, which in turn served as the inspiration for the title of the 1981 film *Chariots of Fire*.

This motif of having blind eyes opened to perceive an overwhelming spiritual reality appears almost nowhere else in the Old Testament.¹⁴ If, in light of Luke's clear and explicit interest in the Elijah/Elisha cycle, Luke's reference to the opening of the disciples' eyes in 24:31 is indeed to be heard as an echo of the text in 2 Kings, what additional multiple senses would such a hearing add to our reading? It might suggest that the hostility of the "chief priests and leaders" surrounding and fighting against Jesus—a circumstance perceived by Cleopas and his companion as insuperable adversity—was in fact a futile assault against a greater divine power that would ultimately guarantee the deliverance and triumph of Jesus. The chariots of fire of 2 Kings may dimly foreshadow the tongues of fire at Pentecost, and perhaps also hint at the reason why the hearts of the disciples *burned* when their eyes were opened by the Lord (Luke 24:32): they were, unbeknownst to them, in the presence of a divine flame.

Was Luke thinking all this? This proposed reading of a hypothetical faint echo goes far beyond anything that can be ascribed with any degree of confidence to Luke's authorial intention. It is an instance of what Stefan Alkier has called "experimental intertextuality," the juxtaposition of texts not obviously or traditionally linked, a juxtaposition that enables readers to discern new and unexpected senses.¹⁵ Yet, in this case, the linkage yields unexpected satisfactions. The plodding Emmaus disciples, like Elisha's servant, are seeing the world through a veil of fear and discouragement. But when their eyes are opened by Jesus, the prophet like Elisha, the veil falls away and a fiery new world opens before them, disclosing the mighty power of God to save.

If all that be granted, at least as a poetic thought experiment, then we can hardly avoid noticing that the story in 2 Kings continues to a remarkable resolution. In response to Elisha's prayer, the Lord first blinds the Aramaean soldiers so that they are taken captive, then opens their eyes to

¹⁴One partial exception to this general statement is the narrative of the serpent's temptation of Eve to eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 3:5). Again, in Gen. 3:7, the narrator repeats that when the woman and man ate the fruit "the eyes of both of them were opened." Here the opening of eyes is a negative event, the result of disobedience. It is perhaps not too much to suggest that the opening of the eyes of the disciples in Luke 24 constitutes an intertextual symbolic reversal, an opening of eyes that leads to redemption rather than punishment.

¹⁵See, e.g., Stefan Alkier, "Intertextuality and the Semiotics of Biblical Tests," in R. B. Hays, S. Alkier, and L. A. Huizenga (eds.), *Reading the Bible Intertextually* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2009), 3-21, especially pp. 10-11.

show them their predicament as prisoners of war. But rather than having them slain, Elisha surprisingly gives orders that they be welcomed at table. Here is the ending of the story: "And he set before them a great feast, and they ate and drank: and he dismissed them and they departed to their Lord. And the bands of Syria came no longer into the land of Israel" (2 Kings 6:23). Strange denouement, opening the eyes not only of the enemy soldiers, but of readers as well. Those who were enemies are blinded, disarmed, given new sight, welcomed at a feast by the one whom they had sought to kill, and, newly at peace with God's people, sent to their Lord. The semantic ripples run both backwards and forwards from that table in the evening shadows at Emmaus: the strange story of Elisha's nonviolent triumph over his Aramaean enemies now foreshadows the surprising and gracious victory of Jesus over his enemies, and the opening of the soldiers' eyes prefigures not only the opening of the eyes of the Emmaus disciples but perhaps also the story of God's opening the eyes of the overthrown enemy Saul/Paul in Acts 9.

This perhaps fanciful intertextual reading indicates how the Elijah/Elisha typology works in Luke-Acts. Jesus is not Elisha *redivivus*,¹⁶ nor does Luke claim that 2 Kings 6 is some sort of prediction fulfilled by Jesus—nothing so overt and mechanical. Nonetheless, on this reading, 2 Kings 6 may be one source that contains mysteriously hidden "things about [Jesus] himself in all the Scriptures." The intertextual connection consists of fine threads, variously colored and intricately woven. And the interweaving yields a surprising pattern of fresh retrospective readings of Israel's Scripture, readings that in turn reframe and deepen our interpretation of Jesus' identity—and, indeed, our understanding of God. So each text illuminates the other in an unexpected way.

Conclusion

I do not suppose that my proposals in this brief essay solve all problems or answer all questions about the future of Scripture. Far from it. But I hope that these examples might point, in a preliminary way, towards a kind of reading that offers at least the possibility of recovering the canonical coherence of Scripture. The scriptural texts do not sing in unison. But precisely because they sing in counterpoint, they produce a richer sound that anticipates the eschatological harmony, which, in the present age, we can only strain our ears to hear.

¹⁶Contra J. A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke* (2 vols.; AB 28/28a; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1981-1985), 1:213-15.

CANONICAL THEISM AND SCRIPTURE: REFLECTIONS ON A SCHOLARLY MOVEMENT TEN YEARS AFTER ITS BIRTH

by

David F. Watson

Ten years ago I sat with a number of graduate students and professors in a classroom at Perkins School of Theology. We had come together at the request of William J. Abraham to discuss a theological proposal that he referred to as “canonical theism.” Abraham described a vision of Nicene-Chalcedonian Christianity—what we might think of as orthodoxy broadly conceived—in which we have been given various resources through the Great Tradition of Christianity. Scripture is a key resource, but so are the doctrinal statements of the ecumenical councils, the great teachers who have written in service to the church through the centuries, the sacraments, and those holy men and women who have gone before us who are often called saints.

The key point is that the primary function of these resources is soteriological. It is to lead people into the life of the Trinity so that we might enjoy the sanctifying work of God in the present, and life everlasting with God in the future. These resources are here to lead us into salvation. They are the instruments in the medical bag that God uses to heal us of our spiritual sickness. They are ports of entry into the life of God. To the extent that we have divested ourselves of them or misunderstood their function within our various traditions, we have impoverished ourselves spiritually.

From the work of this group came the volume *Canonical Theism: A Proposal for Theology and the Church*.¹ Our task in this volume was to work through our discussions about the canonical heritage of the church in light of our own disciplines and interests. My discipline is New Testament, and my reflection on canonical theism over the last decade has had primarily to do with the use of scripture in relation to other theological and soteriological resources. Of particular interest to me are the implications of canonical theism for Protestants, among whom the principle of *sola scriptura* has exerted considerable influence. Canonical theism, however, raises serious questions about the limitations of *sola scriptura*. In what follows I will discuss particular problems with *sola scriptura*, canonical theism as an alternative to *sola scriptura*, and the usefulness of canonical theism for theological education and making inroads in the modern evangelical movement.

***Sola Scriptura* and Canon Formation**

Sola scriptura began as a polemical principle about the authority of the church. It was an attempt to answer the question, “Who or what is the final arbiter of teaching regarding Christian belief and living?” Against the Roman Catholic position that the church is the proper interpreter of scripture, and therefore has final authority with regard to Christian belief and living, the reformers held that scripture is self-authenticating. To describe the self-authenticating nature of scripture, they utilized a Greek word, *autopistos*, which simply means “credible in itself.” We therefore refer to the self-authenticating function of scripture as its “autopistic” function. The ways in which scripture was understood to be autopistic varied among the reformers, but that it was autopistic was a common Reformation understanding.² Scripture did not need to be authenticated by the church, nor did the Christian need the authoritative interpretation of the papacy in order to understand scripture. As Calvin put it, “Indeed, Scripture exhibits fully as clear evidence of its own truth as white and black things do of their color, or sweet and bitter things do of their taste.”³

¹William J. Abraham, Jason E. Vickers, and Natalie B. Van Kirk, eds., *Canonical Theism: A Proposal for Theology and the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008).

²See Nigel Voak, “Richard Hooker and the Principle of *Sola Scriptura*,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 59.1 (2008): 106-21.

³John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 1.7.2.

While some of the radical reformers rejected tradition completely, or at least attempted to, Luther did not do so.⁴ For Luther, the creeds and doctrines of the early church were proper representations of the content of Christian faith, and the Fathers could provide rich insights into the faith. Luther's argument was about where final authority rested.⁵ Was it with the church, and in particular with the papacy, or with scripture? If the church was the authoritative interpreter of scripture, then scripture could not function as a corrective to the church. Therefore, the Nicene Creed, for example, was of value for the life of faith because it was a proper reading of the scriptures. It was not, however, a revelatory text in the sense of the scriptures. David Steinmetz notes that the reformers "rarely intended to exclude theological sources that were non-biblical." He writes, "*Sola scriptura* generally meant *prima scriptura*. Scripture was viewed as the final source and norm by which all theological sources and arguments were to be judged, not Scripture as the sole source of theological wisdom."⁶

Even within the period of the Reformation, then, *sola scriptura* meant different things within different communities. Such is also the case today. *Sola scriptura* can mean that scripture is, in the words of Cynthia L. Rigby, "the only source we look to in deciding what words to say about God." This is a rather restrictive understanding that would rule out phrases such as "Trinity" and "fully divine, fully human." Alternatively, as Rigby describes, *sola scriptura* may mean that "scripture is the unique source among many—the 'ruling norm' that can somehow be separated out from experience, reason, and tradition, and used as the means to assess what is revelatory and what is not."⁷ A variant of this second definition is Merold Westphal's description of the principle:

We cannot come to Scripture unshaped by tradition and experience. But the principle of *sola scriptura* does deny that the relation is thoroughly symmetrical, that it is sometimes the task of the Bible to correct tradition or experience and sometimes the task of tradition or experience to correct the Bible

⁴See Craig D. Allert, "What are we Trying to Conserve? Evangelicalism and *Sola Scriptura*," *EQ* 76:4 (2004): 339-41.

⁵See Allert, "What are we Trying to Conserve?" 339.

⁶David C. Steinmetz, *Luther in Context*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: 2002), 129.

⁷Cynthia L. Rigby, "Put On Your Glasses! *Sola Scriptura* and our Experience of God." *Insights* 124 no. 1 (2008): 3-20.

(which is not the same as correcting our reading of the Bible). This denial, put positively, is what *sola scriptura* is all about. It is the claim that the Bible is the only ultimate standard for the community of faith, the one card that cannot be trumped.⁸

This is a very broad definition of *sola scriptura* that many proponents of this principle would share, even if some would also wish to specify further what the principle entails. Yet, when we consider the formation of the New Testament canon and its relationship to the formation of a basic canon of doctrine, problems begin to emerge with this understanding of *sola scriptura*. A basic set of Christian beliefs, an informal canon that we find, say, in various forms of the rule of faith, developed well before a clear canon of scripture was set. The earliest attestation that we have to our twenty-seven book New Testament canon comes from a letter of Athanasius in the year 367, and even after this there are variants from Athanasius' list. We have the first draft of the Nicene Creed, then, before we have a set New Testament canon. In this period, scripture could not function as the ultimate trump card because there was not a widespread consensus on what works constituted scripture. Works that early Christian theologians considered revelatory of the gospel, however, were important resources in theological debates.

It seems that the rule of faith, rather than a scriptural witness, was the common trump card in the early church. In fact, coherence with the orthodoxy embodied in a community's rule of faith was one of the informal criteria used to determine whether a document was useful for teaching in early Christian liturgical settings.⁹ Doctrine, then, was a determining factor in establishing what works would come to be considered scripture. As works came to be considered scriptural, they in turn contributed to the formation of doctrine. In the debates of the fourth and fifth centuries, which gave clearer shape to a broad form of Christian orthodoxy, part of what the early theologians were doing was reflecting upon scripture. The relationship between scripture and doctrinal tradition in the early church, then, was dialectical. Tradition helped to give shape to scripture, which in turn provided content for theological claims that would become tradition.

⁸Merold Westphal, "Saving *Sola Scriptura* from Rhem and the Rationalists," *Perspectives* (February 1993): 11.

⁹See Lee Martin McDonald, "Identifying Scripture and Canon in the Early Church: The Criteria Question," in *The Canon Debate*, ed. Lee Martin McDonald and James A. Sanders (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2002), 428-30.

In our contemporary context, the canon of scripture is set, albeit with some variation between canons of the Old Testament in Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant traditions, and extremely rare variations in canons of the New Testament (as we find in the Syrian and Ethiopian Orthodox Churches). Should scripture, then, take on the role that the rule of faith played in the early church? To put the matter differently, now that we have a creedal canon of beliefs as well as a fairly well defined canon of scripture, should we dispense with the practice of the early church and make scripture the only ultimate standard for the community of faith? This has been the purported practice of many Protestants. Nevertheless, I can see no compelling reason to maintain this practice, and I can see several reasons not to do so.

Canonical Theism and the Rejection of *Sola Scriptura*

In my essay in the *Canonical Theism* volume, I claim that canonical theism rejects *sola scriptura*.¹⁰ Apart from the fact that the historic debates that gave birth to the principle of *sola scriptura* no longer come to bear directly upon us, I made this claim for three reasons. First, as I have tried to demonstrate above, *sola scriptura* departs from the historic practices of the church regarding the use of scripture during the first five centuries of the faith, a time when the basic contours of Christian orthodoxy were laid out.

Second, I find the claim that scripture is self-authenticating to be unconvincing. I teach New Testament in a seminary. I have also taught undergraduates in secular settings and in a private United Methodist university, and I have spent a great deal of time teaching in churches. In light of these experiences, it is in no way clear to me that scripture is self-authenticating, or that a reading coherent with the historic Christian faith is simply to be expected from the prayerful and diligent reader. Interpretations of biblical texts, even core biblical texts, can vary widely from person to person. This is no less the case among trained biblical scholars than among Christian laity.

Kenneth Collins seems to express an autopistic understanding of scripture in a vitriolic review of *Canonical Theism* in the *Asbury Journal*. He holds that the contributors to the volume have developed a “crowded

¹⁰David F. Watson, “The Jesus of History and Canon: Some Thoughts on Interdisciplinary Scholarship,” in *Canonical Theism*.

and over-determined conception of the canon” which may distort or even mute what he terms “the clear and distinct voice of the Old and New Testaments as they communicate the *kerygma*.”¹¹ As a biblical scholar, however, I often find the writings of the New Testament to be anything but clear. In fact, one can find whole traditions of biblical scholarship lining up in direct opposition to one another on any number of passages of the Old and New Testaments. The variegated witnesses, both oral and written, in the early Christian communities prompted statements of belief such as the rule of faith and various creeds. As Pavel Gavrilyuk points out in his essay in *Canonical Theism*, for Irenaeus the rule of faith provided a structure for reading the scriptures, a structure which was crucial precisely because these early Christian writings were so easy to misinterpret.¹²

Also problematic is Collins’ use of the word *kerygma*.¹³ The *kerygma* is generally understood as a reference to the earliest Christian preaching. This is a term made most popular by Rudolf Bultmann, who believed that the writings of the New Testament in fact *distorted* the *kerygma*, much like Collins believes that our over-crowded canon distorts it. According to Bultmann, the task of the historian was to look underneath these traditions, demythologizing them in order to discern the content of the *kerygma*. This desire to find the *kerygma* underscores the claim of Irenaeus, explained by Gavrilyuk. We need ways of identifying within scripture those points that are essential to our salvation. Creeds, like the Nicene Creed, or proto-creeds like the rule of faith, help to do this.

Third, *sola scriptura* is primarily an epistemic principle, and canonical theism privileges ontology over epistemology. Canonical theism holds that the claims of Nicene-Chalcedonian Christianity are true, and that there are and have always been a variety of ways of getting to that truth. To argue that one must adopt a particular epistemic position, be that *sola scriptura*, papal infallibility, or some other principle, in order properly to access to core truths of the faith is a mistake. *What* we believe is more important than *why* we believe it.

To claim that scripture is self-authenticating is to conflate scripture with catechesis, sacrament, liturgy, and creed. Scripture is a resource for

¹¹Kenneth J. Collins, review of *Canonical Theism*, in *The Asbury Journal* 63 no. 2, 106.

¹²See Pavel L. Gavrilyuk, “Scripture and the *Regula Fidei*: Two Interlocking Components of the Canonical Heritage” in *Canonical Theism*, 27-42.

¹³See Collins, review, 112.

teaching the faith, but not the sole resource. Rather, it is useful for illuminating the faith of the church that is handed on to us in a variety of ways.

Reflections, Ten Years Later

As a teacher of scripture, I have a deep concern both for intellectual integrity and for the spiritual development of my students. With regard to intellectual integrity, I teach critical interpretation of scripture. More specifically, I do not assume “(1) that when biblical texts portray past events they always represent history accurately, or (2) that the faith claims expressed within the Bible must cohere with faith claims of a particular later tradition (such as the doctrinal tradition of Christian orthodoxy).”¹⁴ My claim here is not that this is the only position that has intellectual integrity, but that, from my perspective, this understanding of scripture stands on firmer intellectual ground than the alternatives that I have encountered.

In teaching scripture, the last thing that I want to do is undermine my students’ faith in and relationship to the God who is revealed in Jesus Christ. It is common, however, for students who seriously engage critical biblical scholarship for the first time to react negatively. After all, they have often been taught to believe that the truth of the faith rests upon a particular conception of the truth of scripture. If this understanding of the truth of scripture does not hold, they reason, then the faith is not true. This can cause a crisis of faith, one that I think is unnecessary in the process of theological education.¹⁵ The position of Canonical Theism separates the truth of the faith, and by that I mean the basic truth of Nicene-Chalcedonian belief, from dependence upon a particular doctrine of scripture. Rather, scripture illuminates the faith of the church, a faith that has been passed down to us through the centuries in myriad ways, such as through liturgy, hymnody, the Eucharist, baptism, creed, theological reflections, and practices of prayer. Scripture bears witness to the faith of the church, but the faith of the church does not stand or fall on a particular conception of scripture’s truth.

By separating the truth of the faith from a particular doctrine of scripture, I am able to read scripture in light of its social and historical

¹⁴Watson, “Jesus of History and Canon,” 224.

¹⁵See William J. Abraham, “Canonical Theism and Evangelicalism,” in *Canonical Theism*, 257-58.

presuppositions without a need to dispense with central Christian faith claims. Pedagogically, I take my students through the formation of the canon. I teach them about the significance of the rule of faith in the early church. We discuss the dialectical relationship between scripture and doctrine. I help them to understand that the truth of the faith is not dependent upon a particular doctrine of scripture. We discuss the value of sacrament, creed, prayer, and some form of catechesis for the life of faith. In other words, before we ever touch the biblical texts, we talk about engaging God through the wide variety of resources that have been handed over to us through the church by the work of the Holy Spirit. I am not, then, pulling the rug out from under them, but rather showing them the many different types of fibers that are woven into it, each of which contributes to its beauty and wholeness. As Abraham has put it, “[T]he aim is not to read scripture merely historically but to receive it within a rich theistic vision that is unapologetic about its ontological and metaphysical commitments. Whatever the historical origins of the texts, scripture is now read as recontextualized within the life of faith, functioning in a host of ways to bring one to a vibrant faith in God and to sustain one in that faith.”¹⁶

For purposes of teaching in a United Methodist seminary, then, canonical theism has been a great gift. To a certain extent, Wesleyans are prepared to engage canonical theism because of their familiarity with the Wesleyan Quadrilateral. Indeed, I do see the irony in claiming that the Quadrilateral, which Prof. Abraham has roundly rejected, which he has in fact called “a hastily contrived shotgun wedding between scripture and tradition, the bride provided by the church, and reason and experience, the bridegroom, provided by the European Enlightenment,” has paved the way for what is perhaps his most distinctive contribution to Christian theology.¹⁷

Truth is stranger than fiction and, like it or not, Wesleyans are among the best prepared Protestants to engage canonical theism, in large part because of the Quadrilateral. Whether or not the Quadrilateral repre-

¹⁶Abraham, “Canonical Theism and Evangelicalism,” 260. For other insights on canonical theism and theological education, see Frederick W. Schmidt, “What Is Being Asked of You? Canonical Theism and Theological Education,” in *Canonical Theism*.

¹⁷William J. Abraham, *Waking from Doctrinal Amnesia: The Healing of Doctrine in the United Methodist Church* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995), 61.

sents a workable method is debatable, but it has preserved among Wesleyans the idea that tradition has something to teach us about the life of faith. We need not make scripture do all of the heavy lifting theologically because the Christians who have gone before us have provided myriad resources that help us to be immersed more fully in the life of God.

I am not optimistic, however, that canonical theism will make considerable inroads in the evangelical world outside of Wesleyan or Anglican evangelicals. Evangelicals are one of the target audiences of the canonical theism volume. Abraham devotes an entire chapter to canonical theism and evangelicalism.¹⁸ Yet much of the evangelical movement is infused with Reformed theology, and I am not convinced that canonical theism and Reformed theology are compatible. For one thing, for Christians deeply committed to the Reformed tradition, *sola scriptura* is still a very important concept. Canonical theism's rejection of *sola scriptura* will on that score be a deal breaker.

Second, some will hear canonical theism as simply "too Catholic." There is still a strong anti-Roman Catholic sentiment in some evangelical quarters, and especially those strongly influenced by the Reformed tradition. Both the desire to preserve *sola scriptura* and an anti-Roman Catholic sentiment are found within one paragraph of a recent essay by W. Robert Godfrey, president of Westminster Theological Seminary in California. He writes:

I am eager to join that historic train of Protestant apologists to defend the doctrine that the Scripture is our ultimate religious authority. I believe that it can be shown that this position is the clear position of Scripture itself. And I hope that, by the grace of God, those committed to the Roman doctrine of tradition will come to see the tragic error of denigrating the sufficiency and perspicuity of God's own inspired Word.¹⁹

The areas in which canonical theism draws upon resources of Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy will be difficult for some evangelical Christians to overcome. In fact, I think many will not want to.

¹⁸See Abraham, "Canonical Theism and Evangelicalism."

¹⁹W. Robert Godfrey, "What Do We Mean by *Sola Scriptura*?" in *Sola Scriptura! The Protestant Position on the Bible*, ed. Don Kistler (Morgan, Penn.: Soli Deo Gloria, 1995), 2.

Conclusion

In sum, canonical theism rejects the principle of *sola scriptura* primarily because this concept of scripture does not sufficiently account for the dialectical relationship between scripture and doctrinal tradition as both of these were emerging in the first five centuries of Christian history. This rejection of *sola scriptura* has some real strengths, but it also presents problems with regard to the ecumenicity of canonical theism. Though no theological proposal is without its problems, I nevertheless believe that canonical theism can make a vital contribution to theological education and more broadly to the life of the church.

OUTLER'S QUADRILATERAL, MORAL PSYCHOLOGY, AND THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION IN THE WESLEYAN TRADITION

by

Andrew C. Thompson

Since its original inclusion in the *Book of Discipline* in 1972, the construct known as the “Quadrilateral” has loomed large in theological reflection in the United Methodist Church (UMC). First articulated by Albert C. Outler, it has been defended as a concept that is *Wesleyan* and *methodological*, meaning that it existed as a coherent theological method in John Wesley’s thought. Today it is invoked widely in constructive theological work, in areas from the doctrine of God to Christian ethics. The Quadrilateral does not enjoy universal support, however, and debates both scholarly and ecclesiastical have raged over the claims to its validity for Wesleyan theology. A number of critiques in recent decades have attacked the way sources are framed or the criteria by which those sources are used, arguing that the Quadrilateral is neither authentically Wesleyan nor coherently methodological. Such critiques call the Quadrilateral into question as the Church’s preferred paradigm for the work of theology, and the combined force of these arguments must be considered.

The strongest reason to question the Quadrilateral as “the” manner in which to think about Wesleyan theological reflection is found in an area other than debates internal to the Quadrilateral itself. An historical examination of the way Wesley approached the tasks for which the

Quadrilateral is typically employed reveals that those tasks are much better framed with attention to Wesley's moral psychology and doctrine of sanctification than through the adjudication of sources and criteria. This essay proceeds by arguing for this view by surveying the arguments for and against the Quadrilateral's inclusion in the doctrinal section of the UMC's *Book of Discipline* and with an alternative proposal for engaging in Wesleyan theological reflection via the restoration of the soul's faculties in sanctification.

Constructive Theological Reflection in the *Book of Discipline*

The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church has been described by the Church's episcopal leadership as both a "book of law" and "book of covenant" that guides and governs the people called Methodists within the UMC.¹ As such, it contains the history, doctrinal standards, organizational structure, and administrative apparatus that together make up the Church's constitution.² From the early days of the UMC's original predecessor body—the Methodist Episcopal Church—the *Book of Discipline* has represented the evolving understanding of Methodism's ministry and mission in the world. A central part of this understanding can be found in the *Book of Discipline's* doctrinal section which guides Methodists in such fundamental areas as the doctrine of God, Christology, soteriology, the sacraments, and theological anthropology.³ Presented in both an historical/linear and contemporary/spatial framework, the *Discipline's* doctrinal section is also written with reference to both the Church's commitment to historical Christianity and its

¹"Episcopal Greetings" in *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church, 2004* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2004), v. The phrase "book of law" is conspicuously absent from the 2008 edition of the *Discipline*, the first time it has not appeared since its original inclusion in 1980. The phrase "book of covenant" is, however, still present.

²I intend "constitution" here in the broad sense, meaning the way in which the Church is conceived as a specific ecclesiastical communion in faithfulness to the Scriptures and tradition of the church catholic, as these are understood by United Methodists. The Church's Constitution, in the narrow sense of its legal organization under ecclesiastical law, is found within *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church, 2008*, ¶¶1-61 (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2008), 21-39. This edition is hereafter cited as *Book of Discipline (2008)*.

³*Book of Discipline (2008)*, ¶¶101-104; 41-86.

ecumenical understanding as a reforming body within the church catholic.⁴

The *Book of Discipline* does not, however, simply give a descriptive account of doctrine. It also ventures into the area of theological method with a section entitled "Our Theological Task." This section's introduction states: "While the Church considers its doctrinal affirmations a central feature of its identity and restricts official changes to a constitutional process, the Church encourages serious reflection across the theological spectrum."⁵ The theological reflection to which the *Book of Discipline* refers is oriented around *sources* and *criteria*, which it traces back to John Wesley. The *Discipline* goes on to describe them by stating, "Wesley believed that the living core of the Christian faith was revealed in Scripture, illumined by tradition, vivified in personal experience, and confirmed by reason."⁶ It further connects the four sources of Scripture, tradition, experience, and reason with the manner of theological work typical of Wesley during his own lifetime, before explaining the way in which the four sources may be used in contemporary theological reflection.⁷

The theological method framed in the "Our Theological Task" section of the *Book of Discipline* is not specifically named, but it is known in common Methodist parlance as the "Wesleyan Quadrilateral." Since its original formulation and inclusion in the 1972 edition of the *Book of Discipline*, the Quadrilateral has had pride of place within United Methodist theological reflection.⁸ Even so, neither the formulation nor the use of the

⁴These historical and ecumenical commitments present in the *Book of Discipline* (2008) are described first through the quasi-narrative section in ¶101 entitled, "Our Doctrinal Heritage." Within that description is an attention to the particularly soteriological focus of Wesleyan theology (45-50) and to *The Nature, Design, and General Rules of Our United Societies* (72-74). Commitments to both historical fidelity and ecumenical understanding are embodied second in the church's Articles of Religion and Confession of Faith, both of which are expressions of the church's rootedness in the Reformation theology of the Anglican tradition (59-71).

⁵ *Book of Discipline* (2008), ¶104; 75.

⁶ Ibid., ¶104; 77. The *Discipline* also states, "The interaction of these sources and criteria in Wesley's own theology furnishes a guide for our continuing theological task as United Methodists."

⁷ Ibid., ¶104; 78-83.

⁸ This essay is driven by a consideration of the Quadrilateral within the life of the United Methodist Church, but the Quadrilateral's wider popularity within the denominations that make up the Wesleyan tradition mean that I also write with that wider Wesleyan theological and ecclesial world in mind.

Quadrilateral is without controversy. Various scholars (with various opinions about its origin and value) have referred to it as the Methodist Quadrilateral, the United Methodist Quadrilateral, the Quadrilateral (upper-case “Q”), and the quadrilateral (lower-case “q”).⁹ Where a descriptive modifier is required, the present essay refers to “Outler’s Quadrilateral” in evaluating the history, use, and propriety of the construct in question, because it was, as a matter of fact, first named by prominent twentieth-century Methodist scholar Albert C. Outler. Moreover, Outler himself, together with his vision of a United Methodist theological and ecclesial future following the 1968 formation of the United Methodist Church, stand at the center, and provide the starting point of debate around the Quadrilateral as a conceptual theological method.¹⁰

Outler’s Quadrilateral: Development, Revision, and Critique

The conceptual development of the Quadrilateral can be connected with the development of modern critical Wesley Studies from the 1960s onward. Colin Williams’ landmark study of Wesley’s theology in 1960 contains a chapter describing the use and interaction of Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience within a “structure of authority” in Wesley’s theology.¹¹ As Randy Maddox explains, Williams’ project served at the time as both a “much-needed survey of Wesley’s theology” and a “resource for contemporary Methodism.”¹² Williams’ book was also published at the very cusp of the revival of interest in Methodism’s Wesleyan

⁹The terms used for the Quadrilateral appear in the relevant books and articles published since its inclusion in the 1972 *Book of Discipline*, largely by those scholars who appear in either the text or footnotes of the present essay.

¹⁰Though the term “Outler’s Quadrilateral” is new with this essay, Outler’s role in articulating and defending the concept as both *Wesleyan* and *methodological* merits its enduring identification with him.

¹¹Colin W. Williams, *John Wesley’s Theology Today: A Study of the Wesleyan Tradition in the Light of Current Theological Dialogue* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1960), 23–38.

¹²Randy L. Maddox, “Reclaiming an Inheritance: Wesley as Theologian in the History of Methodist Theology,” in Maddox, ed., *Rethinking Wesley’s Theology for Contemporary Methodism* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1998), 213, 223. Ted A. Campbell goes further than Maddox in pointing to Williams’ text as a main foreshadowing of the Quadrilateral’s conceptual development throughout the 1960s. See Campbell, “The ‘Wesleyan Quadrilateral’: The Story of a Modern Methodist Myth,” in Thomas A. Langford, ed., *Doctrine and Theology in the United Methodist Church* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1991), 155–156.

foundations.¹³ Significantly, Williams' analysis of Wesley's use of theological sources also looks remarkably similar to the way the Quadrilateral would eventually be articulated for the United Methodist Church a few years later.

Williams' important work notwithstanding, however, it was Albert Outler who played the largest role in initiating the neo-Wesleyan revival.¹⁴ It was also Outler who would definitively propose and describe the Quadrilateral for the United Methodist Church. He chaired a Theological Study Commission at the behest of the UMC's inaugural General Conference in 1968 that was given the task of reconciling the sets of doctrinal standards held by the two ecclesiastical bodies that had come together to form the UMC: the Methodist Church (with its Articles of Religion) and the Evangelical United Brethren Church (with its Confession of Faith). However, rather than attempt the complicated and politically fraught process of actually rewriting the two sets of doctrinal material into a single new confession, Outler's Commission instead decided to recommend keeping both Articles *and* Confession in the *Book of Discipline* while constructing a novel statement on the necessity and parameters of ongoing constructive theological reflection in the life of the Church. That statement, once finished, included the concept the Church came to call the "Wesleyan Quadrilateral."¹⁵ The term itself is Outler's own, with the first significant use of "quadrilateral" appearing in a report he gave on behalf of the Theological Study Commission to the specially-

¹³It is impossible to imagine that the recently published and popular *Wesley Study Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2009) would have been undertaken were it not for the neo-Wesleyan revival that Williams' careful study helped to inaugurate.

¹⁴See, e.g., Maddox, "Reclaiming an Inheritance," in Maddox, ed., *Rethinking Wesley's Theology*, 224-226.

¹⁵A history of the development and interpretation of Outler's Quadrilateral has yet to be written, though many of the relevant scholarly debates are collected in the essays of Langford's edited volume, *Doctrine and Theology in the United Methodist Church*. The relevant historical documents that show the substance of the work Outler's Theological Study Commission performed between 1968 and 1972 include: "The Theological Study Commission on Doctrine and Doctrinal Standards: An Interim Report to the General Conference" (an unpublished report delivered to the 1970 General Conference); Outler, "Introduction to the Report of the 1968-72 Theological Study Commission," in Langford, ed., *Doctrine and Theology*, 20-25; and the *Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church*, 1972, ¶¶68-70 (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1972), 39-82.

called General Conference of 1970.¹⁶ Two years later, the Commission's statement was presented to the General Conference of 1972, which adopted it and included it in the *Book of Discipline* published that year.

Outler's Quadrilateral was not met with universal acclaim, however. Methodists had never been known as a group of people to grapple on an ecclesiastical level with substantive issues of doctrine, but suddenly they found themselves in the midst of sharp debates over issues such as the nature of biblical authority and theological pluralism. Large parts of the UMC began to think throughout the 1970s and early 1980s that the *Book of Discipline's* statement on "Our Theological Task" was taking the Church away from theological orthodoxy and that Outler's Quadrilateral was a rather un-Wesleyan construct after all. The prospect of a revision to the Quadrilateral between the General Conferences of 1984 and 1988 led Outler to make his most spirited defense of the methodological construct, appearing in the form of a 1985 essay he pointedly entitled, "The Wesleyan Quadrilateral—in John Wesley." In the essay, Outler refers to his construct straightforwardly as "Wesley's theological method."¹⁷ But the desire for a more qualified statement on the Quadrilateral proved too strong. The charge that the Quadrilateral diminished the primacy of Scripture in theological reflection and encouraged pluralism had caused the 1984 General Conference to appoint a Committee on "Our Theological Task" (COTT) to review the statement in the *Book of Discipline* and recommend any necessary changes.¹⁸ COTT's work precipitated a signifi-

¹⁶"Interim Report of 1970," 4, 8. The Commission's interim report shows a clear preference for understanding its role as articulating a faithful form of constructive reflection as opposed to formulating a descriptive doctrinal statement. This preference was present in Outler's oral presentation to the Conference as well as reflected in the news report, "Seminar-Style Conference Examines Theology and Polity," in *Christian Advocate: For Pastors and Church Leaders* 14:9 (April 30, 1970), 3. The special called session of General Conference took place on April 20-24, 1970, in St. Louis, Missouri.

¹⁷"The Wesleyan Quadrilateral—in John Wesley," in Langford, ed., *Doctrine and Theology*, 80. Originally published in the *Wesleyan Theological Journal* in 1985.

¹⁸The work done by the COTT is recounted in Richard P. Heitzenrater, "In Search of Continuity and Consensus: The Road to the 1988 Doctrinal Statement," in Langford, ed., *Doctrine and Theology*, 93-108. The COTT was chaired by Bishop Earl Hunt. Richard Heitzenrater himself chaired the writing sub-committee that authored the revision passed by the General Conference in 1988. He calls the revisions approved by the General Conference that reshaped the way the Quadrilateral was expressed, "major departures from the approach of the 1972 statement" (97).

cant revision to the *Discipline* four years later that sought to clarify the distinction between doctrinal standards and constructive theology, as well as to emphasize the primacy of biblical authority among the sources named in the Quadrilateral.¹⁹

The revised form of the Quadrilateral has remained unchanged in the *Book of Discipline* from 1988 to the present. Criticisms of it did not end with the 1988 revision either, though, and these have continued to question its legitimacy in the academy as well as the church. Such criticisms fall into historical and philosophical categories. Historical arguments, lodged most forcefully by Ted Campbell and Scott J. Jones, contend that our concept of "tradition" was not operative in Wesley's thought and that any account of Wesley's use of the Christian past as a source of authority would need to be confined primarily to the early church and to the Reformation-era theology and liturgy of the Church of England.²⁰ Philosophical criticisms have charged that the Quadrilateral's formulation amounts to a conceptual incoherence due to the pairing of historical realities within the Church (Scripture and tradition) with categories in epistemology (reason and experience). The philosophical angle is pursued strongly by

¹⁹For a comparison between the 1972 and 1988 doctrinal statements, see *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church, 1972*, ¶¶68-70; 39-82, and *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church, 1988*, ¶¶66-69 (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1988), 40-90. The 1988 *Discipline* sharply tones down various statements that had seemed to denigrate the role of the Articles and Confession as doctrinal standards while privileging ongoing constructive theological formulations. It also downplays affirmations of pluralism and accentuates the primacy of biblical authority.

²⁰See Campbell, "The 'Wesleyan Quadrilateral': The Story of a Modern Methodist Myth," in Langford, ed., *Doctrine and Theology*, 159-161, and Scott J. Jones, *John Wesley's Conception and Use of Scripture* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1995), 63-64. Wesley cited individual Patristic sources but was also prone to refer to the "primitive church" as a norm for faith and practice. Within the tradition in the Church of England, he particularly took the *Homilies*, the 39 Articles of Religion, and the *Book of Common Prayer* as norms. There are other discernible sources of authority for Wesley within what we would call "tradition" that had an impact on his theology, such as the holy living tradition exemplified in Thomas à Kempis' *Imitation of Christ* and Jeremy Taylor's *Rules and Exercises of Holy Living and Dying*. However, the two periods cited above are the only two historical *categories* we can accurately use. Wesley certainly did not see the magisterial tradition of the church, in the Roman Catholic sense, as authoritative and it is there that Campbell and Jones make their most pointed critiques of the way the Quadrilateral is framed.

William J. Abraham, whose combined arguments amount to the most sustained critique of Outler's Quadrilateral as a viable model for theological reflection.²¹ While the historical arguments attack the supposedly "Wesleyan" character of the Quadrilateral as it is framed, the latter philosophical criticisms call into question its status as a defensible methodology.

Outler's death came in 1989, at a time, unfortunately, when he was pained by the rancor over the Quadrilateral debates. In the aforementioned 1985 essay, he had admitted, "The term 'quadrilateral' does not occur in the Wesley corpus—and more than once I have regretted having coined it for contemporary use since it has been so widely misconstrued."²² And in his last public lecture at Lake Junaluska, NC, in 1989, Outler reflected on the Quadrilateral's troubled history and his authorial role in it, stating, "If it was a fault, it was a grievous fault and grievously have I suffered from it."²³ One cannot help but regret that his death just

²¹Abraham believes the Quadrilateral aspires to be a "theory of knowledge," and that it is in exactly this epistemological area that it fails. By this line of critique, the Quadrilateral would need to provide an account of revelation, which it does not. For Abraham's commentary on the Quadrilateral in numerous books and articles over the past three decades, see: Abraham, "The Wesleyan Quadrilateral," in Theodore Runyon, ed., *Wesleyan Theology Today: A Bicentennial Theological Consultation* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1985); Abraham, "On How to Dismantle the Wesleyan Quadrilateral: A Study in the Thought of Albert C. Knudson," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 20:1 (Spring 1985), 34-44; Abraham, *Waking from Doctrinal Amnesia: The Healing of Doctrine in The United Methodist Church* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995); Abraham, "United Methodists at the End of the Mainline," *First Things* 84 (June/July 1998) 28-33; Abraham, "What's Right and What's Wrong with the Quadrilateral?" (unpublished manuscript provided to me by the author); Abraham, "What Should United Methodists Do with the Quadrilateral?" *Quarterly Review* 22:1 (Spring 2002), 85-88; Abraham, "The End of Wesleyan Theology," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 40:1 (Spring 2005), 7-25. Only the two earliest of these give a semi-positive account of the place of the Quadrilateral in theological reflection. In "What's Right and What's Wrong with the Quadrilateral?" Abraham makes a *mea culpa* of sorts and admits that his early optimism about the Quadrilateral was unfounded (see 1, n.6).

²²Outler, "The Wesleyan Quadrilateral – in John Wesley," in Landford, ed., *Doctrine and Theology*, 86.

²³Outler, "Through a Glass Darkly: Our History Speaks To Our Future," *Methodist History* 28:2 (January 1990), 86. *Methodist History* published a transcription of Outler's actual delivered speech. For the manuscript from which he spoke, see Bob W. Parrott, ed., *Albert Outler The Churchman* (Anderson, IN: Bristol House, 1995), 452-471.

weeks after the Lake Junaluska address came before time had the chance to heal some of the wounds Outler suffered throughout the 1980s over the Quadrilateral's reception in the Church. A scholar who gave so much of himself to the Church and who did so much to advance the development of modern critical Wesley Studies surely deserved better.

Criticisms of the Quadrilateral are not undone by whatever regret we might have over Outler's particular experience, however. And added to the specific critiques of the four components of Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience, there is one more that is perhaps most damning of all: the assertion that the honest and careful use of the Quadrilateral can lead to diametrically opposed conclusions on a single theological question, depending on the person employing it. This critique has been made at different times by such scholars as Thomas Langford, Kathy Rudy, and Stephen Gunter.²⁴ On the one hand, it suggests that the criteria by which the four sources are used depends less on guiding Wesleyan standards than it does on contemporary hermeneutical commitments (and also, perhaps, on the idiosyncrasies of the individual using it). On the other, it suggests further questions. If the Church desires an accurate account of Wesleyan theological reflection, is Outler's Quadrilateral simply the wrong way to go? Should our energies even be focused on an issue – methodology – that has little bearing on the contours of “practical divinity” in the Wesleyan mode? Might we locate another possibility that offers the Church a better guide to the manner of theological reflection suggested by Wesley's own example and precept?

Such an inquiry turns us away from arguments internal to the Quadrilateral and toward issues of formation that require attention to John

²⁴Thomas Langford argues that the Quadrilateral's formulation contains a “deceptive simplicity” found in “the assumption that each of the categories is clear and all that is needed is to work out a proper relationship among them” (Langford, “The United Methodist Quadrilateral: A Theological Task,” in Langford, ed., *Doctrine and Theology*, 233). Kathy Rudy writes, “It is not the case that the authorities encased in the quadrilateral lead us nowhere; indeed, the problem is that in and of themselves, scripture, tradition, reason, and experience can lead us almost anywhere” (Rudy, “Abortion, Grace, and the Wesleyan Quadrilateral,” *Quarterly Review* 15:1 (Spring 1995), 79. See also Gunter, “What Should United Methodists Do with the Quadrilateral?” *Quarterly Review* 22:1 (Spring 2002), 90.

Wesley's understanding of moral psychology and its intersection with the doctrine of sanctification.²⁵

Significance of Moral Psychology in the Theological Task

For those interested in a Wesleyan approach to responsible theological or moral reflection, what Outler fails to develop in his accounts of the Quadrilateral is a centrally important point. In his defense of the Quadrilateral written in the midst of the debates over whether to revise it within the UMC, Outler only offers two cursory statements pointing to the skills necessary for the kind of theologizing the Quadrilateral is supposed to facilitate.²⁶ Yet, in Wesley's own theology, it is clear that ongoing formation (in the sense of practical discipleship) and progress in sanctification (in the sense of a soteriological reality) are requisite conditions for mature theological reflection and/or moral reasoning. Moreover, Wesley's conception of human depravity, the debilitating effects of sin on body and soul, means that both human thought and action are rendered incapable of discerning the good on their own. Thus, while *Scripture* and *tradition* are vital sources of authority for theological reflection, for Wesley we do not have

²⁵For a recent call to end the overly-heavy focus on questions of methodology in Wesleyan theology, see Jason E. Vickers, "Albert Outler and the Future of Wesleyan Theology: Retrospect and Prospect," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 43:2 (Fall 2008), 56-67. In the following section, my own criticism of the methodological approach to Wesleyan theology is different than Abraham's in that he sees an incoherent formulation of the components internal to the Quadrilateral, whereas I will argue that methodology is simply the wrong framework entirely.

²⁶See Outler, "The Wesleyan Quadrilateral—In John Wesley," in Langford, ed., *Doctrine and Theology*, 80 and 86. At both points, Outler's makes only vague suggestions that point toward the need for formation in employing the Quadrilateral. The second of these, in particular, offers an example of Outler's generally engaging and persuasive rhetorical style that is confusing more than clarifying. He writes, "The 'quadrilateral' requires of a theologian no more than what he or she might reasonably be held accountable for: which is to say, a familiarity with Scripture that is both critical and faithful; plus, an acquaintance with the wisdom of the Christian past; plus, a taste for logical analysis as something more than a debater's weapon; plus, a vital, inward faith that is upheld by the assurance of grace and its prospective triumphs, *in this life*" (86). But does his use of "theologian" imply that a layperson cannot do theology using the Quadrilateral? If so, does that contradict his earlier statement in the same essay that Wesley's willingness to alter Anglican customs had the practical effect of "mak[ing] every Methodist man and woman his/her own theologian?" (80).

the inherent ability to read them well or discern the revelation contained within them absent the restoration of the soul's faculties in sanctification.

Indeed, *reason* is one of those faculties given by God as the means whereby human beings make sense of their world. But reason is thoroughly compromised by sin and cannot be used well to understand those dimensions of reality concerning God and the things of God without a rehabilitation through grace. *Experience*, of course, is Wesley's primary epistemological referent; it is the means whereby we apprehend both natural and supernatural reality (and is thus the grist for reason's mill). However, the trustworthiness of experience is also debilitated by the effects of sin on the soul. For experience to be received and interpreted rightly, a person must enter into a process of restoration that can only come through a life patterned by participation in those practices known as the means of grace. The best method of Wesleyan theological reflection—if "method" is even an appropriate term to use—turns out to be necessarily viewed through Wesley's doctrine of salvation and, in particular, through the intersection of soteriology and moral psychology.²⁷

A. The Circumstances of the Fall: "*He sinned with his eyes open.*"²⁸ Wesley's understanding of the soul's constitution is divided into the components of understanding (or reason), will (or tempers and affections), and liberty, a description consistently present in his writing

²⁷Don Thorsen best represents the attempt to defend the Quadrilateral in the way Outler hoped it would be used. See Thorsen, *The Wesleyan Quadrilateral: A Model of Evangelical Theology* (Lexington, KY: Emeth Press, 2005). Originally published in 1990. Thorsen recognizes Wesley's lack of an explicit statement of theological methodology and admits the necessity of a reconstruction. He attempts to overcome the somewhat anachronistic tendency to apply the norms of a theological sub-discipline that postdates Wesley's life (i.e., systematic theology as conceived since the nineteenth century) by locating Wesley within an "Anglican" approach to theology traced from Richard Hooker (see 11-32). Thorsen is clearly right in characterizing Wesley's *method* in the Anglican mold, but that is a different matter than applying a *methodology* to his work. Therefore, the present essay does not engage Thorsen's work for historiographical reasons—namely, the view that it is inadvisable to apply a later time period's "grammar" to an earlier one in which the same concepts were not operative.

²⁸The quotation in this section heading comes from Wesley, "On the Fall of Man" (1782), ¶1.1, in the *Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1976 -), 2:403. Hereafter cited as *Works*.

from the beginning to the end of his career.²⁹ In its original, pre-lapsarian state, humanity enjoyed these three faculties in their perfection. That is, prior to the fall, Adam's *understanding* was such that he saw things according to their own nature. For him, "Light and darkness there were, but no twilight; whenever the shades of ignorance withdrew, in that moment the broader day appeared, the full blaze of knowledge shined. He was equally a stranger to error and doubt; either he saw not at all, or he saw plainly."³⁰ With such a perfect understanding, Adam "discerned truth by intuition."³¹ There was no veil of ignorance or confusion separating Adam's reason from things-as-they-are.

Coupled with his reason, Adam enjoyed a perfection of the *will* as well. Treating will as expressive of the affections, Wesley asserts that Adam's affections were "set right, and duly exercised on their proper objects," meaning that they existed in an uncorrupted state and in harmony with reason.³² A perfect reason and will are aspects of humanity's creation in the *natural image of God*, but Wesley does not see them as the totality of God's creative work. He also views the doctrine of *creatio ad imaginem dei* as encompassing a will formed by holy love.³³ So not only is Adam created in God's natural image, he was also created in the *moral image of God*, which (following 1 John 4:16) Wesley understands as *Love*.³⁴ The emphasis on creation in conformity to God's moral attributes is here stressed in the supreme place Wesley gives to the will's perfection: "Far greater and nobler was his second endowment, namely, a will equally perfect. It could not but be perfect while it followed the dictates of such [a perfect] understanding. His affections were rational, even, and regular—if we may be allowed to say 'affections,' for properly speaking he had but

²⁹Wesley, "The Image of God" (1730), ¶I.1-4, in *Works* 4:293-295; "The New Birth" (1760), ¶I.1, in *Works* 2:188-189; "The End of Christ's Coming" (1781), ¶¶I.3-4, in *Works* 2:474-475; "On the Fall of Man" (1782), ¶I, in *Works* 2:400-401. Cf. Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1994), 65-68.

³⁰Wesley, "The Image of God" (1730), ¶I.1, in *Works* 4:293-294.

³¹Wesley, "The End of Christ's Coming" (1781), ¶¶I.3, in *Works* 2:474.

³²*Ibid.*, ¶I.7, in *Works* 2:475. Commenting on Wesley's identification of the will as expressive of the totality of the affections, Maddox describes the will as constituting the "motivating dispositions" of a person, which suggests an active rather than static quality (Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 69).

³³Wesley, "The Image of God" (1730), in *Works* 4:294.

³⁴Wesley, "The End of Christ's Coming" (1781), ¶I.7, in *Works* 2:475.

one: man was what God is, Love.”³⁵ A perfect will is a will formed by love, allowing Adam to “love, desire, and delight in that which is good.”³⁶

The soul’s third constitutive property was that, from a perfect understanding and a perfect will, humanity also enjoyed a perfect *liberty* or freedom. Here, Wesley links the two faculties of understanding and will in a way that reflects the nature of perfection itself. That is, human action could be directed by reason in a way that was unencumbered by any exterior forces or interior corruptions that would inhibit it. Wesley describes the soul’s liberty as “a power of choosing what was good, and refusing what was not so,”³⁷ or “a power of directing his own affections and actions, a capacity of determining himself, of choosing good or evil.”³⁸ Liberty here is seen less as part of the soul’s substance than as the inherent power derived from the perfection of understanding and will—and a power that completes creation in the divine image: “Without this both the will and the understanding would have been utterly useless. Indeed without liberty man had been so far from being a *free agent* that he would have been no *agent* at all.”³⁹

Liberty, then, gives humanity the freedom to participate in the divine image fully. With the will having the ability to freely follow the dictates of understanding, the soul’s constitution obtains a harmony of operations that defines true *happiness*. Wesley concludes,

The result of all these—an unerring understanding, an uncorrupt will, and perfect freedom—gave the last stroke to the image of God in man, by crowning all these with happiness. Then indeed to live was to enjoy, when every faculty was in its perfection, amidst abundance of objects which infinite wisdom had purposely suited to it, when man’s understanding was satisfied with truth, as his will was with good; when he was at full liberty to enjoy the Creator or the creation.⁴⁰

³⁵Wesley, “The Image of God” (1730), ¶I.2, in *Works* 4:294.

³⁶Wesley, “The End of Christ’s Coming” (1781), ¶I.4, in *Works* 2:474.

³⁷*Ibid.*, ¶I.4, in *Works* 2:475.

³⁸Wesley, “On the Fall of Man” (1782), ¶1, in *Works* 2:401.

³⁹Wesley, “The End of Christ’s Coming” (1781), ¶I.4, in *Works* 2:475.

⁴⁰Wesley, “The Image of God” (1730), ¶I.4, in *Works* 4:295. This view is underscored in “The Original, Nature, Properties, and Use of the Law” (1750), where Wesley argues that the will was created in conjunction with understanding and liberty so that humanity might be able to follow the moral law (¶I.1, in *Works* 2:6).

In the area of moral reasoning, humanity in its original perfection had the full ability to pursue love, not under compulsion but rather by the freedom that is characteristic of God himself.

B. The Effects of the Fall Upon the Soul: “Sin, misery, and corruption.”⁴¹ The harmony enjoyed by the soul was subsequently decimated by the Fall, with the rebellion against God’s original intent for human happiness occurring through a perversion of the very liberty human beings enjoyed in their perfection. Adam, Wesley explains, “having this power, a power of choosing good or evil, he chose the latter—he chose evil.”⁴² Satan’s temptation in the Garden of Eden is, moreover, not understood as a trick ultimately played by God, but instead as the necessary trial implied by perfect liberty; that is, without the temptation to choose evil over good, there would have been no real liberty at all.⁴³ The choice ultimately made—that of rebellion, evil, and idolatry—was a free one made by a free moral agent. As Wesley contends, Adam “sinned with his eyes open.”⁴⁴

Wesley’s theological anthropology takes into account the effects of rebellion against God’s original intention of harmonious happiness and considers them devastating for both body and soul. The just retribution of God and the curses leveled in Genesis 3:14-19 are experienced bodily through pain, corruption and decay of the physical body, and ultimately death.⁴⁵ The soul also experiences the effects of sin through the corruption of all of its faculties: understanding, will, and liberty. Understanding “mistook falsehood for truth;” the will “was . . . seized by legions of vile affections;” and liberty “became the slave of vice.”⁴⁶ Thus, Wesley’s theological anthropology is marked by sin’s devastatingly disordering effects, which leaves the human body subject to decay and moral psychology in a debilitated state. We cannot think rightly, feel rightly, or act rightly. Absent grace, we can only rightly speak of the human condition as “the universal depravity of our nature,”⁴⁷ a reality Wesley also describes as “the entire depravation of the whole human nature.”⁴⁸

⁴¹The quotation in this section heading comes from Wesley, “The Image of God” (1730), ¶4, in *Works* 4:293.

⁴²Wesley, “On the Fall of Man” (1782), ¶1, in *Works* 2:401.

⁴³Wesley, “The Image of God” (1730), ¶II, in *Works* 4:295-296.

⁴⁴Wesley, “On the Fall of Man” (1782), ¶I.1, in *Works* 2:403.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, ¶I.2-4, in *Works* 2:403-405.

⁴⁶Wesley, “The Image of God” (1730), ¶II.2-4, in *Works* 4:298-299.

⁴⁷Wesley, “Of the Church” (1785), ¶II.21, in *Works* 3:53.

⁴⁸Wesley, “Original Sin” (1759), ¶III.1, in *Works* 2:183.

How, then, do we translate this image of a sin-broken moral psychology into the arena of theological reflection to which Outler's Quadrilateral has typically been applied? While resting on a broad (that is to say, catholic) foundation of doctrinal standards as expressed in its Articles of Religion and Confession of Faith, the United Methodist Church urges the faithful within its membership to do "serious reflection across the theological spectrum."⁴⁹ That ongoing work does, indeed, need to be done with reference to appropriate sources and the analytical criteria by which they are adjudicated. But what about the *people* doing the work? Wesley's doctrine of sin and its effects on the human condition imply that proper theological reflection cannot proceed without addressing the way in which the disordered soul can be rehabilitated. Certainly, moral reasoning cannot proceed. And if we accept that all constructive theology is a species of moral reasoning, then it follows that no such theological reflection can occur with propriety without the rehabilitation of the internal faculties of the soul that would make it possible.⁵⁰

Graced Healing and Character Formation in Theological Reflection

The previous examination of the impact of sin within Wesley's theological anthropology considered the matter of *depravity* in the abstract. We should note, however, that no one is in as hopeless a condition as the abstract illustration would suggest. The path of rehabilitation that allows a person to engage adequately in theological reflection begins, then, with a two-fold recognition. First, the faculty of reason is damaged but not destroyed. Consider that Wesley's conception of depravity tends to be more concerned with the will than with reason. It is with the will, in particular, that he sees the corrupting effects of sin in a person leading inevitably to such idolatries as pride, self-will, and an inordinate love of the world, all of which bespeak of an enslavement to "sensual appetites"

⁴⁹*Book of Discipline* (2008), ¶104; 75.

⁵⁰In a Wesleyan sense, all constructive theology can be seen as a species of moral reasoning because such work entails reflection on a God whose chief attribute is love. The *moral image of God* is that aspect of God's character in which we are most fully created as God's children, according to Wesley. And the condition of *holiness*, which is the very substance of sanctification in Wesley's thought, is "no less than the image of God stamped upon the heart." See Wesley, "The New Birth" (1760), ¶III.1, in *Works* 2:194. Thus, to engage in reflection about this God is to reflect upon (and even participate in) holy love—a moral exercise.

that “have, more or less, the dominion over him.”⁵¹ In the case of reason, Wesley tends not to be as uniformly harsh. While he can speak in one place of human nature as “totally corrupted in all its faculties,”⁵² he does not present reason as corrupted in the same way that the will is—even apart from God’s healing work through grace. In “The Case of Reason Impartially Considered” (1781), for instance, Wesley seems to suggest that reason is left somewhat intact despite the effects of the fall. Though he criticizes Enlightenment thinkers who view reason as “the great unerring guide,” his criticism is aimed at the idea that reason can show us too much, not that it is wholly debilitated.⁵³ Likewise, Wesley states in regard to Adam’s choice, “In that moment he *lost* the moral image of God, and, *in part*, the natural.”⁵⁴ He is therefore willing to admit that reason has a role to play in the human being’s ability to skillfully navigate day-to-day life in a complex society, even apart from the active reception of God’s grace.⁵⁵

The loss of the moral image of God, which is for Wesley the highest expression of *creatio ad imaginem dei*, is seen in that sin-damaged reason can no longer freely direct the will toward love. Wesley refers to the loss of liberty in the soul in the way in which the sin-deformed appetites “lead [a man] captive, they drag him to and fro, in spite of his boasted rea-

⁵¹Wesley, “Original Sin” (1759), ¶¶II.7-11, in *Works* 2:178-182. Within his category of “love of the world,” Wesley includes seeking happiness in the creation rather than the Creator, lustful obsessions, and the pride of life expressed by an inordinate need to receive the praise of others. Cf. “The One Thing Needful” (1734), ¶I.3-4, in *Works* 4:354.

⁵²Wesley, “Original Sin” (1759), ¶III.3, in *Works* 2:184.

⁵³See Wesley, “The Case of Reason Impartially Considered” (1781), ¶3-4, in *Works* 2:588. In the same sermon, Wesley ventures a definition of the rational faculty of the soul as providing for three main processes: (a) simple apprehension (or comprehending objects); (b) judgment (or drawing distinctions or correlations between different, apprehended things); (c) discourse (or, proceeding rationally from one judgment to another) [*Works* 2:590].

⁵⁴Wesley, “On the Fall of Man” (1782), ¶II.6, in *Works* 2:410. Italics mine.

⁵⁵Wesley, “The Case of Reason Impartially Considered” (1781), ¶I.I.3-5, in *Works* 2:590-591. After listing the specific abilities given by bare reason, Wesley goes on to consider more complex tasks of reason, from agriculture to the arts, and from mathematics to governance. This sermon is intended as a critique of what Wesley sees as the Enlightenment over-confidence in reason and so lacks any real treatment of the work of God’s prevenient grace in humanity’s nascent restoration.

son.”⁵⁶ And he contends that those who rationally deliberate apart from the Christian revelation have only “the dim light of reason” at their disposal.⁵⁷ Thus, while bare reason remains, trustworthy *moral reasoning*, understood as a deliberative process with a requisite conjunction of reason and will and dependent upon liberty, is rendered impossible.

The second recognition is that the doctrine of universal atonement—in which Wesley adamantly believed—implies that no one is wholly lacking in God’s favor. Therefore, the true beginning of humanity’s restoration comes through God’s prevenient grace. This is that grace which precedes or “comes before” (*praevenire*) human action and is given by God as free gift. More specifically, it is the power and presence of God working in human beings to begin the restoration of their sin-damaged souls, even without their active reception of it. Wesley’s understanding of prevenient grace is wholly in line with his larger Anglican context; Article X of the 39 Articles speaks of “the grace of God by Christ *preventing us*, that we may have a good will, and *working with us*, when we have that good will.”⁵⁸ He echoes this aspect of grace when he exhorts, “Go on, in virtue of the grace of God *preventing, accompanying, and following you*.”⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Wesley, “Original Sin” (1759), ¶II.9, in *Works* 2:180. Wesley elsewhere makes a statement about sin causing humans to sink “lower than the very beasts of the field,” a somewhat oblique point about the relative depravity of the will and reason, in that our partially intact reason fails to keep us from sinning, whereas animals (lacking the *naturalis imago dei*) act only according to their natures (see Wesley, “The One Thing Needful” (1734), ¶I.2, in *Works* 4:354).

⁵⁷ Wesley, “Original Sin” (1759), ¶2, in *Works* 2:172. Wesley’s evaluation of reason here can be helpfully compared to the view of John Locke’s *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, where Locke refers to the understanding as “the most elevated faculty of the soul” but has no sense of reason’s deformity through sin. See Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Co., 1996), 1. First published in 1689.

⁵⁸ *Book of Common Prayer* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1818). Italics mine. Pages are unnumbered. Wesley retained this article in full when he sent his revised 24 Articles (later 25) to the nascent Methodist Episcopal Church in America, where it appeared as Article VIII. See James F. White, ed., *John Wesley’s Sunday Service of the Methodists in North America* (Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House and General Board of Higher Ed, 1984), 309.

⁵⁹ Wesley, “On Working Out Our Own Salvation” (1785), ¶III.8, in *Works* 3:209. Italics mine.

Wesley sees this prevenient action of God as gifted in a universal sense, exactly because of the universality of Christ's atonement.⁶⁰ Total depravity might seem to suggest that we can think or do nothing good, but prevenient grace counters that by affirming that *all* people have begun to walk the way of salvation by virtue of God's prevenient work in their lives.⁶¹ For Wesley, this universal gift explains the phenomenon of *conscience*, which he regards as "a supernatural gift of God" and a direct consequence of prevenient grace.⁶² Conscience allows for the discernment of basic questions of right and wrong, an important first step in moral reasoning, even while the more soteriological function of prevenient grace comes in the way it leads individuals to a sense of conviction and repentance for sin.

The status of reason prior to its restoration by grace, as well as the initial effects of God's prevenient action, are important to note because they have real consequences for moral psychology. They are not sufficient to allow for our task which is an account of the possibility of moral reasoning inclusive of responsible theological reflection. For that to be possible, the faculties of the soul—reason and will—must be *progressively* restored by grace, meaning that their deformed nature is healed over time and a degree of liberty manifestly grows between them that allows them to act rightly. The category Wesley uses to describe this renewed state is *holiness*, which takes us fully into the realm of soteriology. An exhaustive description of the sanctified (and sanctifying) life is not necessary at this point; rather, we need an account of the effect sanctification has on moral psychology—that is, the way that present salvation impacts those dynam-

⁶⁰On the universal atonement in Wesley, see "Free Grace" (1739), ¶21, in *Works* 3:553. On the assertion that prevenient grace is received universally, see "On Working Out Our Own Salvation" (1785), ¶III.4, in *Works* 3:207.

⁶¹See, e.g., Wesley, "On Working Out Our Own Salvation" (1785), ¶II.1, in *Works* 3:203, where Wesley states that "salvation begins with what is usually termed (and very properly) preventing grace." Cf. Wesley, "The Scripture Way of Salvation" (1765), ¶I.2, in *Works* 2:156-157.

⁶²Wesley, "On Conscience" (1788), ¶I.5, in *Works* 3:482-484. Wesley goes on to assert that conscience has a "threefold office," which is described as follows: "First, it is a *witness*, testifying what we have done, in thought, word, or action. Secondly, it is a *judge*, passing sentence on what we have done, that it 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" (¶I.7).

ics internal to a person that define the possibility of moral reasoning.⁶³ Put another way, we need to see the process by which Christian character is formed.

Wesley argues that the gift of God's grace actively working in the soul is required for right thinking and action to be restored. This renewal comes first with justification by faith in Jesus Christ (pardon) and thereafter with the sanctification of the Holy Spirit (progressive healing). The work of Jesus Christ removes the guilt of sin, but this is not the totality of salvation. Salvation continues through the work of God the Holy Spirit, who brings about progressive renewal in both the natural image and moral image of God. Elsewhere, Wesley relates this renewal to the development of "spiritual senses" in the soul that were wholly deadened subsequent to the Fall.⁶⁴ The enlightening of both reason and will comes about through the ability to see the good in a way that only those in whom the power of sin has been broken are capable.

Wesley describes this condition of internal, ongoing restoration—properly speaking, holiness of *heart*—in his early sermon "Circumcision of the Heart" (1733), in a way that remains consistent throughout his life. For Wesley, the circumcision of the heart (Romans 2:29) is:

[T]hat habitual disposition of soul which in the Sacred Writings is termed "holiness," and which directly implies the being cleansed from sin, "from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit," and by consequence the being endued with those virtues which were also in Christ Jesus, the being so "renewed in the

⁶³For the classic account of sanctification in Wesley, see Harald Lindström, *Wesley & Sanctification: A Study in the Doctrine of Salvation* (Nappanee, IN: Francis Asbury Press, 1980). Originally published 1946. Cf. Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 176-191. Elsewhere, Maddox defines moral psychology as "the technical title for proposed accounts of the dynamics involved in moral choice and action" (Maddox, "A Change of Affections: The Development, Dynamics, and Dethronement of John Wesley's Heart Religion," in Richard B. Steele, ed., *"Heart Religion" in the Methodist Tradition and Related Movements* [Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2001], 4).

⁶⁴On the spiritual senses, see *An Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion* (1743), ¶¶9 and 32, in *Works* 11:47, 56-57; *A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion, Part I* (1745), ¶¶V.27-28, in *Works* 11:170-171; "The Witness of the Spirit, I" (1746), ¶I.12, in *Works* 1:276; "The End of Christ's Coming" (1781), ¶III.1, in *Works* 2:481.

image of our mind” as to be “perfect, as our Father in heaven is perfect.”⁶⁵

This experience of sanctification entails a progressive transformation through humility, faith, hope, and love (each building on the other). And Wesley’s account of progressive spiritual renewal further rejects those Enlightenment options of empiricism and rationalism, popular in his day, that rely either on sense experience or natural reason and depend upon an essentially neutral starting point from the soul’s perspective.⁶⁶ An explanation of how one can know or do the good, for Wesley, is only possible with an accounting of how sin is overcome and the soul is healed—a soteriological rather than epistemological perspective.

In describing a restored moral psychology, Wesley uses categories of tempers/dispositions (for the constitution of the will) and affections (as active forces arising from tempers that drive thought and action).⁶⁷ He characterizes holiness of heart as “inward religion,” a precursor to holiness of life that consists of those dispositions of the soul constituting real Christianity: “the inward tempers contained in that holiness ‘without which no man shall see the Lord’—the affections which, when flowing from their proper fountain, from a living faith in God through Christ

⁶⁵Wesley, “The Circumcision of the Heart” (1733), ¶I.1, in *Works* 1:402-403.

⁶⁶For an engagement with such options, see “The Unity of the Divine Being” (1789), ¶18-20 in *Works* 4:67-69.

⁶⁷These categories are interpreted differently by Randy Maddox, Kenneth J. Collins, and Gregory S. Clapper. See Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 69-70; Maddox, “A Change of Affections,” in Steele, ed., “*Heart Religion*” in the *Methodist Tradition*, 3-31; Collins, “John Wesley’s Topography of the Heart: Dispositions, Tempers, and Affections,” *Methodist History* 36:3 (April 1998), 162-175; Clapper, *John Wesley’s Religious Affections* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1989). My analysis is closest to that of Maddox: The will is equivalent to rooted affective *dispositions* of the soul. Wesley often refers to these as “tempers,” such that the two terms can be seen as synonymous. *Tempers* describe formed capacities of the will in the way we speak of *tempered steel*, meaning metal hardened by sustained exposure to high heat. A temper, then, is a capacity of the will that has been molded over time by good or evil forces acting upon it. *Affections* exist as motivating forces to feeling, thought, or action that arise out of the tempers (and can be characterized as good or evil in accordance with their underlying tempers). Both tempers and the affections to which they give rise are malleable, though the affections are always expressive of their underlying tempers. Tempers are enduring characteristics of the soul, so that the level of their holiness conforms to that of the person in which they reside.

Jesus, are intrinsically and essentially good, and acceptable to God.”⁶⁸ This is, then, the “religion of the heart” summarized: an inward faith constitutive of a certain disposition of the soul, marked by holy tempers, which give rise to intrinsically good affections. Its fullest homiletical depiction is found in “On Zeal” (1781), where Wesley explicitly places love “upon the throne” in the soul of the Christian, which is surrounded first by holy tempers (including long-suffering, gentleness, meekness, goodness, fidelity, and temperance) and then by the right actions embodied in works of mercy and works of piety.⁶⁹ Any tendency to see such qualities in sentimental fashion should be resisted; the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23) are the marks of a graced character and the works flowing from them make up an entire pattern of life.

Love’s restoration as the ruling temper of the soul means, finally, that freedom is again present in the soul and happiness a reality: “Such a love of God is this as engrosses the whole heart, as takes up all the affections, as fills the entire capacity of the soul, and employs the utmost extent of all its faculties.”⁷⁰ Wesley is clear that such a restoration will usually only occur over time.⁷¹ But that is simply the manner of a power that acts as a kind of divine medicine, working upon the soul via the *love* of God, mediated by Christ and known through *faith*.⁷² The graced soul that can seek its happiness in God through restored liberty, ironically, acquires the freedom to submit itself entirely to God. And with the soul’s healing, a return “to virtue, and freedom, and happiness” also precipitates

⁶⁸Wesley, “Upon our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, IV” (1748), ¶1, in *Works* 1:572-573. For a description of these right affections, see Wesley, “Letter to Conyers Middleton,” ¶VI.1.7, in the Jackson edition of the *Works of John Wesley* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1958), 10:68-69. Hereafter cited as *Works (Jackson)*.

⁶⁹Wesley, “On Zeal” (1781), ¶II.5, in *Works* 3:313. Wesley’s “Letter to Conyers Middleton” undergirds the logical progression from inward holiness (a state of being) to outward holiness (a state of action). See ¶VI.1.7-9, in *Works (Jackson)* 10:68-69.

⁷⁰Wesley, “The Almost Christian” (1741), ¶II.1, in *Works* 1:137.

⁷¹See, e.g., “The Scripture Way of Salvation” (1765), where Wesley speaks of “the gradual work of sanctification,” in which “we are more and more dead to sin” and “more and more alive to God” (¶I.8, in *Works* 2:160). Note also the integral connection between initial (justifying) faith and subsequent (sanctifying) faith over time.

⁷²Wesley, “Original Sin” (1759), ¶III.3, in *Works* 2:184.

responsible moral agency—the ability to think, feel, speak, and act for the good.⁷³

The preceding paragraphs have traced the contours of how moral psychology and sanctification intersect. A thick description of what the soul's restoration looks like in a human life would require attention to active participation in a communally-rooted discipleship that Wesley describes in terms of the *means of grace*.⁷⁴ These practices, usually grouped in categories of “instituted” and “prudential” means or “works of piety” and “works of mercy,” are all either practices of the Christian community or dependent on that community for individual sustenance.⁷⁵ Life patterned by them is both a life-in-community and a life in which sanctification will proceed. Thus, individuals will never find their souls healed and faculties restored apart from membership in the community of faith. Therefore, the work of theology is itself ultimately a communal enterprise. Theological reflection, according to Wesleyan norms, only happens when those engaging in such activity have the concomitant experience of their souls' restoration via the healing of God's grace, an experience of life in the body of Christ.⁷⁶

Conclusion

It is, therefore, impossible for an individual, apart from an accounting of the regeneration of the soul through grace, to utilize the compo-

⁷³Wesley, “The Image of God” (1730), ¶III.3, in *Works* 4:300-301. Wesley insists that grace is not coercive, but rather cooperative and enables moral reasoning “without depriving [anyone] of that liberty which is essential to a moral agent” (“The General Spread of the Gospel” [1783], ¶11, in *Works* 2:489).

⁷⁴The best account of the means of grace in Wesley's theology is Henry H. Knight III, *The Presence of God in the Christian Life: John Wesley and the Means of Grace* (Metuchen, NJ: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1992).

⁷⁵For a description of the means of grace in the categories of *instituted* and *prudential*, see Wesley, *Large Minutes*, in *Works (Jackson)* 8:322-324. For a description in the categories of *works of piety* and *works of mercy*, see Wesley, “The Scripture Way of Salvation” (1765), ¶¶III.9-10, in *Works* 2:166.

⁷⁶The direction to which I am pointing calls for an understanding of theology's purpose that includes both *normative* and *formative* dimensions. While not prominent in modern systematic theology, Randy Maddox argues that it is the conception of theology that both goes back to the early church and is expressed by Wesley's own theological work. See Maddox, “Formation and Reflection: The Dynamics of Theology in Christian Life,” *Quarterly Review* 21:1 (Spring 2001), 20-32.

nents of Outler's Quadrilateral for responsible theological reflection. How would one interpret Scripture and tradition well, with a soul debilitated? Could reason ever deliberate effectively in a sustained way when it is at war with unruly passions? And why would experience (even so-called "Christian experience") be a helpful guide when it might be confirming nothing but the vagaries of various lusts, self-loves, and idolatries that are dominant in the sin-ravaged soul? None of this is to suggest that Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience are not the proper sources for constructive theological work. It is, however, to suggest that elevating them, as Albert Outler did, into a construct that claims to exist as a clearly formed (and even self-conscious) method within the mind of John Wesley is a bridge too far. Wesley did not care about theological method in the sense we use the term—that is, as methodology. He cared rather about Christian character.⁷⁷

Theological reflection requires the use of proper judgment: in the interpretation of Scripture, the discernment of the work of the Holy Spirit, the intellectual exploration of doctrine, the organization of the Church for witness and mission, and the daily moral challenges that confront every Christian believer. That reflection is done well not by manipulating the constituent parts of a methodological construct.⁷⁸ It is instead done well by those who are together traveling the *way of salvation* and who demonstrate that character known as *holiness of heart and life*. The logic of holiness is rooted in the view that the love of God will transform a person so that proper feelings, thoughts, and actions can proceed in human life:

⁷⁷Wesley, "The Unity of the Divine Being" (1789), ¶¶22-25, in *Works* 4:70-71. Wesley here connects the practice of right speech and right action with the character inculcated by the love of God in the Christian over time.

⁷⁸Dissatisfaction with the root image of the Quadrilateral has, on occasion, led to new proposals. See Randy Maddox's reformulation of "a unilateral rule of Scripture within a trilateral *hermeneutic* of reason, tradition, and experience" (Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 46), an image later pushed further toward a dialogical model where sources are framed in ongoing dialogue as consensus is sought (Maddox, "'Honoring the Dialogue': A Wesleyan Guideline for the Debate over Homosexuality," *Circuit Rider* 22:6 [Nov/Dec 1999], 25). See also the suggestion of rephrasing the Quadrilateral as a "quartet" with different instruments seeking a common harmony in Charles M. Wood and Ellen Blue, *Attentive to God: Thinking Theologically in Ministry* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008), 10 and 135-136, n.9. These helpful interpretations still represent what I earlier call "arguments internal to the Quadrilateral" and hence do not truly affect the conclusions of this essay.

“First therefore see that ye love God; next your neighbour, every child of man. From this fountain let every temper, every affection, every passion flow. So shall that ‘mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.’ Let all your thoughts, words, and actions spring from this.”⁷⁹ With the rooted dispositions (or tempers) of the soul healed by love, the affections that drive all thought and action are freed and the moral image of God begins to re-emerge.⁸⁰ Reasoning about God and the things of God can proceed from there, by sustained engagement with the Word of God, all the means of grace, and the life of the community called *church*.⁸¹

Outler’s Quadrilateral is at best a convenient term to describe something the Church was already in possession of. At worst, its methodological pretensions are a distraction from the important tasks before the Church that, by the strange life it has taken on, threatens to co-opt the real emphases Wesley attempted to impart to the people called Methodists. In the area of theological reflection, that emphasis is intimately tied to the healing of moral psychology through sanctification. It requires no methodology beholden to norms foreign to Wesley’s context. It needs rather the reality of sanctification through grace as it is experienced in individuals living in community, actively “waiting in the means,” as Wesley suggests, for their inward renewal.⁸² With that understanding, the work of theology can proceed apace, no less faithful to recognized sources of authority, but relying on character rather than construct.

⁷⁹ Wesley, “The Unity of the Divine Being” (1789), ¶25 in *Works* 4:71.

⁸⁰ Thus, Wesley says, “True religion is right tempers toward God and man” (*ibid.*, ¶16, in *Works* 4:66).

⁸¹ Mark L. Horst refers to such an approach to theological reflection, which he believes is characteristic of Wesley, as “an experiment in Christian wholeness.” See Horst, “Experimenting with Christian Wholeness: Method in Wesley’s Theology,” *Quarterly Review* 7:2 (Summer 1987), 22. Horst also prefers to see Wesley’s manner of engaging in theology as a “form of life” rather than the investigation of propositional truths (17-20).

⁸² Wesley, “The Means of Grace” (1746), ¶III.7, in *Works* 1:383-384.

TO SERVE THE PRESENT AGE: AUTHENTIC WESLEYAN THEOLOGY TODAY

The 2010 WTS Presidential Address

by

Thomas A. Noble

Unfortunately (or fortunately), being president of the Wesleyan Theological Society for one year does not bring with it the charism of infallibility, and therefore this presidential address must not be regarded as some kind of *ex cathedra* pronouncement. It can only be one contribution to the discussion which is already underway. Several years ago, William J. Abraham presented a stimulating paper at an annual WTS conference titled “The End of Wesleyan Theology.”¹ Such a title seems to imply at the very least the disbanding of the Wesleyan Theological Society, and indeed appears to be an obituary for Wesleyan theology. Perhaps, then, our conference this year is an extended wake! Or, alternatively, perhaps the news of the death of Wesleyan theology was (to quote the wittiest of Americans) somewhat exaggerated.

Either way, the assumption behind this presidential address is that Wesleyan theology is sufficiently alive today to consider how we may best “serve the present age.” A further assumption is that theologians serve the present age by serving the church, and serve the church by doing theology. Our starting point involves two necessary questions:

¹William J. Abraham, “The End of Wesleyan Theology,” *WTJ*, 40:1 (Spring, 2005), 7-25. This surely deserves to be ranked along with the paper “The Holiness Movement is Dead” given to the Christian Holiness Association or Partnership in 1995 by Keith Drury.

What are the characteristics of Wesleyan theology today? How can we recognize authentic Wesleyan theology?

Like Lutherans and Calvinists and Thomists, we take the name of our tradition from a specific figure of Christian history. That means that the question is first of all an historical one. Wesleyan theology, to be Wesleyan with integrity, must take its characteristics from John Wesley. On the other hand, Wesleyan theologians today do not live in the eighteenth century. Enormous changes have taken place in the world, in culture, in philosophy and society and thought, since Wesley's death in 1791. Schleiermacher, Hegel, and Kierkegaard, Marx, Darwin, and Freud, Einstein, Wittgenstein, and Barth, to name only a few, have revolutionized our ideas of the cosmos, of what it is to be human, and of the role and nature of Christian theology. We cannot think as Wesley thought in the eighteenth century. Insofar as our theology cannot but be contextual, there are many assumptions that Wesley made about humanity and the world which we can no longer share.

Despite those enormous leaps of discontinuity between 1791 and 2010, here we will concentrate on the continuities. Can we establish some characteristics of Wesleyan theology which allow us to claim with integrity that we stand in the Wesleyan tradition? The question of whether we stand in continuity with Wesley is obviously prior to the question of whether "Wesleyan" theology has a role today. Whether *Wesleyan* theology can "serve the present age" obviously depends on how we define Wesleyan theology.

Just over thirty years ago William M. Greathouse was installed as president at Nazarene Theological Seminary. His inaugural address was published as a booklet. In it he identified three characteristics of Nazarene theology.² Perhaps there are those who would argue that Nazarene theology is something different from Wesleyan theology. But we may be sure that Dr. Greathouse did not see it that way, and neither should we. So these three characteristics will help us identify the continuity and integrity of the Wesleyan tradition. The three characteristics he identified were that our theology is *catholic*, *evangelical*, and *conservative*.

Conservative?

There are some of us who will want to demur at the last word. Are we "conservative"? The problem with the word is a peculiarly American

²William M. Greathouse, *Nazarene Theology in Perspective* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 1970).

one. These twin words, conservative and liberal, came into theological use in the mid-nineteenth century from politics. In British and European politics, and then in American politics, the word conservative applied to those who wanted to conserve the best of the past, whereas the word liberal applied to those who wanted to reform political institutions in order to ensure maximum liberty for the individual in the future. Liberalism was a forward-looking and individualistic political, social and economic creed. Freedom (including the free market) was at the heart of this movement, which was the dominant political, social and economic philosophy of the era of modernity. Many of those who think of themselves as politically ‘conservative’ today are actually nineteenth-century liberals!

Surely we must say that the word liberal was wrongly applied in theology. Presumably, the reason for its use was that so-called liberal theology was thought to look towards the future. But it is difficult to argue that so-called ‘liberal’ theology ever had anything to do with Christian *liberty* as Paul or Luther understood it, and more often than not it seemed rather to end up in some kind of Pelagian system, denying the liberty of the gospel. In fact, it is surely a more accurate description to refer to the whole tradition from Schleiermacher to Tillich, not so much as “liberal” theology, but as *modern* theology or *modernism*, a theology devised to address apologetically the era of modernity. It is now clear that this kind of theology, which tries to reinterpret the Christian faith and adapt it to “modern thought” or modern science, is in steep decline.

The main problem with the use of both the terms conservative and liberal, particularly in America today, is the way in which it is assumed that to be conservative in politics is to be conservative in theology, and that to be liberal in politics is to be liberal in theology. The polarization of American politics today, therefore, makes for deep distortion in the way we align ourselves theologically. Young people particularly, who of course in every generation react against the conservatism of their parents, will naturally gravitate toward a theology which, in a clever piece of spin, describes itself as liberal. Even better spin is to call yourself “post-liberal”! Or at least, young people will tend to react against anything labeled conservative, especially if that conservatism is some kind of obscurantist and oppressive legalism.

For someone who is (as it happens) a conservative in politics, to say this is something of a concession. We are talking about being a *real*

conservative, a *British* conservative, like John Wesley, a Tory and a monarchist, who would have to consider anyone labelled a “republican” a dangerous “lefty”! But precisely from that position on the political spectrum, or indeed from anywhere on the spectrum, it is wise that we now dispense with these descriptors, conservative and liberal, in theology. We may need to find another word to describe what we have meant by being conservative in our theology.³ If it implies being loyal to the Christian gospel, committed to specifically Christian, Christ-centered theology, refusing to dilute or syncretize the Christian faith, or to reshape it according to some alien metaphysic or according to fashionable modernity or postmodernity, then it is surely the case that Wesleyans cannot with integrity be anything other than conservative. If we are going to use the word, we have to be more specific about what we mean by it. It may be that Dr Greathouse’s two other descriptors will suffice. These were that our theology is *catholic* and that it is *evangelical*.

Catholic

We no doubt can all quote John Wesley’s sermon on “The Catholic Spirit,”⁴ but we have now buried the myth that Wesley considered all theological convictions as mere opinions and that he was ready to extend the right hand of fellowship to any and every heretic. Nor do we need to say that by *catholic* we do not mean Roman Catholic, even though Wesley included that tradition in the designation *catholic*. What we mean by the *catholic* faith is that faith *kath holou*, according to the whole, that faith which C. S. Lewis designated “mere Christianity”⁵ or which N. T. Wright calls “simply Christian.”⁶ As virtual synonyms, we could also speak of biblical Christianity or Nicene Christianity or Trinitarian Christianity, while recognizing the built-in and necessary tension between what is biblical and what is Nicene.

In a paper delivered at the Wesley Tercentenary Conference in Manchester in 2003, Ted Campbell addressed the question as to which doctrines John Wesley considered central. He identified two distinct groups of essential or definitive doctrines to be found in Wesley’s

³See Roger E. Olson, *How to Be Evangelical without Being Conservative* (Zondervan, 2008)

⁴*Works* [BE], Vol. 2, 81-95.

⁵C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (Macmillan, 1952).

⁶N. T. Wright, *Simply Christian* (SPCK/HarperOne, 2006).

writings.⁷ One of these groups appears in 1746 in “Principles of a Methodist Further Explained” where Wesley asserted that “our main doctrines which include all the rest, are three—that of repentance, faith, and holiness.”⁸ In 1761 he identified “three grand scriptural doctrines” uniting the Evangelical clergy as Original Sin, Justification by Faith, and Holiness. These are the doctrines, Campbell argues, which Wesley sees as identifying the Methodist or Evangelical movement (words largely synonyms in the eighteenth century).

In addition to those, Campbell writes, Wesley also “identified a cluster of doctrines about the Trinity, the divinity of Christ, and the atonement as representing the consensus of the ancient church and of contemporary churches in his own time.”⁹ In his “Letter to a Roman Catholic” (1749), Wesley says that a “true Protestant” will express his faith “in these or the like words,” and then he proceeds (as Campbell notes) to paraphrase in the following five paragraphs the substance of the Apostles’ and Nicene Creeds. We may then regard it as established that, according to Wesley himself, a true Wesleyan is a true Protestant, and that a true Protestant heartily confesses the Nicene faith of the ancient Catholic Church. It is within that fold that she or he will extend the right hand of fellowship and confess an ecumenical unity despite disagreement on other matters.

This word ‘Nicene’ connects us directly with the only Christian creed ever adopted officially by a council representing the whole church catholic, the Council of Constantinople, AD 381.¹⁰ But the other descriptor which may be used here is “Trinitarian.” By “catholic” theology, then, we mean Nicene, Trinitarian theology, the theology which arose in the early centuries of the church in response to the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, witnessed to definitively by the apostles in the scriptures of the New Testament in continuity with the scriptures of Israel.¹¹

⁷Ted A. Campbell, “John Wesley and the Legacy of Methodist Theology,” *The Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester*, 85, 2 & 3, (2003), 405-418.

⁸*Works* [BE], Vol. 9, ed. Rupert E. Davies, *The Methodist Societies: History, Nature, and Design* (Abingdon, 1989), 95.

⁹Campbell, 409.

¹⁰In an earlier form it was adopted at the Council of Nicea in 325 A.D.

¹¹Cf. *Nicene Christianity: The Future for a New Ecumenism*, ed. Christopher R. Seitz (Brazos Press, 2001). The contributors include Colin Gunton, Robert Jenson, William Abraham, John Webster, Susan Wood, Carl Braaten, and Thomas Smail.

Particularly associated with this definitive expression of the Christian faith are the great Nicene Fathers, Athanasius and the Cappadocians, standing in the tradition of Irenaeus. For Nicene Christianity, these are the Fathers (not primarily Augustine) who shape our Trinitarian Christian doctrine. And we have to note that their Trinitarian doctrine of God developed in close harmony with their doctrine of creation, so that Trinitarian doctrine implies and includes the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*.¹² The Cappadocians particularly were at pains to reject the Hellenization of Christian doctrine which they saw in that great thinker to whom they owed so much, Origen. The myth propagated by Harnack, that the theology of the Fathers was the Hellenization of Christianity, may have been true to a great degree of Origen's doctrine of the eternity of creation. But Basil and Gregory Nazianzen, educated in the Hellenistic literature as students in Athens itself, were at pains to ensure that, while the Christian faith was contextualized in their Hellenistic culture, and while they used the philosophical terminology of that culture, Christian theology broke the back of the monistic ontology which included God and the cosmos in the same overarching system. The Trinitarian God was the living God of Scripture, the transcendent yet immanent One, the Holy One of Israel.¹³

It goes without saying, then, that Wesleyan theology today cannot be anything other than *catholic*, Nicene, biblical theology. To stand in continuity with Wesley, we have to recognize that as essential to the integrity of the Wesleyan tradition. But this is not simply a matter of faithfulness to the past. This is a matter of "serving the present age." The last seventy years have seen the greatest revival of Trinitarian theology for centuries. T. F. Torrance and Geoffrey Bromiley, the editors of the English translation of Barth's *Church Dogmatics*, introduce Volume I of that epoch-making work as "the greatest treatise of the kind since the *De Trinitate* of St. Augustine."¹⁴ In addition to Barth's linking of the doctrine

¹²This is integral to the Trinitarian argument of Athanasius in his ground-breaking *Letters to Serapion*.

¹³Like the system of Origen, the "process theology" which still survives in North America has difficulty in establishing a claim to be compatible with Nicene, creedal Christian theology.

¹⁴See Barth's *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. 1, Part 1 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975), ix.

of the Trinity to revelation, Hodgson revived the social analogy,¹⁵ Rahner devised his 'rule', Moltmann argued for the doctrine as indeed a *theologia crucis*, Torrance expounded the logic of the Nicene theology, Gunton examined the Trinity and creation, Pannenberg the Trinity and history, Zizioulas and Volf the Trinity and the church, and so on it goes. The doctrine of the Trinity, which for centuries appeared to be a dead letter and an embarrassing conundrum, has emerged as the key and shape of the whole of Christian theology.

Holding the Nicene faith also implies and includes a robust and healthy realism. For all the insights of George Lindbeck and "post-liberalism," Nicene Trinitarian theology is not just concerned with laying down rules for theological grammar, but with assertions or truth claims about the reality of the Living God. Gregory of Nazianzus explicitly repudiates the fascination of the Neo-Arians with mere language and terminology, mere *onomata*, asserting that Christian theologians are concerned with the *pragmata*, the objective reality of the three Persons of the Holy Trinity asserted by the very term *hypostasis*, and the objective reality (as Athanasius had fearlessly insisted) of the Word who did not remain Word alone, but who became flesh.¹⁶ The Fathers certainly dwelt in the narrative of Scripture, but they did not believe that we were saved by narratives or by stories or by texts or by words or by the merely conceptual or linguistic. We are saved by the hypostatic Word who became flesh in the space-time world and who was crucified literally and physically upon a Roman cross of real, physical wood and who shed real physical blood.¹⁷

Trinitarian theology is where the action is today. The doctrine was not at issue at the time of the Reformation, nor as long as we lived even in

¹⁵Leonard Hodgson, Regius Professor of Divinity at Oxford, in his book *The Doctrine of the Trinity* (Nisbet, 1943).

¹⁶Gregory of Nazianzus, Oration 29:13 [The Second Theological Oration], Migne, *Patrologia Graeca*, Vol. 36, 92A (ET *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, Vol.7, p. 306): "Truth is a matter not of names (*onomasin*) but of realities (*pragmasin*)." See also the short hermeneutical discussion in the Fifth Theological Oration (Oration 31:21-24).

¹⁷The case for philosophical realism as essential to Christian theology was argued by T. F. Torrance in the Payton Lectures given at Fuller Theological Seminary and published as *Reality and Evangelical Theology* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1982/1999), and has been more recently articulated by the Oxford theologian Andrew Moore in *Realism and the Christian Faith* (Cambridge: CUP, 2003).

a dying Christendom. But now that the Christian church is seriously challenged in Europe and America with a secularization which appears to be merely preparing the way for a sacralization by the new religions or “spiritualities,” the doctrine of the Trinity becomes as crucial to the mission of the church as it was in the days of pagan and pluralistic Greco-Roman society.

It is noteworthy then that several Wesleyan theologians have been working on the doctrine of the Trinity, including Samuel Powell,¹⁸ Allan Coppedge,¹⁹ and Roderick T. Leupp.²⁰ Surely the challenge for Wesleyan theology is to show how our particular doctrinal emphases of ‘repentance, faith and holiness’ are grounded in the Trinitarian faith of the church catholic. How, for example, is our doctrine of Christian perfection rooted in the Holy Trinity? This is not merely a matter of abstract doctrine. As the Cappadocians well knew, this is basic to the life of faith, the faith of the believer, baptized “into the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.”²¹ This is the faith of the church.

Wesley himself, while a Trinitarian theologian,²² lived in what was probably the most theologically barren century of the modern era when the doctrines of Incarnation and Trinity were being sidelined and marginalized by the rising tide of deism. But today, with the recovery of vibrant Trinitarian faith in the church, this is where Wesleyan theologians need to be actively at work shaping the global church of the future. Our challenge is to demonstrate in a way Wesley was never able to do how

¹⁸Samuel M. Powell, *The Trinity in German Thought* (CUP, 2001); and *Participating in God: Creation and Trinity* (Augsburg Fortress, 2003).

¹⁹Allan Coppedge, *The God Who Is Triune* (IVP, 2007).

²⁰Roderick T. Leupp, *Knowing the Name of God: A Trinitarian Tapestry of Grace, Faith and Community* (IVP, 1996); and *The Renewal of Trinitarian Theology: Themes, Patterns and Explorations* (IVP, 2008).

²¹To be baptized into (*eis*) the One Name is, for the Fathers, to be baptized into all Three, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, for the Trinity cannot be divided. See Gregory of Nazianzus, Oration 6:22, *PG*, Vol. 35, 749B: “that we may each abide in one Spirit . . . adoring the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; knowing the Father in the Son, and the Son in the Holy Spirit, into which we were baptized, in which we have believed” (my translation). See also Athanasius, “Letters to Serapion,” I, 29, 30.

²²See Geoffrey Wainwright, “Why Wesley was a Trinitarian,” *The Drew Gateway*, 59:2, 26-43, and more recently, “Trinitarian Theology and Wesleyan Holiness,” *Orthodox and Wesleyan Spirituality*, ed. S. T. Kimborough (St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2002), 59-80.

our doctrines of faith, repentance and holiness are rooted in the Trinitarian faith of the church catholic.

If we are to be Wesleyan with integrity, therefore, then we must be “catholic,” by which we mean Nicene or Trinitarian. But what about that other word, “Evangelical”?

Evangelical

It is surely somewhat contradictory to call ourselves Wesleyan but deny that we are Evangelicals. Coming from a British and European context, that appears to be a stance which could only arise out of ignorance of our own tradition. Historically, how could Wesleyans be anything other than Evangelical?

There are, however, some contextual reasons, particularly in North America, for this apparently indefensible denial. First, there is the bizarre assumption in some American publications that Evangelicalism is an “American” religion invented by Billy Graham and Carl Henry!²³ Popular journalism tends to identify Evangelical Christianity with that largely American phenomenon, Fundamentalism. There is also the further consideration that North American Evangelicalism is dominated by the Reformed wing which tends to claim exclusive rights to the term. That is not an unfamiliar problem in Europe. There is also the question, raised some years ago by Donald Dayton, about whether the word now covers such a wide range of traditions that it is no longer useful.²⁴

Despite those problems, it is surely distorting and short-sighted to view this term, “Evangelical,” only within the American context. We have to see this in a more long-term and global perspective. Further, it is part of our business as theologians to shape our language and terminology and not to abdicate that responsibility to popular journalism. Viewed in historical perspective, then, there can be no doubt that Wesleyans belong to Evangelical Christianity, but we have to be clear what we mean by that.

When we say that the Wesleyan tradition is historically Evangelical, we do not mean that it is Fundamentalist or Calvinist. “Fundamentalism” is a term which has been used too loosely until it has become what

²³See, for example, Mark Ellingsen, *The Evangelical Movement: Growth, Impact, Dialog* [sic] (Augsburg, 1988).

²⁴See Donald W. Dayton, “Some Doubts about the Usefulness of the Category ‘Evangelical,’ ” in Donald W. Dayton and Robert K. Johnson, eds, *The Variety of American Evangelicalism* (IVP, 1991), 251.

someone has called “a theological swear word.” But here we use it in a “fixed and definite sense” (to quote Wesley) to refer to an extreme, largely American branch of the Evangelical faith. It asserts not only the detailed inerrancy of Scripture (some mainline Evangelicals also contend for that), but also accompanies that with a failure to understand the unavoidability of hermeneutics, a “creationism” which is obscurantist and at war with modern science, and some kind of dispensationalism or at least premillennialism, often combining those features with very conservative and nationalistic political views.

Historically, Evangelical Christianity is a world-wide phenomenon with a history of centuries rather than decades. Historic Evangelical Protestantism in the English-speaking world is generally held to have begun in the eighteenth century, led by John and Charles Wesley, the Arminians, and the Calvinists, George Whitefield and Jonathan Edwards. The historian David Bebbington famously identified its characteristics as “biblicism, cruci-centrism, conversionism, and activism.”²⁵ While deists and so-called “liberal” theologians were debating in the universities of Europe, it was this Evangelical Revival which led to the modern missionary movement—Brainerd and Carey, Henry Martyn, Livingstone and Hudson Taylor—the movement which planted Evangelical Christianity around the globe in what Latourette called “The Great Century”²⁶ and led to the demographic revolution of our day in world Christianity which sees the phenomenal growth in the global church so that a majority of Christians now live outside Europe and North America.²⁷

Bebbington is correct that there were some new features in the preaching of the eighteenth-century Evangelical Revival, notably the emphasis on conversion or “the new birth” inherited from the German Pietists and the English Puritans. But it is not for nothing that it is called “The Evangelical *Revival*.” It is called the *Evangelical Revival* because it was the revival of the faith and theology of the Reformation in reaction to the deism and moralism which accompanied the Enlightenment.

²⁵David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (Baker, 1992). See also *The Dominance of Evangelicalism: The Age of Spurgeon and Moody* (IVP, 2005).

²⁶Vol. IV of *A History of the Expansion of Christianity* (Harper, 1937-45).

²⁷See Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (OUP, 2002).

Historically, then, it is incontrovertible that Wesleyan theology stands in the tradition of the Reformation and the eighteenth-century Evangelical Revival. In fact, the term “Evangelical” is preferable to the term “Protestant” in speaking about the theological heritage of the Reformation. The word ‘Protestant’ was coined at the Diet of Speyer as a political term: ‘Evangelical’ (as German usage has always maintained) is the more accurate word for the theology of the Reformation. Herbert McGonigle was right then to highlight Wesley’s theology as that of “an Evangelical Arminian”—Arminian as distinct from Calvinist, but “Evangelical” as distinct from some of the so-called Arminians of the Remonstrant tradition.²⁸

To be authentically Wesleyan, therefore, is to affirm the Reformation emphasis, first of all, on *sola fide*. Justification by faith is the core of Wesley’s heritage from Luther and also where he was closest to his Calvinist allies. Some of us seem to want to get far away from Calvinism and see it as enemy number one, but the historic Wesleyan position with respect to justification is within a “hair’s breadth” of Calvinism.²⁹

To be authentically Wesleyan is, secondly, to affirm the Reformation emphasis on *sola gratia*. And this is where the Reformation and the Wesleyan tradition are deeply Augustinian. Our reaction against the Augustinian roots of the Calvinist doctrine of predestination must not blind us to the fact that historically the emphasis on grace is an Augustinian rather than an Eastern heritage. And that not only includes grace understood as unmerited favour, but also grace seen as therapeutic. That is Western: that is Augustinian.³⁰

Most importantly, to be authentically Wesleyan, is to affirm the Reformation focus on *solus Christus*. Bebbington’s four marks of Evangelical Christianity, while they are helpful in the historian’s task of identifying the distinguishing marks, fail to get to the theological center of Evangelical Theology. The Reformation focus was certainly on the

²⁸Herbert McGonigle, *Sufficient Saving Grace: John Wesley’s Evangelical Arminian* (Paternoster, 2001).

²⁹The famous quotation comes in the letter to John Newton of 14th May, 1765: “I think on Justification . . . just as Mr Calvin does. In this respect I do not differ from him an hair’s breadth.” See *The Letters of John Wesley*, ed. John Telford, Vol. IV (Epworth, 1931), 298.

³⁰See Thomas A. Noble, “East and West in the Theology of John Wesley,” *The Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester*, 85, 2 & 3, (2003), 359-372.

cross, that is, on the atonement. The Wesleys also, according to George Croft Cell, regarded the atonement as “the burning focus of faith.”³¹ But it was not the crucifixion as such which was the heart of Reformation faith, but rather “*Christ crucified*”—not just the event of the death, but *the One who died*—and who rose again. Here is the heart of Reformation faith, the heart of Evangelical Christianity, namely the *evangel*, the gospel of the incarnate, serving, crucified and risen Lord. And this is surely the center of authentic Wesleyan theology. No theology can consider itself authentically Wesleyan which is not centered in the *solus Christus*.³²

What about *sola scriptura*? If authentically Wesleyan theology is committed to the material principles of the Reformation, are we committed to the formal principle of *sola scriptura*? Historically, we certainly have been. It is quite clear from Article 6 of the *Thirty-Nine Articles*, “The Sufficiency of Holy Scripture,” that tradition and reason cannot in themselves be the source of Christian doctrine:

Holy Scripture contains all things necessary to salvation: so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of the faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation.

That is precisely the position of Wesley, that *homo unius libri*. It is the position of his Twenty-five Articles, of the sixteen Nazarene Articles, and surely of every fellowship in the Wesleyan tradition. So there can be no doubt that *sola scriptura* is the historic and authentic Wesleyan position. But is it something we should now abandon? William Abraham suggested in his stimulating paper on the end of Wesleyan theology that *sola scriptura* was the virus that is killing not only Wesleyan theology, but all Protestant theology. Should we then abandon it and embrace a wider canon of the church’s creeds and liturgy and tradition?

We should have some sympathy with Abraham’s view, but that does not mean that we should adopt an Eastern Orthodox position on the equal inspiration and authority of the ecumenical councils and creeds. Further,

³¹George Croft Cell, *The Rediscovery of Wesley* (Holt, 1935), 297.

³²See my argument in “John Wesley as a Theologian: An Introduction,” *Evangelical Quarterly*, 82:3 (July, 2010), that instead of setting out Wesley’s theology in the traditional shape of systematic theology (God, Christ, and the Spirit), as so many have done, one should follow the shape which he himself gives to his official theology in his Standard Sermons and begin with the gospel of Christ.

it is not true that Protestantism is dying. That may appear to be the case in Europe and North America, particularly in those denominations misleadingly called “the mainline churches.” Where they abandon the theology of the Nicene Fathers and the Reformers, they cease to be the “mainline” and become sidelines. In the world as a whole, the future lies with Evangelical Christianity. As Miroslav Volf has reminded us, it is the model of the believers’ or free church, propagated by Evangelical missionaries, which is rapidly expanding around the world.³³

Far from *sola scriptura* being a virus, therefore, it has been the source of Protestant vitality since the Reformation that Biblical Theology is not to be held captive to Dogmatics as it was in long centuries in the Eastern Orthodox Church and frequently also in the West. What Alister McGrath calls “Protestantism’s dangerous idea” is precisely what has given Evangelical Christianity its dynamic.³⁴ Its theological creativity lies precisely in the tension and therefore the ongoing conversation between Scripture and doctrine, text and interpretation.³⁵

However, it is true that, since the Reformation, Evangelical Christianity has spun off innumerable churches and denominations and fellowships, and that in many cases, such as that of Methodism, this has been contrary to the intention of the founders. Someone has spoken of the centrifugal force of Protestantism. And it is this that should lead us to have considerable sympathy with the thinking of “canonical theism,” at least to this extent, that Evangelical Christianity typically has a theology which is conscious only of its post-Reformation heritage and is obsessed with its contemporary context.³⁶ What we need is a deeper understanding of the subordinate authority of the creeds, that since Irenaeus, the *regula fidei* has in fact been the hermeneutic of the church in interpreting Holy Scripture.

It is in this context that we must understand the so-called Wesleyan Quadrilateral, which is neither uniquely Wesleyan, nor indeed a quadrilat-

³³Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Eerdmans, 1998), 11ff.

³⁴Alastair E. McGrath, *Protestantism’s Dangerous Idea* (HarperCollins, 2007).

³⁵See also the assessment of Evangelical relations with Rome in Mark A. Noll & Carolyn Nystrom, *Is the Reformation Over? An Evangelical Assessment of Contemporary Roman Catholicism* (Baker, 2005).

³⁶See William J. Abraham, Jason Vickers, Natalie Van Kirk (eds), *Canonical Theism: A Proposal for Theology and the Church* (Eerdmans, 2008)

eral. It is not a quadrilateral if that is taken to imply four equal sources of doctrine. But re-expressed by the late Timothy L. Smith in the figure of a three-legged stool (the seat of doctrine upheld by the three legs of tradition, reason and experience, standing on the floor of Scripture),³⁷ it distinguishes the Wesleyan and Evangelical hermeneutic from Fundamentalism on the one hand and so-called liberalism on the other. It falls short as an analysis of hermeneutics when it suggests a one-directional movement from Scripture to theology instead of a hermeneutical circle or spiral. And the distinction between reason and experience is inadequate, not to say epistemologically naive. Nevertheless, it is not to be rejected, but finessed in a more nuanced and sophisticated way. So understood as a helpful yet not fully adequate way to talk about hermeneutics, it is fully compatible with *sola scriptura*.

Such a hermeneutic is not peculiarly Wesleyan. It is the theological method of all Evangelical theologians. It could easily be shown to be the method of John Calvin.³⁸ It is the method of the great Nicene Fathers. Read the *Contra Arianos* of Athanasius, or his *Letters to Serapion*. Examine the *Five Theological Orations* of Gregory Nazianzen. They do not argue for Nicene theology from the creeds, but defend the doctrine of the creeds from *Holy Scripture*.³⁹ The formal principle of *sola scriptura* is not

³⁷Timothy L. Smith, "John Wesley and the Wholeness of Scripture," *The Preacher's Magazine*, 61:4, (1986), 12-15, 55-57. Dr Smith particularly differentiated the Nazarene stance from that of "liberal" or "modernist" Methodists: "Methodist modernists have appealed for a century to the myth that Wesley grounded his theology in human experience." But, on the other hand, he maintained that Wesleyans reject the narrow view of Scripture associated with B. B. Warfield and Harold Lindsell. Cf. his letter to *Christianity Today* (March 10, 1978) stating that: "...we Wesleyans stand in an older and much broader evangelical tradition than that represented by modern neo-Calvinist scholasticism."

³⁸See my treatment of Calvin in T. A. Noble, "Scripture and Experience," *A Pathway into the Holy Scriptures*, eds. P. E. Satterthwaite and David F. Wright (Eerdmans, 1994), 277-295. See also the articles by Howard Marshall, Anthony Thiselton, Gerald Bray, and A. N. S. Lane in this collection of papers read at the jubilee conference of the Tyndale Fellowship for Biblical and Theological Research. Lane's paper on qualifying *sola scriptura* and Bray's on doctrine as the Christian hermeneutic are particularly relevant.

³⁹Basil's argument in *De Spiritu Sancto* for a more secret source of doctrine in tradition (and therefore for refusing to make the deity of the Spirit explicit) was not shared by Athanasius or Nazianzen. It became the source of Orthodox and Roman Catholic views of the authority of tradition.

a rule arbitrarily invented by the Reformers, but is the method of the Fathers. Certainly they provide corroborating arguments from the liturgy and practices of the church, but their arguments for Nicene doctrine are not based in the creeds, but are based firmly on Scripture as interpreted by the creeds.

In summary, then, Evangelical Christianity is where the action is today. One of the most promising developments is the new dialogue between Evangelical theologians and biblical scholars evidenced in a growing list of major publications.⁴⁰ But one can also point to the revival of a robust philosophical theology led by philosophers such as Plantinga and Wolferstorff. It is true that there is a strong neo-Calvinism, but the Evangelical movement today (as evidenced in *The Cambridge Companion to Evangelical Theology* with the chapter on justification by D. Stephen Long)⁴¹ is much broader than that.

This is where the Wesleyan voice needs to be heard. Particularly, it is in this ecumenical context of *catholic* and *evangelical* theology that we need to demonstrate that Wesley, the “conjunctive” thinker (as Kenneth Collins has argued),⁴² the one who produced a synthesis of the *evangelical* theology of the Reformation and the ancient *catholic* spirituality of Christian perfection, is a pivotal figure for today’s global church. Only then will we demonstrate that the Wesleyan doctrine of “perfect love” is not “the mad theological aunt in the basement of Wesley’s theology,”⁴³ nor a hobby-horse ridden by sectarians from the backwoods of American revivalism, but is the *catholic* doctrine of Clement and of Athanasius in his “Life of Antony,” of the Cappadocians and of Benedict, of Bernard and of Thomas. Only then will we prevent authentic *evangelical* faith from being “cabin’d, cribb’d, confin’d” in the exclusivism and rationalism of post-Reformation scholastic Calvinism.

Wesleyan theology must not see itself as a narrow sect called “Wesleyanism,” gathering up its skirts and defending its narrow distinctives. Perhaps that is what William Abraham had in mind. If it does that, it will

⁴⁰See the host of publications by Craig Bartholomew, Stephen Fowl, Kevin Vanhoozer, Francis Watson, *et al.*

⁴¹*The Cambridge Companion to Evangelical Theology*, eds. Timothy Larsen and Daniel J. Treier (Cambridge University Press, 2007).

⁴²Kenneth J. Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley: Holy Love and the Shape of Grace* (Abingdon, 2007).

⁴³William J. Abraham, “The End of Wesleyan Theology,” 21.

certainly die, and deserve to die. Wesley would have been horrified at the idea that his name should be given to an “ism.” What he was committed to was “the old religion, the religion of the Bible, the religion of the primitive church, the religion of the Church of England,”⁴⁴ or, in other words, “mere Christianity,” the *catholic* and *evangelical* faith. And as Wesleyan theologians, our part is surely to serve the growing, global, *catholic* and *evangelical* church of today in all its branches. Charles Wesley paints for us the great vision:

See how great a flame aspires,
Kindled by a spark of grace!
Jesus’ love the nations fires,
Sets the kingdoms on a blaze:
To bring fire on earth He came;
Kindled in some hearts it is:
O that all might catch the flame,
All partake the glorious bliss!

When He first the work begun,
Small and feeble was his day:
Now the word doth swiftly run;
Now it wins its widening way:
More and more it spread and grows,
Ever mighty to prevail;
Sin’s strongholds it now o’erthrows,
Shakes the trembling gates of hell.

Sons of God, your Savior praise!
He the door hath opened wide!
He hath given the word of grace,
Jesus’ word is glorified;
Jesus, mighty to redeem,
He alone the work hath wrought;
Worthy is the work of Him,
Him Who spake a world from naught.

Saw ye not the cloud arise,
Little as a human hand?
Now it spreads along the skies,
Hangs o’er all the thirsty land:

⁴⁴Sermon 112, “On Laying the Foundation of the New Chapel,” *Works* [BE], Vol. 3, 585.

Lo! the promise of a shower
Drops already from above;
But the Lord will shortly pour
All the spirit of His love.

If then by “Wesleyan theology” we mean the evangelical faith of the church catholic as Wesley understood it, then the idea that it is dead or dying is clearly false. The challenge to Wesleyan theologians is to think and write creatively in order to formulate this evangelical and catholic faith in a way that serves the global, multi-cultural Church of today. If we can serve the present age in this way, this is not the end. It is only the beginning. Thanks be to God!

BODIES GIVEN FOR THE BODY: COVENANT, COMMUNITY, AND CONSECRATION IN ROMANS 12:1

by

Sarah Whittle

In a recent paper discussing the issue of whether Romans needs addressees, Peter Oakes explains, “Historically disembodied readings of Romans misunderstand the letter.”¹ He addresses Romans 12:1, and his position on the writer and expected hearers leads him to the question, “But what is the point of comparison in calling this a sacrifice?”

Oakes acknowledges that Paul’s main point of reference is the range of sacrificial offerings made at the Jerusalem temple. He notes that, if Paul’s audience are Gentiles, Greco-Roman religious practice may be the frame of reference closer to hand. The quest for Paul’s audience will no doubt continue. In the meantime, literary and theological readings of the epistle, emphasising Paul’s narrative thought world, have proved extremely fruitful—to the extent that they have provided momentum for the current debate.²

This is an important introductory matter, not least because interpretations of Rom 12:1 may have suggested either that this is polemic language relating to Israel’s cult, now superseded (the believers’ “living”

¹Peter Oakes, “Does Romans Need Addressees?” An unpublished paper presented at the British New Testament Conference, Aberdeen, 2009.

²Ben Witherington III, *Paul’s Narrative Thought World* (Westminster John Knox Press, 1994); Katherine Greib, *The Story of Romans: A Narrative Defence of God’s Righteousness* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2002); Sylvia Keesmaat, *Paul and His Story: (Re)Interpreting the Exodus Tradition*, JSNT Supp. 181 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999).

sacrifice contrasts favorably with the low spirituality of dead animals of Israel's sacrificial worship) or Paul's frame of reference is Greco-Roman sacrifice. In this case, Israel's cult doesn't feature in Paul's mind. Thus, whether or how it is evoked is not an issue.

While not disputing the importance of the identity of Paul's audience, this paper will propose that Paul's point of comparison is found in Israel's scripture. This is a reading that sees Paul setting out the covenant relationship between God, Israel, and the Gentiles in light of the death and resurrection of Christ and the work of the Spirit—where Paul sees the covenant relationship renewed and the Gentiles included. Specifically, I will explore the possibility that the sacrifice of Roman 12:1 is intended to evoke the peace offering (LXX θυσίαν σωτηρίου) made at the covenant ratification at Sinai (Ex. 24:5) and subsequent renewals of the covenant between God and Israel.³

Kiuchi, who observes that 12:1 “clearly has an old testament ritual background,” and who notes that the adjectives “holy” and “acceptable” are used of any OT sacrifice, and that peace offerings are also expiatory, concludes, “it is inappropriate to suggest that Romans 12:1b refers directly to a specific offering.”⁴ Rather, he says, other occurrences of *thu-*

³Attempting a definition of allusion, Richard Hays says the following: “The volume of intertextual echo varies in accordance with the semantic distance between the source and the reflecting surface. Quotation, allusion and echo may be seen as points along a spectrum of intertextual reference, moving from the explicit to the subliminal. As we move farther away from overt citation, the source recedes into the discursive distance, the intertextual relations become less determinate, and the demand placed on the reader's listening power grows greater.” Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 29-32.

⁴Kiuchi, “Azazel Goat—in Romans 12:1” *Tyndale Bulletin* 57.2 (2006), 252-261, (254). Having made his case for generality, Kiuchi goes on to suggest that the goat of Lev. 16:5, which remains “living,” is the “antecedent” to the sacrifice of 12:1b and that to which Paul is alluding. His point that the peace offering is expiatory must also be nuanced. The primary context of the peace offering is that of fellowship and celebration of reconciliation, although there is evidence to suggest that it was understood to be expiatory by the time of Ezekiel (45:17). Leviticus 17 may have provided the scripture through which the blood was understood to have been atoning, specifically verse 11, which seems to still have the peace offering in view when it says the blood is given to make atonement. *Pseudo-Jonathan* and *Onkelos* describe how the covenant blood in Ex. 24:8 is given to atone for the sins of the people. Jesus' death is described in terms of a covenant sacrifice in Mark 14:24 and Matthew 26:28, where “my blood of the covenant” is used, and Matthew adds that the blood of the covenant was “poured out for the forgiveness of sins.” Paul (1 Cor. 10:25) and Luke (22:20) use “the new covenant in my blood.” Interestingly, in just one chapter the writer the Hebrews portrays Jesus as the sin-offering of the Day of Atonement (9:6-12), the covenant offering of Exodus 24 (9:15-22), and the offering of the red heifer of Numbers 19 (9:13-14).

sia in the Pauline epistles suggest that it refers “very generally to various kinds of animal sacrifices.”⁵ But the case is not clear. As we shall see, Paul was capable of making distinctions, and did.⁶ I shall begin by sketching the narrative of Romans 9-11 where Paul sets out the mercy of God as the basis for the sacrifice of Romans 12:1.⁷

The Narrative of Romans 9-11

Although Israel has the privilege of being the elect, Paul doesn’t dwell at Sinai but returns to the calling of Abraham to find that “not all Israelites truly belong to Israel”; that is, not all Abraham’s descendants can properly be said to be the people of God (9:6). Rather, it is the children of the promise who are Abraham’s descendants. That promise, according to Paul, was that Abraham would inherit all the nations of the world (4:13). Paul cites Hosea as evidence that God has called people “not from Jews only, but also from Gentiles” (9:24). Following Hosea, after exile and judgement for sin, the broken covenant relationship will be renewed and those who were “not my people” will become “children of the living God.” Paul cites several phrases from Hosea (2:23 in 9:25 and 1:10 in 9:26) with the implication that he sees scripture being fulfilled in the present.

Those “returned from exile”—Jew and Gentile—have received righteousness by faith in Christ. Paul’s citations from and allusions to the covenant renewal ceremony of Deuteronomy 30—which follows a post-exilic circumcision of Israel’s heart (30:4)—strongly suggest that he understands this final, great renewal of covenant to be taking place. But it does not involve reciting Torah and an oath of obedience to it; rather, it is on the basis of belief in one’s heart and a confession that Jesus is Lord (10:9-10). Paul concludes that “there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved” (10:13).

⁵Kiuchi, “Azazel Goat,” 254.

⁶In the idol food debate of 1 Cor. 10, for example, a text that Kiuchi uses in support of his argument, Paul refers to historic Israel (κατὰ σάρκα) who eats the sacrifices as partners in the altar (10:18). Assuming Paul is not referring specifically to the priesthood, which is unlikely given the context, he must be referring to an offering where the community participates in the meal.

⁷To the extent that Paul may be working in categories of narrative, see Richard Hays’ response to Bruce Longenecker in “Is Paul’s Gospel Narratable?” *JSNT*. Vol. 27, No. 2 (2004): 217-239.

Paul shows that, with the disobedience of ethnic Israel, Gentiles have now received mercy. But he makes clear that ethnic Israel, too, will receive mercy. His use of ἔλεος in Romans 11:31 picks up on the word at the beginning of his argument in chapter 9. In 9:15, Paul cites Exodus 33, the hardening of Pharaoh's heart, to establish the fact that God is free to have mercy on whomever God chooses. The following verse (9:16) shows that election is solely the prerogative of God who shows mercy. In 9:23 the objects of mercy are from the Jews and the Gentiles. Again in 15:9, Gentiles will glorify God for his mercy. In each case ἔλεος is used to describe the mercy of God in regard to election and, more significantly, includes Gentile incorporation into the covenant.

This mercy is the basis for the praise that is offered at the end of chapter 11 where the hymn functions as “an explicit reminder of the material and spiritual benefits that the enactment of God's ‘mystery’ will bring.”⁸ The sense that this material connects 9-11 with what follows is reinforced. God's purposes are part of God's unsearchable judgments.⁹ Believers are called to respond with worship that is an appropriate expression of the restoration made effective by Christ.¹⁰

Paul's question “who has known the mind of the Lord?” (11:34) is one that should not be overlooked, especially in its proximity to the “will of God” sayings below (12:2). This knowledge is located in a correct understanding of the faithfulness of God in Christ, in terms of the fulfillment of the promises given to the Patriarchs (15:8) and that which was promised beforehand through the Prophets (1:2). It has as its objectives the realization of these purposes of God in the covenant community. This is the mystery of Paul's Gospel, the means by which Jew and Gentile become one holy people made righteous in Christ.

The Sacrifice of Reasonable Worship

This theme of the mercies of God (οἰκτιρμῶν τοῦ θεοῦ) becomes the basis of Paul's exhortation in chapter 12. The appeal, says Jewett, is

⁸Robert Jewett, *Romans: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 716.

⁹Tobin points out the significance of “three rhetorical questions about the possibilities of humans understanding the divine mysteries.” Thomas Tobin, *Paul's Rhetoric in Its Contexts* (Hendrickson, 2004), 377.

¹⁰Cranfield elaborates the language of mercy in 9-11. C. E. B Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans*, ICCO II (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1979), 596.

sustained by pagan as well as Jewish religion, which “assumed that the reception of divine benefaction placed a person or group under obligation to the deity.”¹¹ This should not merely be understood in terms of obligation, however; this is the response of covenant-making or renewal, a formal rite which establishes or re-establishes relationship.

Paul exhorts his hearers to “present your bodies a sacrifice, living, holy, pleasing to God” (παραστήσαι τὰ σώματα ὑμῶν θυσίαν ζῶσαν ἁγίαν εὐάρεστον τῷ θεῷ). They are to present their bodies (σώματα) corporately as a singular sacrifice (θυσία), modified with the adjectives living (ζῶσαν), holy (ἁγίαν), and pleasing (εὐάρεστον). To present (παρίστημι) is the technical language of sacrifice,¹² and the attributes holy and pleasing also lend support for a cultic setting.

That the sacrifice is *living* is not simply a presentation of an alternative to a dead ritual sacrifice. There are strong connections with chapter six here, which also draws on notions of sacrifice and bodily consecration. Believers are to “offer (παριστάνετε) yourselves to God as those alive from the dead” (6:13).¹³ Thus, this is a sacrifice in which there is a death involved, but following that a new life, a sacrifice whose death and life is “in Christ.” Chapter 6 also provides a clue to Paul’s use of holiness language in relation to sacrifice. Believers are to present (παρεστήσατε) themselves as slaves to righteousness, resulting in sanctification (ἁγιασμόν) (6:19). This activity is plainly contrasted with the old way of life and being offered (παρεστήσατε) in slavery to impurity and iniquity (τῇ ἀκαθαρσίᾳ καὶ τῇ ἀνομίᾳ εἰς τὴν ἀνομίαν).

Sanctification or making holy (ἁγιασμός) clearly has an ethical quality in chapter 6 which should be kept in mind as we read 12:1-2. That the sacrifice of 12:1 is holy, or set-apart to God, suggests both the relationship to the holy and the ethical implications of that relationship.¹⁴ The third adjective, εὐάρεστος, is that which is pleasing to God. Elsewhere

¹¹Jewett, *Romans*, 727.

¹²Cranfield says it is used here “as a technical term of religious ritual with the meaning ‘to offer.’ . . . The verb does have this sense in extra-biblical Greek. See Josephus, *Jewish War* 2.89; *Antiquities* 4.113. Cranfield, *Epistle to the Romans*, 598.

¹³Michael Thompson, *Clothed with Christ: The Example and Teaching of Jesus in Romans 12:1-15:13*, JSNT Supp. 59 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), 79.

¹⁴“The metaphorical context makes clear that “holy” has primarily cultic associations; but for Paul the ultimate significance of this being “set-apart” has, of course, moral implications.” Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 750.

(Phil. 4:18) Paul combines the terms acceptable (δεκτός), sweet smelling (εὐωδία), and pleasing (εὐάρεστος), the former two being favorite terms to describe Israel's sacrifice.¹⁵ Apparently these adjectives should be heard with concepts of both moral uprightness and temple cult.

Paul's phrase confirming the believer's reasonable worship (τὴν λογικὴν λατρείαν ὑμῶν) extends the technical language of sacrifice. Jewett suggests on this basis that it should be understood generally to refer to early Christian worship, including temple sacrifices, home services, the observation of the Sabbath, the recitation of the Shema, the Lord's Supper and other forms of early Christian worship.¹⁶ Specifically, λατρεία is used by Paul in Romans 9:4 where it is attributed to Israel as one of the list of privileges: it is the worship or sacrificial service which is God-ordained for the people of God to carry out.¹⁷ As Wright points out, this is one more place where Israel's privileges (9:4) are shared with the Gentiles. And Paul does with temple worship what he did with circumcision (2:25-29). "This can hardly be overemphasised," says Wright.¹⁸ It is often observed that λογικός has the sense of Stoic rationality, and, while such a sense is not excluded, this θυσία is the appropriate response, a worship consonant with God's covenant mercy.¹⁹

The phrase is filled with the technical language of sacrifice. But this is a different kind of sacrifice. As Jewett puts it, to present your bodies is "unique in many ways":²⁰ (1) This is one's own body, rather than an object; (2) Paul describes a collective devotion, a communal sacrifice;

¹⁵Rom. 12:2; 14:18; 2 Cor. 5:9; Phil. 4:18; Col. 3:20. In Lev 1:3; 22:29, sacrifices are to be made in such a manner that God will accept them. For example, the θυσίαν σωτηρίου of Leviticus 19 is δεκτός.

¹⁶Jewett, *Romans*, 565.

¹⁷It is used in LXX for cultic service, including at the Passover ritual in Exodus 12:25-6, and the covenant renewal at Joshua 22:7 where it specifically describes the presentation of the peace offerings. In its nine uses in LXX, eight refer to Jewish cultic worship. TDNT 3.181-2. It is translated by the NAS as "temple service" and by the NIV as "temple worship."

¹⁸N. T. Wright, "The Letter to the Romans: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections" Vol. 10, *The New Interpreter's Bible*, ed. Leander E. Keck (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002), 704. Wright, "Letter to the Romans," 704.

¹⁹Wright emphasises the sense of Stoic rationality, saying "this is more than simply the worship to which our argument points, though the phrase could mean that as well and it is no doubt true." Wright, 704.

²⁰See Jewett, *Romans*, 728.

(3) this is a bodily obedience, yet it is hardly appropriate for continual service in its aorist infinitive. Seeing significance in the aorist infinitive, Jewett suggests “present” (παραστήσαι) is “inappropriate for continuing service in daily life, pointing, rather, to some specific “transaction” that Paul has in mind.”²¹

Although the notion that one should present (παρίστημι) one’s body is clustered in 6:13, 16, 19 (along with 14:10 and 16:2) where it is used in the context of giving one’s body in service of life and righteousness, in none of those places does Paul portray it with the technical language of an act of sacrifice as he does here in 12:1. Moreover, whereas in chapter 6 the emphasis is on an ethical assertion regarding that which the Romans should do with their bodies in terms of not sinning but living a life of righteousness, in 12:1 Paul has a singular offering in view. The emphasis is on bodies given as a corporate sacrifice.

Can we shed more light on Paul’s use of tense? Cranfield says one might suggest “very tentatively” that “a sense of the definiteness which characterizes the act of self surrender may have contributed to Paul’s choice of the aorist.”²² Godet goes further, contrasting the “once and for all act” with the continuing activity found in 12:2 where present tenses are used.²³ Godet describes two main types of sacrifices of Israel’s cult. The first, he says, are offered to obtain reconciliation; the second are offered after obtaining reconciliation and serving to celebrate it—the whole burnt-offering and the peace-offering.

The fundamental idea of the first part, chaps. 1-11, was that of the sacrifice offered by God for the sin and transgression of mankind; witness the central passage, 3:25 and 26. These are the mercies of God to which Paul appeals here, and the development of which has filled the first eleven chapters. The practical part which we are beginning corresponds to the second

²¹Jewett, *Romans*, 728-9. Dunn suggest that Paul should have selected a present infinitive to adequately represent the “essentially continuous character” of the action contemplated. Peter Oakes, too, reads “continuous action.” Oakes, “Does Romans Need Addressees?” Following his controlling interpretive framework, Jewett understands Paul to be enlisting the bodies of the Romans for “a mission project.” Jewett *Romans*, 729.

²²Cranfield, *Romans*, ICC II, 598.

²³F. Godet, *Commentary on St Paul’s Epistle to the Romans* (trans. A. Cusin; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1887), 278-9.

kind of sacrifice, which was the symbol of consecration after pardon had been received (the holocaust, in which the victim was entirely burned), and of the communion re-established between Jehovah and the believer (the peace offering, followed by a feast in the court of the temple). The sacrifice of expiation offered by God in the person of His Son should now find its response in the believer in the sacrifice of complete consecration and intimate communion.²⁴

Interestingly, Godet understands the letter's controlling emphases to be cultic—that of Christ's sacrifice and believers' sacrifice as response. He sees 12:1b as a symbol of consecration and communion re-established, a peace offering.²⁵

Paul's use of cultic language elsewhere also points to the incorporation of the Gentiles, and this could be a clue to the transaction described here. Paul's priestly ministry remains largely unexplored by Pauline scholarship, not, as yet, related coherently to 12:1. But this priestly service seems to involve him overseeing the consecration of the Gentiles from the profane or unclean to the holy as an activity of the Spirit, which is mediated through his preaching of the gospel. "Nevertheless, on some points I have written to you rather boldly by way of reminder, because of the grace given me by God to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 15:15-16).

It may well be that the Gentiles' sanctification is affirmed here in 12:1 as they offer themselves in an act of commitment and as a response to God's mercy in Christ. The sacrifice in question, then, would be a case of the Romans believers offering themselves to God, becoming holy. Cranfield sees a sense of this and suggests the sacrificial victim "was thought of as passing from the offerer's possession when offered." He concludes, "Henceforth, it was holy—that is, it belonged to God." As

²⁴Godet, *Romans*, 278-9.

²⁵Michael Thompson notes something similar, although without using the technical language, when he says 12:1b is "a sacrifice of thanksgiving in grateful response to the mercy of God seen in the sacrifice of his son." Thompson goes on to offer evidence that in Paul's theology the link with the sacrifice of Jesus is "more than a causal relation." Thompson, *Clothed With Christ*, 80.

such, the aorist infinitive may suggest an event, the self-offering of conversion, the becoming holy.²⁶

There is evidence, then, from both the shape of the narrative of Romans and Paul's "offering of the Gentiles" to suggest that we have in 12:1 the human response to the mercies of the covenant-making God, set out in the technical language of sacrifice. But can this offering be tied further to covenant making? The answer is positive in two important respects: first, the making holy of the sacrifice is not only cultic but also relational language. The sacrifice becomes holy as it is consecrated to God; and those to whom God has shown mercy in restoring to relationship are now expected to present their bodies. Second, scripture affirms the peace offering (θυσίαν σωτηρίου), a voluntary sacrifice of thanks, as the appropriate human response to the divine activity, including at times of covenant-making.

Beginning with Noah (Gen. 8:20), the establishment of a covenant is introduced by sacrificial ritual, as attested to, three times, in the Abraham narrative.²⁷ The Peace Offering was first presented at the covenant ratification in the Sinai narrative (Exodus 24:5) where "burnt offerings and sacrificed oxen as offerings of peace" precede the pronouncement by those gathered that "all that the Lord has spoken we will do and we will be obedient." The idea of sacrifice and accompanying oath is a feature of Israel's covenant-making and renewals.²⁸

Having then been presented at the golden calf incident—potentially with fascinating implications for Paul—the offering is celebrated next at the covenant renewal of Deut. 27-28, where the covenant ratifying burnt offerings and peace offerings is followed by the pronouncement by Moses and the Levitical priests that "This very day you have become the people of the Lord your God" (27:9b). Furthermore, in the renewal ceremony in

²⁶Cranfield, ICC II, *Romans*, 599. Although Cranfield understands this as a surrender that needs to be repeated, it is difficult to see how on this interpretation giving up one's life can be described as a repeatable event. Thompson describes this as to give one's self away, i.e., to "lose one's life." Thomson, *Clothed with Christ*, 82. Moule comments that the calling is "to a transaction with the Lord quite definite, whether or not the like has taken place before, or shall be done again." It is "a critical surrender." H. G. C. Moule, *The Epistle to the Romans* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1902), 328. Perhaps this is as much as we can ascertain.

²⁷Genesis 8:20-21; 15:9-10; 22:13-14

²⁸Paul Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath: Covenant in God's Unfolding Purpose* (Nottingham Apollos, 2007).

Joshua, anticipated by Deuteronomy 27 (Josh. 8:30-35) the people “offered burnt offerings to the Lord and sacrificed peace offerings.” The OT and specifically covenant renewal contexts of such sacrifices suggest that they are the appropriate response to God’s covenant mercy, carried out at times of covenant making and renewal, and are accompanied by an oath of obedience and/or declaration of Israel’s identity as the holy people of God. Specifically, the ritual of Exodus 25:4, for example, is the culmination of Israel’s consecration as priestly kingdom and holy nation (19:6).

The peace offering was a festive meal eaten in or near the sanctuary. The only offering shared between God, the priest, and the offerer and household, it was an expression of covenant relationship. It was last in the order of sacrifices, the offerer only being in a position to make it after having been rendered acceptable by the previous offerings. Although Leviticus gives us technical details of preparation, it yields little information about the meal. In Deuteronomy, however, we find two detailed accounts of how the whole household is to celebrate with the offering, namely, by eating together in the presence of God.²⁹

Scholars have attempted to tie the peace offering specifically to covenant making and renewal, but not without problems. These offerings also occur at major ceremonies, high points of Israel’s liturgical life.³⁰ Furthermore, there is little consensus on how to render the Hebrew term שלמים. Leviticus 7:12ff gives three reasons for bringing a peace offering—confession, freewill, and vow.³¹ But it is difficult to ascertain which aspect of

²⁹“You shall go there bringing there your burnt offerings and your sacrifices . . . your freewill offerings . . . and you shall eat there in the presence of the Lord your God, you and your household together, rejoicing in all the undertakings in which the Lord your God has blessed you. . . . These you shall eat in the presence of the Lord your God at the place the Lord your God will choose. . . . your son, your daughter, male and female slaves . . . the Levites . . . rejoicing in the presence of the Lord your God in all your undertakings” (Deut. 12:6-7, 18). A similar description also occurs in Deuteronomy 14:23, 26b, although the Hebrew term is itself absent from the list of sacrifices. See, too, Hartley, *Leviticus*; WBC 39 (Dallas; TX: Word, 1992), 39.

³⁰For example, when David brings the Ark to Jerusalem (2 Sam. 6:17); at Saul’s inauguration (1 Sam. 11:15); the dedication of Solomon’s temple (1 Kings 8:63).

³¹It may be offered as “peace offering,” i.e., related to *shalom*, or “thank offerings” because of the nature of the sacrifice, or “final offerings” on the basis of the root of “to be complete.” It did not form any part of the regular daily offerings in the temple, although Lev. 23:19 requires the peace offering at Pentecost.

the sacrifice was being emphasized. Was it a confession of God's mercy, gratitude for election, or vows to keep covenant? That these aspects are not mutually exclusive doesn't help to make the case clearer.³² There is, however, consensus that the root שלם is behind the peace offering; thus, "health, prosperity and peace with God, i.e., salvation" seems to do most justice to the evidence.³³

As Wenham puts it, "It was a fellowship or communal offering that indicated and enacted the fact that there was peace between God and his people and that the person, family or community was, therefore, in a state of wellbeing."³⁴ Though affirming the sense of reconciliation between parties, with the celebration as the appropriation of the restored relationship, and although it was offered at times when Israel's covenant was ratified or renewed, Wenham concludes that "covenant sacrifice . . . seems to read too much into the term."³⁵

Although we cannot say with complete confidence that this was a covenant sacrifice, there is some fairly compelling lexical evidence. The LXX choice of θυσίαν σωτηρίου as a rendering in Exodus 24:5 is described by John Wevers as "particularly important." He says it is a "technical term" and that it "must be distinguished from all other types of sacrifice."³⁶ Having first appeared at the covenant ratification in Exodus,³⁷ this translation became standard throughout the Pentateuch. In the non-covenant-making narrative, however, (2 Sam. 6:17; 1 Sam. 11:15; 1 Kings 8:63, etc.) we do not find the rendering θυσίαν σωτηρίου; there the θυσία is instead modified by εἰρηνικὸς.

Specifically, the rendering θυσίαν σωτηρίου is offered at the sealing of the covenant at Sinai (Ex. 24:5); the golden calf (Ex. 32:6); the renewal at Moab (Deut. 27:7); the renewal at Schechem (Joshua 8:31, cf. 22:23); Hezekiah's reforms (2 Chron. 31:2—33:16); and the dedication of the

³²Wenham, *Leviticus*, 79.

³³Wenham, *Leviticus*, 77. BDB translates as "a sacrifice for alliance or friendship," probably based on what we know about the communion that followed.

³⁴Wenham, *Leviticus*, 77.

³⁵Wenham, *Leviticus*, 77.

³⁶John William Wevers, *LXX Notes on the Greek Text of Exodus*; Septuagint and Cognate Studies 30 (Scholar's Press: Atlanta; Georgia, 1990), 319.

³⁷Although this is pre-empted by instruction for preparing the sacrifice in Exodus 20:24.

altar (1 Macc. 4:56), the latter two, arguably, represented as covenant renewals.³⁸ The evidence suggests that the LXX translators understood this offering to form part of a covenant ceremony, and the literary use of the *θυσίαν σωτηρίου* is intended to evoke the Sinai event.³⁹ This is likely to be, as Wevers suggests, on the basis that Moses and the seventy elders ate and drank in the presence of God on Mount Sinai (Ex. 24:9-11), and this offering expressed the same gracious relationship.⁴⁰

The covenant meal is arguably at the heart of Paul's reflections throughout 1 Cor. 10-11. He makes an allusion to the peace offering when he asks, "consider the people of Israel (*κατὰ σάρκα*) are not those who eat the sacrifices partners in the altar?" (10:18) Picking up on a fascinating bit of irony in the Exodus narrative, Paul knows that, having just ratified the covenant, while Moses is on the mountain receiving the law, Israel is sacrificing the *θυσίαν σωτηρίου* to the golden calf—the high-point of Israel's idolatry (Ex. 32:6). So it is not only significant in Paul's polemic that they "rose up to play" (Ex. 32:6, cf. 1 Cor. 10:7), but also that they "sat down to eat and drink" (Ex. 32:6, cf. 1 Cor. 10:7).⁴¹ Having celebrated the covenant meal in the presence of YHWH, Israel does so before the golden calf. Indeed, says Paul, those who eat the peace offering are covenant partners in the altar and eat in the presence of the deity. This may be more than an interesting digression because it is on this very basis, says Paul, that the covenant meal we eat together—the cup we

³⁸Outside these events, the rendering occurs in the technical sacrificial language in Leviticus and numbers. One interesting case is the offering of the *θυσίαν σωτηρίου* in Leviticus 19, a context which may well have been understood as covenant renewal. Hartley, *Leviticus*, 313.

³⁹Hindy Najman shows how the Sinai narrative is represented through Israel's covenant renewals in order to confer Mosaic authority on the proceedings and demonstrate their continuity, although the renewals are differently constituted, in different situations and with different stipulations. Najman, H., *Seconding Sinai: The Development of Mosaic Discourse in Second Temple Judaism* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2003).

⁴⁰Wevers, *Greek Text of Exodus*, 319.

⁴¹Although he acknowledges Paul is referring to historic Israel by his use of *kata sarka*, Hays misses the significance of the golden calf, suggesting rather that Paul is probably thinking of Deuteronomy 14:23, 26b when he describes Israel sharing in the sacrifices. Conzelman does pick up on the reference to the *θυσίαν σωτηρίου*, but in its Leviticus context. Hans Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians: A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 172.

share and the bread we break—is participation in the body of Christ (1 Cor. 10:16).⁴²

As noted, this is not the first time Christ's death is interpreted in terms of Israel's cult. Paul apparently understands it providing the atoning sacrifice for a new means of righteousness where in 3:25 he describes Jesus' self-giving in terms of the Day of Atonement of Lev. 16. The hymn celebrates the death of Jesus as having established a new place of atonement.⁴³ Other clues are the reconciliation language of 5:7-10 where the death of the righteous brings justification—the basis for our peace with God, and the description of the sin offering in 8:3 behind which Dunn and others see the LXX *περὶ ἁμαρτίας* of Leviticus.⁴⁴ Yet, following the covenant-making framework specifically, the Sinai narrative, its covenant meal and its covenant-making blood are undoubtedly significant for Paul's understanding of the new relationship.

As Moses seals the covenant with blood (Ex. 24:8), Paul, apparently following Jesus himself, understands Jesus' blood as fulfilling a similar function, that of ratifying covenant ("This cup is the new covenant in my blood," (1 Cor. 11:25). There is little doubt among commentators that the reference to the blood of the covenant (1 Cor. 11:25) alludes to Exodus 24:8 and the Sinai narrative. Thus, when Paul recites tradition, saying, "This is my body that is for you" and "This cup is the new covenant in my blood" (1 Cor. 11:25), even if it only forms a part of the assortment of concepts that include Passover and Isaiah 53, it is difficult to dispute the allusions to Sinai. As Hays says of Paul's rendering of the tradition, "two closely linked themes stand out; the sharing of the Supper calls the com-

⁴²The culmination of the theological argument against idol food is that those who eat do so in the presence of the deity. The fellowship involved at the meal means that those who eat in idol temples are literally participating with, or becoming partners of, demons (1 Cor. 10:20-21). The exclusivity of the covenant relationship means that this is impossible for those who share the blood and body of Christ.

⁴³There is "no doubt," says Jewett, that Paul identifies Christ as the ἱλαστήριον. See too Jewett, *Romans*, 285; Cranfield, *Romans I*, 216-18; Wright, *Romans*, 474. Others are more hesitant to commit to ideas like Jesus representing "the mercy seat," even though they still see cultic and sacrificial themes. See, for example, C. K Barrett, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*; Harper's New Testament Commentaries (New York: Harper, 1957), 78.

⁴⁴Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, 422

munity to think of Jesus' death for others, and that death is thought to initiate a new covenant."⁴⁵

Hearing Romans 12:1 through 1 Corinthians 10-11 suggests that we should understand sacrificed bodies, covenant making, and corporate hospitality to be closely related. In Corinthians, just as in Romans 12: 1, 4-5, Paul uses the term "body" with two referents.⁴⁶ While Dunn suggests the two options for this metaphor are "the sacramental language of 1 Cor. 10-11" and "the vital expression of the unity of a community,"⁴⁷ Thiselton explains that Christ's body becomes for Paul the lens through which we understand body as community, so that participation is viewed as commonality and concern for the other, and a cruciform lifestyle which witnesses to identification with Christ. In a discussion of the semantics of "one bread one body," Thiselton says: "If body is already an established political term for the unity of a community . . . it eminently reflects Pauline thought to use Christ and his body given over on a cross as a 'lens' (i.e., a foundation and criterion) to refocus the application of body to the church."⁴⁸ So, when Paul looks for terminology to express the believers' life together as an appropriate expression of the restoration found in Christ, it is a cruciform lifestyle of self giving for others

⁴⁵Hays goes on to say, "To be in covenant relation with God is to belong to a covenant people bound together by responsibilities to God and one another." Hays, *First Corinthians*, 199. The covenant focus of the meal has important implications for the way the Eucharist should be understood. Consuming the peace offering celebrated fellowship and reconciliation between YHWH and the worshippers, and between themselves—the partners bound together in covenant community. It was affirmation and celebration that all was well in the relationship. Hearing this in the context of Romans 12:1 opens up possibilities. As James Dunn notes, it is "disappointing, possibly somewhat disturbing" that Paul says so little on the subject. Dunn, *Theology*, 600. Thiselton sees the primary interpretive setting as the Passover (Matt. 26:17-19; cf. John 18:28). Wenham, too, sees Passover as primary, but suggests that this does not invalidate the theological connections between the peace offerings and the Lord's Supper, "for the Passover could be described as a specialised type of peace offering that was celebrated once a year by the whole nation." Wenham, *Leviticus*, 82.

⁴⁶1 Cor. 10:16-17; 11:27-29; 12:12-13 all refer to Christ's body and believers as body.

⁴⁷Dunn, *Theology*, 550.

⁴⁸Antony Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary of the Greek Text*, NICGT (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2001), 768.

described in terms of bodies (σώματα) offered as a corporate sacrifice (ἐν σώμα οἱ πολλοὶ ἔσμεν), just as his body was “for us” (Τοῦτό μου ἔστιν τὸ σῶμα τὸ ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν).

Such a lifestyle, as set out in Romans 12-15, is concerned with the way the socially and ethnically diverse people of God relate to one another. In all their dealings, although they may not be in agreement, they are not to think too highly of themselves, love genuinely, outdo one another in showing honor, not pass judgment, avoid causing offence, pursue peace and mutual edification, and please the other, not themselves. In fact, they are to welcome one another as Christ has welcomed them.

The offering of the people of God in Romans 12:1, then, could well ratify or appropriate the new relationship and function as a kind of thanksgiving and enactment of acceptance, where bodies are given as a sacrifice to others because of, and on the basis of, the restored relationship. This sacrifice, as with the peace offering, has horizontal as well as vertical implications. This corporate offering takes the shape of the body of Christ, demonstrating cruciform acts of welcome and hospitality as it responds to God’s mercy shown to both Jew and Gentile.

Conclusion

In summary, Paul presents Christ’s death in language and concepts of Israel’s cult, and he is capable of identifying various aspects of it. By implication, he is able to describe the Christians’ response similarly. When the evidence presented here is viewed through the lens of Paul’s concern to show how the Gentiles have been included as God’s covenant people, it would follow that Paul would describe some act of response, some rite, which would demonstrate the fact of their inclusion and affirm their relational status as holy people. As Nicholson says of Exodus 24:8, “whatever else it entailed . . . the making of the covenant here was also a matter of Israel becoming YHWH’s holy people.”⁴⁹ Although the confession of faith takes place in a radical reinterpretation of Deuteronomy 30 in Romans 10, it may be that this “liturgical” act echoes Israel’s covenant-making defined on new terms. The offering of the people of God in Romans, then, could well ratify or appropriate the new relationship, and function as a kind of thanksgiving and enactment of acceptance.

⁴⁹E. W. Nicholson, *God and His People: Covenant Theology in the Old Testament* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1986), 83.

Hearing Romans 12:1 through the covenant meal of 1 Corinthians 10-11, the self-offering of Christ's body in an act of covenant making, not only confirms this as a possibility but also affirms the importance of the horizontal aspect of the Christians' sacrificed bodies. Effectively, following Christ, their bodies are given for the body. Chapters 12-14 will emphasize the cruciform nature of the hospitality the Roman church is to demonstrate. Paul is providing the theological basis on which the community acts out its life together before God, with Christ as its example. This corporate sacrifice is one of consecration and communion, an offering of peace and reconciliation with God and one another.

May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus, so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you for the glory of God (Rom. 15:7).

THE LIVING AND WRITTEN VOICE OF GOD: JOHN WESLEY'S READING, UNDERSTANDING, AND APPLICATION OF SCRIPTURE

by

David B. McEwan

Many people in the eighteenth century viewed Christianity as an intellectual system, and belief was an intellectual quality involving the comprehension and application of propositional truth. This was congenial to the developing Enlightenment approach to the study of religion.¹ While John Wesley was influenced by these developments, he clearly rejected their main thrust. From the very beginning of his Oxford years, Wesley had visualized God's essential nature as love, a love displayed among the Persons of the Triune Godhead and to all creation. God's desire for loving relationships then defines and shapes all of interactions with humanity. To be a Christian is to have a personal encounter with God, entering into a relationship based on trust, and centred in the heart.

If "true religion" is a matter of the heart and relationships, then the ministry of the Holy Spirit is absolutely vital to the initiation, development, and consummation of the life of faith in both personal and community experience.² Sadly, this critical fact, acknowledged by nearly all

¹See Peter Harrison, *"Religion" and the Religions in the English Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

²John Wesley, *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1984), Vol. 1: *Sermons I*, Albert C. Outler, ed. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1984), 660. Hereafter, *Works*. See also *Works* (Jackson), 10:82. For the vital importance of the ministry of the Spirit in Wesley's theologizing, see Rob L. Staples, "John Wesley's Doctrine of the Holy Spirit," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 21, no. 1 & 2 (Spring-Fall, 1986): 91-115.

Wesleyan theologians, is often forgotten when it comes to approaching theological method. We so often work as if God is the silent partner in our conversations. It is all about our attempts to understand God and his ways, defining what is and what is not possible to “know” from the written and oral resources available to us. If God is truly a Person who loves and desires us to be in fellowship with humans, then it is reasonable to expect that God would be active in communicating with us in an immediate and personal way, not just through documents written long ago.

The Living Voice of God: the Work of the Holy Spirit

John Wesley’s writings are filled with references to the role of the Holy Spirit in the whole process of salvation. The person who was impacted by the Spirit’s ministry could know this by personal experience through a direct witness of the Spirit.³ The danger in this was, of course, that believers would so insist on the immediate work of the Spirit that they would rely almost totally on spiritual intuition for their doctrine and practice. Wesley was particularly concerned by beliefs that have all “the appearance of *enthusiasm*: overvaluing *feelings* and *inward impressions*; mistaking the mere work of *imagination* for the voice of the Spirit; expecting the end without the means; and undervaluing *reason*, *knowledge*, and *wisdom*, in general.”⁴

To limit this danger, Wesley realized the need for various safeguards, and these had to be such that they did not deny or stifle the direct work of the Spirit in the heart. It is here that his concept of “the means of grace” becomes critical. While this phrase is normally used in connection with the sacraments and spiritual disciplines, Wesley also used it in connection with those sources that God uses to instruct and guide people in their spiritual life.⁵ The chief of these means are “prayer, whether in secret or with the great congregation; searching the Scriptures (which implies reading, hearing, and meditating thereon) . . . and these we believe to be ordained of God as the ordinary channels of conveying his grace to the souls of men.”⁶

³*Works*, 1:290-91.

⁴*Works*, 21:396. The consequences of all this he outlines on pp. 396-97.

⁵See Lycurgus M. Starkey, Jr., *The Work of the Holy Spirit: A Study in Wesleyan Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962), 79-90.

⁶*Works*, 1:381.

It is important to note that, in both prayer and searching the Scriptures, Wesley implied that both personal and community reason and experience are vital elements. His theological method clearly utilizes all of them, but he does not want to say that they are absolutely essential—this is properly limited to the work of the Holy Spirit.

. . . all outward means whatever, if separate from the Spirit of God, cannot profit at all, cannot conduce in any degree either to the knowledge or love of God. . . . And all outward things, unless he work in them and by them, are mere weak and beggarly elements. Whosoever therefore imagines there is any intrinsic power in any means whatsoever does greatly err, not knowing the Scriptures, neither the power of God. We know that there is *no inherent power* in the words that are spoken in prayer, *in the letter of Scripture read, the sound thereof heard*, . . . but that it is God alone who is the giver of every good gift, the author of all grace; that the whole power is of him, whereby through any of these there is any blessing conveyed to our soul. We know likewise that he is able to give the same grace, though there were no means on the face of the earth . . . *seeing he is equally able to work whatsoever pleaseth him by any or by none at all* [emphasis mine].⁷

Wesley was arguing for the vital role of Christian experience (the presence of God himself in the person's life). The implication is that people devoid of the Spirit cannot comprehend the Scriptures as God intends. He has made it clear that it is the direct authority of the Spirit that is absolutely indispensable in theologizing, making God the sole authority in matters of faith and practice. Don Thorsen draws our attention to this critical point:

Wesley knew that all authority comes from God and that religious authorities with which we function are somehow derivative of God's ultimate authority. Even Scripture only represents a derived or secondary religious authority. Thus, while the focus of so much of this study is on Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience, we must not forget that Christians ulti-

⁷Ibid., 382. See also Starkey, 142-45.

mately look to God alone as their source of religious authority.⁸

To maintain this stance was not easy and it has often been lost by his successors, who have frequently elevated Scripture (as a written document) to the place of primacy (or, to a lesser extent, reason, experience or tradition), with only a casual link to the work of the Spirit.

The Written Voice of God: the Scriptures

Wesley was only too aware that his insistence on God as the sole authority in matters of faith and practice easily opened the door to mysticism and enthusiasm.⁹ He rejected mysticism simply because it was unscriptural: “. . . it is not only quite unconnected with Scripture, but quite inconsistent with it. It strikes at the very foundation of Scripture. If this stands, the Bible must fall.”¹⁰ The written text was a guard against those who so insisted on the immediate work of the Spirit in the believer’s life that they relied almost solely on spiritual intuition for their doctrine and practice.

There is a consistent and strong emphasis throughout Wesley’s writings on the centrality of Scripture for both doctrine and practice.¹¹ In a sermon reflecting on the rise and development of the Methodist movement, he emphasized:

⁸Don Thorsen, “*Sola Scriptura* and the Wesleyan Quadrilateral,” *WTJ* 41, no. 2 (Fall, 2006): 20. See also Winfield H. Bevins, “Pneumatology in John Wesley’s Theological Method,” *Asbury Theological Journal* 58, no. 2 (Fall, 2003): 101-13; Ted A. Campbell, *Methodist Doctrine: The Essentials* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999), 40; Leroy T. Howe, “United Methodism in Search of Theology,” in *Doctrine and Theology in the United Methodist Church*, ed. Thomas A. Langford (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1991), 52-63; N. T. Wright, *Scripture and the Authority of God* (London: SPCK, 2005), 17-18.

⁹For a thorough examination of Wesley’s interaction with mysticism, see Robert G. Tuttle Jr., *Mysticism in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989). See also *Works*, 21:279, 442-43; 26:29, 56; John Telford, ed., *The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley*, 8 vols. (London: Epworth Press, 1931), 3:332-70; 4:106, 234 (hereafter *Letters* (Telford)).

¹⁰*Works* (Jackson), 13:436. See also *Works*, 22:217, 383.

¹¹*Works*, 4:393-94. See also *Works*, 1:384, 90; 3:31; 9:34; 11:337, 40, 70, 75, 414; 19:162, 79; 20:439; 21:143, 59; 26:483, 521-23, 43-45; Thomas Jackson, ed., *The Works of John Wesley, A.M.*, 14 vols. (London: The Methodist Conference, 1872), 13:510 (hereafter *Works* (Jackson)), 13:510; *Letters* (Telford), 3:332-70; 4:111, 24, 31, 216, 334.

From the very beginning, from the time that four young men united together, each of them was *homo unius libri*—a man of one book. *God taught them* [emphasis mine] all to make his “Word a lantern unto their feet, and a light in all their paths.” They had one, and only one rule of judgment with regard to all their tempers, words, and actions, namely, the oracles of God.¹²

He continued to acknowledge the input of the Anglican Homilies on their understanding of justification by faith, but “they were never clearly convinced that we are justified by faith alone till they carefully consulted these, and compared them with the Sacred Writings, particularly St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans.”¹³ When a critic suggested that Wesley make available the “ingredients” of Methodism in a public document, he wrote that “the whole ingredients of Methodism (so called) have been discovered in print over and over; and they are enrolled in a public register, the Bible, from which we extracted them at first. . . . We ought neither to add or diminish, nor alter whatever is written in that Book.”¹⁴ For example, Wesley’s insistence on referring to “perfection” caused him endless difficulties with other Christians, but he was unwilling to drop it, or similar terms, as they were clearly scriptural: “But are they not found in the oracles of God? If so, by what authority can any messenger of God lay them aside, even if all men should be offended?”¹⁵

Reading the Scriptures

Rather than supplying propositional truth for intellectual apprehension and doctrinal formulations, the Scriptures are primarily used to define and illustrate the norms of the Christian life. Said Wesley:

No stress has been laid on anything as though it were necessary to salvation but what is undeniably contained in the Word of God. And of the things contained therein the stress laid on

¹²*Works*, 3:504. See also *Works* 3:496; 4:145-46; *Works* (Jackson), 13:258-61.

¹³*Works*, 3:505. Wesley failed to realize that his understanding was in fact shaped by his reading community; a person from another reading community could look at these same texts and not find the same corroboration.

¹⁴*Letters* (Telford), 4:131. See also *Works*, 3:585-86; *Letters* (Telford), 6:123.

¹⁵*Works*, 2:99-100. He does admit that the terms do need to be explained.

each has been in proportion to the nearness of its relation to what is there laid down as the sum of all—the love of God and neighbour.¹⁶

Wesley's hermeneutical key is not merely soteriology as a whole, but what he perceives to be the heart of it—the love of God and neighbour. This keeps the central interpretive focus on personal relationships, love and trust, rather than a mere intellectual comprehension of doctrine. The Bible is more akin to personal correspondence than an academic treatise, and was to be understood from this perspective. Wesley consistently maintained that, in all essential matters relating to salvation, Scripture was clear thanks to the work of the Spirit in our lives.¹⁷ When confronted with the danger of false teaching in his societies, Wesley wrote:

Hear with fervent and continual prayer *to him who alone teacheth man wisdom* [emphasis mine]. And see that you bring whatever you hear “to the law and to the testimony.” Receive nothing untried, nothing till it is weighed in “the balance of the sanctuary.” Believe nothing they say unless it is clearly confirmed by plain passages of Holy Writ. Wholly reject whatsoever differs therefrom, whatever is not confirmed thereby.¹⁸

This underscores the critical role of God himself in the reading and comprehension of Scripture.¹⁹ It confirms that the living word and the written word of God are intimately linked and mutually supportive.²⁰

The reading stance taken on any text or texts must derive from a basic conviction regarding God's essential nature displayed in the whole of Scripture. When considering the nature of “real religion,” Wesley reminded his people that “it runs through the Bible from the beginning to the end, in one connected chain. And the agreement of every part of it

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 277. Wesley perceives this as both scriptural and rational; see *Works*, 2:155–56.

¹⁷*Works*, 2:102.

¹⁸*Works*, 1:683–84. In his correspondence with “John Smith” Wesley totally rejected the idea of proving doctrines by miracles or other signs as only the Scriptures were sufficient; see *Works*, 26:155.

¹⁹On the intimate link between the Spirit and the Word, see Staples, 94–101. See also *Works*, 3:504.

²⁰See the preface to John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament* (London: Epworth Press, 1952).

with every other is properly the analogy of faith.”²¹ Critical to his understanding was this idea of the “analogy of faith,” which in the *Notes (NT)* on Rom. 12:6 he described as “the general tenor” of the whole of the Bible understood through a soteriological framework of original sin, justification by faith, and present, inward salvation.²² In the correspondence with “John Smith” he agreed that it was important to work with “the general tenor of Scripture soberly studied and consistently interpreted” and “that the children of light walk by the joint light of reason, Scripture, and the Holy Ghost.”²³ This affirms Wesley’s conviction that, for the Spirit-filled Christian, reason, Scripture and the living voice of the Spirit work in harmony. He remained confident that a sound interpretation could only arise from first grasping the whole picture of salvation revealed in Scripture, rather than beginning with isolated proof texts which could easily be manipulated to prove almost any doctrinal or practical point.²⁴

Against the Calvinists, Wesley argued that God’s sovereignty cannot be seen in isolation from his justice and mercy, and neither of these can be divorced from “the scriptural account of his love and goodness.” Wesley noted that Scripture expressly states that God is love and this love is toward all, not merely the “elect.” On this basis, any particular text or texts that can be interpreted to support the application of predestination and election to the salvation of individuals must be wrong, as it contradicts God’s nature as love, from which flows justice and mercy. These, in turn, cannot be inconsistent with God’s sovereignty and God’s gracious gift of human responsibility.²⁵

Wesley was convinced that a genuine heart experience of God need not be tightly linked to a correct interpretation of the text, since God has full authority over the text and can apply it through the Spirit as he chooses. For example, when Hannah Ball sought help on interpreting

²¹*Works*, 2:483. See also *Works*, 2:501; 4:89.

²²Rom. 12:6, *Notes (NT)*. See also *Works*, 1:183, 473; *Works* (Jackson), 10:490; *Letters* (Telford), 5:103-04.

²³*Works*, 26:158. In terms of order, Wesley said, “We prove the doctrines we preach by Scripture and reason; and, if needed, by antiquity;” see *Works*, 11:310. See also *Works*, 2:293; 26:380, 475.

²⁴For insightful comment on this issue, see Chuck Gutenson, “Theological Method for a Man of One Book,” *Asbury Theological Journal* 59, no 1 & 2 (Spring/Fall, 2004): 54-61.

²⁵*Works* (Jackson), 10:211-36, 42-55. See also his comments on Mk. 3:13 and 1 Jn. 4:8 in *Notes (NT)*.

Rev. 3:12 because it had produced doubts as to her own experience, he wrote:

From what has lately occurred you may learn a good lesson—not to build your faith on a single text of Scripture, and much less on a particular sense of it. Whether this text be interpreted in one or the other way, the work of God in your soul is the same. Beware, therefore, of supposing that you are mistaken in the substance of your experience because you may be mistaken with regard to the meaning of a particular scripture. Pray; and observe that *God Himself may, and frequently does, apply a scripture to the heart* (either in justifying or sanctifying a soul) *in what is not its direct meaning* [emphasis mine].²⁶

This affirms that Scripture, while at the core of his theological methodology, could not be substituted for the direct work of the Spirit in the life. While his written sermons are filled with scriptural language and allusions (as the footnotes to the *Bicentennial Edition* plainly demonstrates), Wesley's private correspondence contained very little direct quotation from Scripture, and Wesley rarely referred to a specific text to answer a particular need. The letters more commonly contain material from Wesley's pastoral wisdom and experience, both directly from his own ministry and what he has read or heard from others, as well as exhortations to read his published sermons and other works.²⁷ These writings contain a plethora of Scripture quotations and allusions, confirming that it is not simply the actual texts of Scripture that matter, but the way you read, understand and apply them.

Understanding and Applying the Scriptures

Wesley upheld the Protestant belief that every Christian is personally responsible before God for his or her reading of the text.²⁸ However, he was certain that imperfect knowledge, ignorance, and the subsequent mistakes arising from these impact our ability to understand and apply the Scripture,

²⁶*Letters* (Telford), 5:328.

²⁷See David B. McEwan, *Wesley as a Pastoral Theologian: Theological Methodology in John Wesley's Doctrine of Christian Perfection* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, forthcoming).

²⁸*Works*, 1:683-84.

especially with respect to those parts thereof which less immediately relate to practice. Hence even the children of God are not agreed as to the interpretation of many places in Holy Writ; nor is their difference of opinion any proof that they are not the children of God on either side. But it is a proof that we are no more to expect any living man to be infallible than to be omniscient.²⁹

He acknowledged that the work of the Spirit in a believer's life is sufficient to enable the person to be certain about salvation. However, this assurance does not extend to other matters of doctrinal and practical interest. In a "religion of the heart" there was a great danger of imagining yourself a Christian or that you were guided by the Spirit when neither was the case: ". . . how many impute things to him, or expect things from him, without any rational or scriptural ground!"³⁰ To help guard against this, "God has given us our own reason for a guide; though never excluding the 'secret assistance' of his Spirit."³¹

Wesley insisted that, although faith "is always consistent with reason, yet reason cannot produce faith in the scriptural sense of the word."³² With this essential proviso, he reiterated that reason is very useful, "both with regard to the foundation of [religion], and the superstructure. The foundation of true religion stands upon the oracles of God" and it is reason that enables us to understand and explain them to ourselves and to others.³³ "Is it not reason (*assisted by the Holy Ghost*) [emphasis mine] which enables us to understand what the Holy Scriptures declare concerning the being and attributes of God?"³⁴

Given the dangers of imperfect reasoning and the consequent faulty interpretation and application of Scripture, it was necessary to utilise a further test to confirm that the interpretation was sound. This is where Christian experience plays an essential role in Wesley's theological method. However, Christian experience is not self-authenticating and it needs criteria for evaluation, and this is where Scripture is essential. It is this symbiotic relationship between Scripture, reason, and specifically

²⁹*Works*, 2:102. See also *Works*, 26:519.

³⁰*Works*, 2:54.

³¹*Ibid.* See also *Works*, 26:252, 402-04.

³²*Works*, 2:593.

³³*Ibid.*, 591-92.

³⁴*Ibid.*, 592.

Christian experience that lies at the heart of his approach. Wesley believed his understanding of the Scriptures was correct regarding the inward witness of the Spirit, and he appealed to experience to confirm it:

And here properly comes in, to confirm this scriptural doctrine, the experience of the children of God—the experience not of two or three, not of a few, but of a great multitude. . . . It has been confirmed, both in this and in all ages, by “a cloud of” living and dying “witnesses.” It is confirmed by *your* experience and *mine*.³⁵

Note that the reference to Christian experience is not merely to an individual’s experience but to that of the community of faith in many times and places. He agreed that experience was not sufficient to “prove a doctrine which is not founded on Scripture,” but since this doctrine is founded on Scripture “experience is properly alleged to confirm it.”³⁶

Wesley was sure that God raised up the Methodists to preach perfection, but his critics asked what he would do if none had ever attained what he claimed the scriptures promised. “If I were convinced that none in England had attained what has been so clearly and strongly preached by such a number of Preachers in so many places, and for so long a time, I should be clearly convinced that we had all mistaken the meaning of those scriptures; and therefore, for the time to come, I too must teach that ‘sin will remain till death.’”³⁷ This statement is a critical one since it affirms that Christian experience is essential to verify our understanding and application of the Bible. If no one has ever had such an experience, then the interpretation of Scripture is incorrect. He warned that human experience and emotion must always be checked by the plain declarations of Scripture. He rejected many of the teachings of the Roman Catholic mystics because “each of them makes his own experience the standard of religion.”³⁸

The references to Christian experience emphasize that this is not an individualistic approach because the person was always set in a community of faith and informed by its wisdom.³⁹ Wesley unmistakably made

³⁵*Works*, 1:290.

³⁶*Works*, 1:296-97. In the Conference of 1747 he recorded in relation to assurance of justification that “It is dangerous to ground general doctrine on a few particular experiments.” See also *Works*, 1:288; *Works* (Jackson), 8:293.

³⁷*Works* (Jackson), 11:405-06.

³⁸*Letters* (Telford), 6:44.

³⁹See *Works*, 11:453.

reference to both antiquity and the Church of England as critical reading communities for his understanding and application of Scripture.⁴⁰ He particularly valued the contributions of the early apostolic fathers because “we cannot therefore doubt but what they deliver to us is the pure doctrine of the gospel; what Christ and his apostles taught,” and we “ought to receive it, though not with equal veneration, yet with only little less regard than we do the sacred writings of those who were their masters and instructors.”⁴¹ Thomas Langford has proposed the term “ethos” rather than ‘tradition’ as the best way to describe Wesley’s references to the role of the community of faith.⁴² This can be defined as its characteristic nature, attitudes and values; its way of viewing and living in the world. The emphasis is then on its dynamic, relational qualities rather than a static, formally-defined belief system. It was in this sense that Wesley strongly treasured the heritage of the early church (especially of the first three centuries), the Church of England (particularly of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries),⁴³ and his own emerging Methodist movement.⁴⁴

This latter point is critical and often ignored in any analysis of Wesley’s use of tradition.⁴⁵ Wesley retained throughout his whole ministry a

⁴⁰For a clear example of this link, see his response to Dr. Horner in *Letters* (Telford), 4:172-76. There are also references to a number of individuals, groups, and documents that are not located in either of these communities; see Outler’s examination of Wesley’s sources as they are used in his sermons in *Works*, 1:74-88.

⁴¹John Wesley, ed., *A Christian Library Consisting of Extracts and Abridgements of the Choicest Pieces of Practical Divinity Which Have Been Published in the English Tongue* (London: Thomas Cordeaux, 1819), 1:iii-iv. The key writings are those of Clement, Ignatius, Justin Martyr, Polycarp and Macarius. Wesley regarded these early fathers as “endued with the extraordinary assistance of the Holy Spirit” and so hardly capable of mistake; see p. v-vi.

⁴²See Thomas A. Langford, “Introduction: A Wesleyan/Methodist Theological Tradition,” in *Doctrine and Theology*, 11-13.

⁴³*Works*, 4:393-94. He regarded the Church of England as a “scriptural church” and valued its authority “only less than that of the oracles of God.” See for example *Works*, 9:308; 11:117, 63-71, 85, 290; 26:49-50; 419, 26; *Letters* (Telford), 3:245.

⁴⁴In a letter Wesley said, “This is the scriptural way, the *Methodist* way, the true way”; see *Works*, 26:489.

⁴⁵Neither Ted Campbell or Scott Jones’ in their analysis of Wesley’s theological authorities makes reference to Methodism itself; see Campbell, “The Interpretative Role of Tradition,” in *Wesley and the Quadrilateral: Renewing the Conversation*, eds., W. Stephen Gunter et al (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997): 63-75; Jones, *John Wesley’s Conception and Use of Scripture* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1995): 169-76.

deep conviction of the value of both the early church and the Church of England as theological communities, but what is explicit in the latter decades of his ministry is the addition of his own Methodist movement to this group.⁴⁶ Over time a distinct Methodist ethos arose, shaped by its Anglican roots, but with conspicuously Wesleyan features: the sermons, hymns, liturgy, testimonies, society rules, and accountability structures, conferences, letters, the growing corpus of Methodist writings and edited works, all largely bearing the stamp or seal of approval of John Wesley himself. This was why his Methodist Conferences were so important, especially in helping to understand, teach, and live holy lives.⁴⁷

Conclusion

The critical observation to be made is Wesley's insistence that God is a God of love, and that the whole goal of salvation is to restore human beings to an enjoyment of that love in a relationship with God and with other persons. This emphasis places the living presence of the Holy Spirit with persons in community at the center of his theological method. Wesley clearly believed that this direct experience of God could be perceived wrongly due to the present realities of human existence blighted by sin and its consequences. This liability did not mean that God could not or would not work directly in a person's life, but if this is all God does it reduces Christianity to pure subjectivity. Wesley's insight was to realize that God had made full provision to help humanity at this very point of need. The Holy Spirit could not only work directly in the human heart, but could also utilise indirect means of grace as instruments to convey God's personal communication. This ensures a degree of objective witness to God's nature, character, purposes, and their implications for human salvation.

These means of grace are identified by Wesley as Scripture, reason, the community (Methodist) ethos, and Christian experience (both personal and community). Each element only has value when the Spirit

⁴⁶For a discussion of the important role of the societies in theologising, see John W. Wright, "Wesley's Theology as Methodist Practice: Toward the Postmodern Retrieval of the Wesleyan Tradition," *WTJ* 35, no. 2 (Fall, 2000).

⁴⁷*Works*, 21:165. See Angela Shier-Jones, *A Work in Progress: Methodists Doing Theology* (Peterborough: Epworth Press, 2006), 3-11 especially; Shier-Jones, "Conferring as Theological Model," in *Unmasking Methodist Theology*, eds., Clive Marsh et al (London: Continuum, 2004); Stephen Dawes, "Revelation in Methodist Practice and Belief," *Unmasking Methodist Theology*, 114-16.

uses it; personal and community access to the Spirit's use of the means comes by faith (trust) alone. Among the means of grace, the Scripture (the soteriological "rule") plays a central and normally indispensable role, as it is in full harmony with the living voice of the Spirit (the "guide"). The means are intimately intertwined and all are energized by the presence of the Spirit. The Spirit uses them in whatever sequence and priority deemed best for the situation. Wesley believed that the Spirit would normally always use Scripture, with the other elements assisting in the process of interpretation and application. But he did not allow the means to replace the direct work of the Spirit, and insisted that without the Spirit's presence they were simply tools used by people and communities for their own purposes. This ministry of the Spirit is never ours to command.

Wesley was well aware that the Bible must not only be read, but interpreted and then applied. It was his church community that taught him to read the text soteriologically, to focus on the message as a whole rather than its parts, and to locate essential gospel truth by the analogy of faith rather than proof texts. It is equally important to note that this was not simply an historical or intellectual reading of the text, but an experimental one—it had to make a verifiable difference in life and practice as evidence of the validity of the interpretation and application. There is a place in theologizing for each person's own experience of God reflected upon rationally, while being measured against the experiences and reasoned reflections of the community (past and present). These are in dynamic tension with the norm of Scripture as the primary means utilized by the Spirit to limit excessive subjectivism and error.

The crucial role of the community for Wesley is in originally creating and then maintaining, through the presence of the Spirit, an ethos that fundamentally shapes the process of theologizing by providing the parameters and attitudes necessary to remain in harmony with that community and its interpretations and applications of Scripture. Here the emerging ethos of his Methodist societies (and not simply the early church or the Church of England) is decisive. Wesley saw an indispensable role for the Methodist community itself, as it was shaped by the liturgy (sermons, hymns and testimonies especially), accountability structures, conferences, and the reading of materials written or edited by Wesley. The continued health of Methodism was inextricably tied to the Spirit-formed ethos of its own community.

It is this dynamic, living system that defines Wesley's approach to theologizing. This energized, dynamic interlinking and interweaving of

the direct work of the Spirit, the means and our own lives, points to Wesley's understanding of theologizing being akin to an immersion experience in which the means and the persons are simultaneously "bathed" in the Spirit. The key task of the theologian is to discern the voice of the Spirit in the midst of the means and the people; the critical evaluative tool is the wisdom to discern whether love and relationships are being promoted or hindered. This allows for and, in fact, expects there to be dynamic, shifting roles in theologizing among the elements as the Spirit makes use of them. Wesley believes that all of them are finally in harmony with the living voice of the Spirit, and dissonance indicates that we have not yet heard the Spirit fully and/or faithfully.

The Spirit begins with the current reality of the people in our time and setting; through direct presence or utilizing one or other of the means, the Spirit challenges our present theological understanding or application of the Christian faith and by the same process seeks to bring about an increasing depth of faithful relationship with God and neighbour. Just like the environment in which we live, it passes unnoticed until a change gets our attention; so the people immersed in this Methodist ethos and Christian experience would take it for granted until "upset" by the work of the Spirit in their lives and community. This would lead to an examination of the situation under the guidance of the Spirit, normally using the means of grace to do so—Scripture in particular. After reflection, involving pastoral wisdom and discernment (both personal and community), a new understanding or application would be posited and then tested in practice among the people. If the relationship with God and neighbour deepened as a result, then in time this became the new environment until a further challenge arose. It is always the role of the living Spirit to raise up "prophets" to give fresh visions, new perspectives, and new insights, to recapture, renew, or refresh the soteriological beliefs and practices of the community of faith.

THE STILLNESS CONTROVERSY OF 1740: TRADITION SHAPING SCRIPTURE READING

by

Mark K. Olson

As we look to the future of Scripture it is often prudent to look backwards. The Apostle Paul summarized it well when he wrote of the Old Testament era, “All these events happened to them as examples for us.”¹ For us Wesleyans, one of these examples is the Stillness Controversy of 1740. Historians have emphasized the theological and practical differences that divided John Wesley and the Moravians. One underlying factor in the controversy was their different approaches to reading Scripture, differences arising from their respective faith traditions. The Stillness Controversy was as much a *hermeneutical* conflict as it was a theological and practical one. It is this aspect of the story that has not been told. We begin with a review of the context of the controversy.

Why Divide Over Being Still?

The Stillness Controversy erupted in November, 1739, at the Fetter Lane Society. What sparked the controversy were two opposing views regarding the *spiritual standing* of the recent converts. Philipp Molther, a Moravian representative, had arrived in London in mid-October with the intention of leaving soon for America. When he first came to the Fetter Lane Society he was shocked by the displays of emotion in the meetings. After conversing with the converts and learning about their continuing struggles with doubt, he concluded that their groanings for the Spirit were

¹1 Cor. 10:11 NLT.

self-effort attempts to receive the *gift* of justifying faith.² To use classic Pauline terminology, these converts were seeking salvation by works of the law, not by faith alone. Therefore, Molther understood the spiritual standing of these converts as pre-new birth. Since they were not yet justified they were *seekers*, not regenerate believers.

Molther counseled these misguided seekers to stop consuming their time practicing the means of grace.³ The means were not designed to prepare one for the gift of faith, but to confirm those who already have faith. In addition, the means not only diverted their attention away from Christ, but were leading these seekers to place their trust in their own *self-efforts* to prepare themselves for the gift of faith. This is contrary to the gospel. So Molther counseled them to come as *poor sinners*, renouncing all self-effort, looking solely to “free grace in the blood of Jesus.”⁴ Then God would give them the true gift of justifying faith, confirmed by the direct witness of the Holy Spirit. This was the answer their hearts longed for. This would remove all their doubts. This was the correct *path* to receiving God’s gift of saving faith.

Molther blamed this unfortunate situation on the Wesley brothers. Peter Böhler had left the society under their care the previous June. John Wesley confirms in his journal that in early September he “exhorted our brethren to keep close to the Church, and all the ordinances of God.”⁵ So Molther would have been informed by the recent converts that it was John Wesley who had instructed them to use the means of grace to resolve their conflicts with doubt.

John Wesley, on the other hand, saw things quite differently. Contrary to Molther, he believed these converts were already justified and

²The controversy involved more than the issue of who can participate in Holy Communion and the role of the means of grace. The heart of the matter concerned the salvific standing of the recent converts. See John Wesley’s Journal (JWJ) 12/31/39 & 6/22/40 (*The Works of John Wesley*. Nashville: Abingdon Press. 1984-Present. 19:131-32, 154. Hereafter *Works*); and James Hutton’s *Memoirs*, 34, 46-47, 53-54 (Benham, Daniel ed. *Memoirs of James Hutton*. London: Hamilton, Adams, & Co. 1856; Hereafter: *Hutton*).

³Wesley does reluctantly admit on one occasion that the issue for the Moravians was excessive and legalistic reliance on the means of grace (JWJ 4/23/40; *Works*, 19:147).

⁴According to Molther’s own testimony, this was his core message at Fetter Lane (*Hutton*, 53).

⁵*Works* 19:96.

born again. Consequently, they already had the gift of faith, but in a *low degree*.⁶ Their remaining doubts concerned their sanctification, not their justification. These converts were in a *mixed* state, just as Wesley had concluded about himself a year earlier.⁷ Furthermore, in the summer of 1738 Wesley had been taught about degrees of faith from none other than Christian David and the Moravian leadership in Germany.⁸

Wesley, therefore, had counseled these converts to diligently *practice* the means of grace to perfect their faith. By this time Wesley was teaching that full assurance and renewal come by degrees. There is a marked difference between justification and sanctification. Justification is by faith alone in the merits of Christ's death. This is the first gift. But sanctification is a progressive work of inner transformation and renewal, with the perfecting of one's love received as a second gift.⁹ Though justification and sanctification begin in the same moment, they must be kept distinct to avoid the *error* that the work of salvation is complete in the initial gift of faith.¹⁰ This single error had been the primary cause of Wes-

⁶Wesley's views on degrees of faith developed in tandem with his belief in degrees of regeneration, both of which developed out of his struggles with doubt following his own conversion at Aldersgate. After one episode with doubt Wesley concluded he had a "measure of faith" (cf. JWJ 10/14/38, *Works* 19:16-19). His first *explicit* mention of degrees of regeneration was on January 25, 1739 (*Works* 19:25; cf. also JWJ 7/23/39, *Works* 19:82). Wesley's argument that the Stillness Controversy was over "degrees of faith" is misleading. That was *his* argument over the converts' spiritual standing. The Moravians and their supporters disagreed with this position.

⁷*Works* 19:16-19; 27-28.

⁸*Works* 18:270ff. This is why Wesley gives so much space to Christian David and the other Moravian testimonies in his second journal extract. In 1740 Wesley believed that the English Moravians (and their supporters) were in disagreement with the leadership in the German mother church over these issues. But as Colin Podmore has shown, this is simply incorrect (*The Moravian Church in England, 1728-1760*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998, 60-65).

⁹In the spring 1740 Wesley used the terminology of *gift* for Christian perfection in his Preface for *Hymns and Sacred Poems II* (Jackson, Thomas ed. *Works of John Wesley*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House. 1984, Reprint, 14:323 §4).

¹⁰Wesley worked out this distinction during the spring/summer of 1739. He articulates this distinction for the first time on September 13, 1739 (*Works* 19:96). His writings during the winter of 1738/39 reflect more of an intermittent view with two basic spiritual states (unregenerate and regenerate). In this *ordo*, a "weak" believer is one who is vacillating between these two states. Perfection is then being established in the regenerate state. But Wesley abandoned this position by the summer 1739 and embraced a two works of grace model as he clarified what he believed about sanctification in relation to justification.

ley's own struggles with doubt following his evangelical conversion.¹¹ So Wesley blamed Molther for the division at Fetter Lane. Molther and other men had "crept in among them unawares" during the fall of 1739 and began preaching a *new gospel*—the gospel of stillness.¹² In response, Wesley saw himself as simply preserving the truth of the gospel from antinomian error.

From the above description it is easy to see why being "still" divided the society and drove the two parties apart. At its heart were two conflicting *conversion narratives*. These conversion narratives divided sharply over the *nature* of the gift of faith and the *role* the means of grace play in receiving this gift of faith. Yet behind these two conversion narratives stood two faith traditions with their competing hermeneutics on how to read the Scriptures.

The Shaping Power of Faith Tradition

A narrative of conversion is always shaped by the faith tradition that informs it. This is true because faith tradition serves as the primary paradigm through which the experience of conversion is defined, delineated, and given meaning. The Stillness Controversy of 1740 illustrates this point very well.

The *Moravian's* conversion narrative was grounded largely on a faith tradition that reached back through German pietism to the teachings of Martin Luther. The Moravian gospel emphasized the new birth, received in an *instant*, witnessed *directly* by the Holy Spirit. But they differed from their pietistic predecessors by rejecting the notion of an intense spiritual struggle preceding the gift of faith.¹³ Instead, they taught the "easy way of salvation," one of coming directly to Christ. Significant to this narrative was the idea that grace comes to the believer *unmediated*.¹⁴ It was Luther's *Preface to Romans* that largely shaped their *theol-*

¹¹Cf. Olson, Mark *John Wesley's Theology of Christian Perfection: Developments in Doctrine & Theological System*. Fenwick: Truth in Heart, 2007, 120-123.

¹²Cf. *Works* 18:219 and 19:147.

¹³Hindmarsh, D. Bruce, *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative: Spiritual Autobiography in Early Modern England*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005, 164.

¹⁴ That is, apart from the ordinances. Of course, the Moravians believed grace to be mediated through Christ, but it was Christ *alone* as well as by faith alone that brought salvation to the waiting soul.

ogy of the gift of faith.¹⁵ In this *Preface* Luther, in pietistic fashion, directly links the gift of faith to the new birth and good works:

Faith is a work of God in us, which changes us and brings us to birth anew from God. It kills the old Adam, makes us completely different people. . . . What a living, creative, active powerful thing is faith! It is impossible that faith ever stop doing good. Faith doesn't ask whether good works are to be done, but, before it is asked, it has done them. It is always active. Whoever doesn't do such works is without faith.¹⁶

The Moravians fully embraced Luther's teaching that the new life *spontaneously* generates the Spirit's fruit and good works. It was this understanding of the spontaneity of the regenerate life that profoundly shaped their narrative of conversion and their views regarding stillness. Since faith is an undeserved gift received directly from God, all human efforts to prepare for this gift were viewed as seeking salvation by works.¹⁷ This is why Molther counseled seekers to remain *still* in regard to the means of grace.

But the Moravian's emotionally-charged gospel left little if any room for *doubt* to coexist with faith. Since the regenerate life naturally produces the Spirit's fruit, the experiential realities of this generation naturally bears witness in the believer's heart. As Count Zinzendorf later told the Fetter Lane Society, "There is no saving faith which is not simultane-

¹⁵A good example of the Preface's influence on Moravian conversion narrative is Wesley's Aldersgate conversion (*Works* 18:249). William Ward notes that Luther's Preface to the Romans "became the classical text for evangelical conversion" (Ward, W. R. *Early Evangelicalism: A Global Intellectual History 1670-1789*. Cambridge University Press, 2006, 43). For an overview of Luther's views on faith and assurance, see Beeke, Joel R., *Assurance of Faith: Calvin, English Puritanism, and the Dutch Second Reformation*. New York: Peter Lang, 1991, 1994.

¹⁶Luther, Martin, *Preface to the Letter of St. Paul to the Romans*. Translated by Bro. Andrew Thornton, OSB, for the Saint Anselm College Humanities Program (c)1983 by Saint Anselm Abbey. Section quoted: Faith.

¹⁷Luther's doctrine of "alien righteousness" also shaped the Moravian gospel by placing the believer's entire righteousness in Christ alone. Consequently, the Christian remains in this life both sinner and saint. See the Wesley and Zinzendorf conversation on September 3, 1741 (*Works* 19:211-215).

ously love for him who laid down his life for us.”¹⁸ The Moravian’s propensity to link faith to the experiential realities of love spontaneously flowing from the heart meant that to doubt these experiential realities in one’s life became an infallible sign of one’s lack of saving faith.¹⁹

Now this was the *new gospel* John Wesley embraced in the spring of 1738 and which led to his Aldersgate conversion. But his views shifted over the next eighteen months, primarily due to his chronic struggles with doubt. To resolve the dilemma Wesley returned to his Anglican faith tradition,²⁰ which emphasized *process* and the *mediation* of grace through the ordinances.²¹ This allowed room for doubt to coexist with faith within the process of *sanctification*. Wesley now believed that grace is not only received in the instant—in the gift of faith, unmediated—but also in the process that precedes and follows this instant. Therefore, the means of grace do serve a vital role to prepare a seeker for the gift of faith. This explains Wesley’s penchant for degrees of faith during the controversy.

To clarify, Wesley did not just revert back to his earlier Oxford views, for he continued to embrace the Moravian message of the gift of faith and the direct witness of the Spirit. Yet Wesley differed sharply from the Moravian gospel by largely shifting Luther’s emphasis on the spon-

¹⁸Forrell, George W., ed., *Zinzendorf: Nine Public Lectures*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1973, 34 (hereafter: *Zinzendorf*).

¹⁹This explains why in the summer of 1738 the Moravians refused to let Wesley join them at the Lord’s Table. Wesley’s muddled testimony reflected someone who had not yet received the gift of faith (*Hutton*, 40).

²⁰In November, 1738, Wesley began to “inquire what the doctrine of the Church of England is concerning the much controverted point of justification by faith” (*Works* 19:21). Wesley soon after published an extract of the Homilies on justification, faith, and good works. The following year (1739) he also published a second tract on two treatises supporting the tenth through thirteenth Articles regarding justification and good works (Green, Richard, *The Works of John and Charles Wesley: A Bibliography; Second Edition*. London: Methodist Publishing House, 1906, Nos. 9, 14). It should be added that Wesley began to study more intently relevant Puritan writings after his Aldersgate conversion (including Thomas Halyburton’s *Memoirs*, Jonathan Edward’s *Faithful Narrative*, Daniel Neal’s *History of the Puritans*, and John Bunyan’s *Life and Pilgrim’s Progress*).

²¹ It should be noted that in 1738, when Wesley was under the sway of Moravian principles, he *did* devalue the role the means of grace play in receiving the gift of faith (*Works* 18:214, 248; 19:15, 19, 31).

taneity of the regenerate life to a later blessing, which at the time he labeled “a new, clean heart” (i.e., Christian perfection).²²

How Faith Tradition Shaped Their Reading of Scripture

A close reading of the primary documents of the Stillness Controversy in late 1739 and 1740 reveals interesting insights into how faith tradition shaped both party’s reading of Scripture. Each side was not only inclined by its respective faith tradition to appeal to specific passages that best supported its arguments, but we see how faith tradition profoundly shaped its reading of Scripture.

In keeping with their pietistic Lutheran convictions, the Moravians appealed to texts that supported their views on the spontaneity of the regenerate life. In passages like 2 Corinthians 5:17 (*if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature . . . all things are become new*)²³ and Galatians 5:22 (*the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace*) the Moravians argued that the primary marks of the regenerate life are spontaneously generated within the conscious life of the new believer.²⁴ Another passage they appealed to was Romans 5:1-5 (*justified by faith . . . peace with God . . . rejoice in hope . . . love shed abroad*). In the Moravian narrative of con-

²²Randy Maddox confirms this point: “Wesley was convinced that the Christian life did not have to remain a life of continual struggle. He believed that both Scripture and Christian tradition attested that God’s loving grace can transform our lives to the point where our own love for God and others becomes a ‘natural’ response” (*Responsible Grace*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994, 188).

New, clean heart. This synonym for Christian perfection was used by Wesley in 1740 and 1741, with one possible exception (cf. Preface of *Hymns and Sacred Poems II*, spring 1740; Wesley’s journal 6/24/40; 7/20/40; 9/29/40, Preface of Extract Two; 5/2/41; 8/8/41). The lone exception is found in Extract Two of Wesley’s Journal on 8/10/38. Since this sole exception is found in Extract Two, which was published in October, 1740, this author is inclined to believe that Wesley began using the phrase *new, clean heart* during the Stillness Controversy. In *Christian Perfection II*.29 (early 1741) Wesley quotes Ezek. 36:25-27, which speaks of being *cleansed* with water and having a *new heart*. This scripture is a possible source for the phrase. After the early 1740’s the phrase is dropped from Wesley’s vocabulary for the second sanctifying gift except when quoting his earlier works. 2 Corinthians 5:17 was a popular verse during the revival and speaks of believers being *new creatures...all things become new*. Most likely the Moravians used this phrase too, even though at this time I cannot confirm it.

²³The scripture quotations in this section are from the KJV.

²⁴This was how Wesley read this text in the fall 1738 through early 1739 (*Works* 19:18-19, 30-31).

version these texts taught that doubt cannot coexist with the marks of love, joy, and peace within the conscious life of the convert.

In contrast, Wesley appealed to texts that emphasize degrees of faith, to show that the transformative power of the gift of faith is initially more limited than what the Moravians taught. This allowed for doubt to coexist with the gift of faith within the process of sanctification. Wesley's reading of Romans 5:1-5 illustrates this point. In agreement with the Moravians, Wesley taught that believers experience God's love, joy, and peace in the gift of faith, but he differed sharply by insisting that the degree of transformation is more limited than what Molther and his supporters proclaimed.²⁵ Another text Wesley used to make his case for degrees of faith was Romans 1:17 (*from faith to faith*).²⁶ Wesley also drew upon texts that speak of a *weak* faith that is still justifying (Matt. 8:26; Rom. 14:1; Lk. 22:32 with Jn. 15:3).²⁷ In May 1740 Wesley began to appeal to 1 John 2:12-14 (*children . . . young men . . . fathers*) to make the same point: weak faith is justifying faith. But in contrast to the other passages on degrees of faith, this last text continued to shape Wesley's *ordo salutis* and his teaching on Christian perfection for many years.²⁸

To support their message of spontaneous generation, the Moravians appealed to scriptures that teach deliverance from the power of sin in the gift of faith. Of course these scriptures were read through the lens of Luther's *Preface on Romans*. These include 1 John 5:4 (*victory that overcometh the world . . . even our faith*),²⁹ and Rom. 6:14 (*sin shall not have dominion*), and the favorite text of the revival, 1 John 3:9 (*Whosoever is born of God . . . cannot sin*). Count Zinzendorf summarized the Moravian position well when he told the Fetter Lane Society, "In this very moment he (the convert) is delivered from the power of sin, from the fear of sin,

²⁵*Works* 19:123-24, 153-54.

²⁶*Works* 19:154.

²⁷*Works* 19:154-55.

²⁸Beginning in the spring of 1740, Wesley identified justification/new birth with *children*, full assurance with *young men*, and Christian perfection with *fathers* (*Works* 19:148, 154; cf. Charles Wesley's Journal 5/10/40). This became Wesley's basic framework for explicating the stages of spiritual development and was later incorporated in the sermon *Christian Perfection* (1741) and later sermons, e.g., *On the Discoveries of Faith* (1788).

²⁹*Works* 19:148.

from the inclination of sin. Then he is delivered from all attachment to sin and stands there like a newborn child, as a new creature.”³⁰

By late 1739 Wesley could no longer embrace this Moravian reading of 1 John 3:9 and other related texts.³¹ As we saw above, from his own struggles with doubt in the fall of 1738, along with the tendency in the recent converts to over inflate their spiritual attainments, Wesley saw that a *new, clean heart* is attained as a second, post-justification gift.³² According to Wesley, the Moravian’s Lutheranism had distorted their reading of scripture and kept them from seeing the proper role of sanctification following the initial reception of the gift of justifying faith.³³

In keeping with their German pietism, the Moravians argued that grace comes unmediated in the gift of faith. Their intent was to guide seekers to come *directly* to Christ for salvation. To make this point they appealed to Hebrews 12:2 (*looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith*),³⁴ John 14:23 (*if a man love me . . . we will come . . . make our abode with him*), Romans 8:16 (*the Spirit beareth witness with our spirit*), Romans 14:17 (*kingdom is . . . righteousness, peace, joy in the Holy Ghost*), and Galatians 2:20 (*Christ lives in me*). The Moravians believed these scriptures teach that grace comes directly from Christ to the seeker. Hence there is no need to practice the means of grace to receive the gift of faith. In fact, there was a danger in doing so because the English had been taught a view of religion that emphasized the externals of religion—do no harm, do good, practice the means of grace.³⁵ The Moravians saw such religion as a form of legalistic nominalism: salvation by works of the

³⁰Zinzendorf, 93.

³¹JWJ 11/7/39 (*Works* 19:120). A close reading of Wesley’s use of 1 Jn. 3:9 shows that his understanding of this verse changed over time. In 1738 he appealed to this verse to support his perfection doctrine (*Salvation By Faith* II.5; *An Extract of the Life and Death of Thomas Halyburton* §5). By 1741 he understood the verse to promise deliverance only from outward sin (*Christian Perfection* II.2; *The Great Privilege of Those that are Born of God* II.1-2).

³²Cf. JWJ 7/23/39 (*Works* 19:82).

³³Wesley believed the “grand error” of the Moravians was that they “follow Luther, for better, for worse” (JWJ 6/15/41, *Works* 19:201).

³⁴“One then spoke of ‘looking unto Jesus,’ and exhorted us all ‘to lie *still* in his hand’” (*Works* 19:119).

³⁵Even John Wesley had to combat this view of religion with fellow Englishmen (cf. *Works* 19:123).

law.³⁶ Their solution was for seekers to simply wait on Christ under the hearing of the gospel until the gift of faith is received, witnessed directly by the Holy Spirit in a spontaneous outflow of love, joy, and peace within the conscious life of the new believer (Rom. 5:1-5, 14:17; Gal. 5:22).³⁷

The Wesley brothers countered Moravian quietism in two ways, both of which reveal their Anglican roots. First, they repeatedly appealed to texts that call attention to the active efforts of the seeker or believer: 2 Corinthians 13:5 (*examine yourselves . . . prove yourselves*),³⁸ Acts 2:42 (*continued in apostles' doctrine . . . fellowship . . . breaking of bread . . . prayer*), Matthew 11:12 (*kingdom . . . taken by force*), Luke 13:24 (*strive to enter in at the straight gate*), Philippians 2:12 (*work out your own salvation with fear and trembling*), Hebrews 11:6 (*must believe he is . . . rewarder of them that diligently seek him*).³⁹ Second, the Wesleys appealed to texts that emphasize the trials, temptations, and spiritual warfare of the believer to show that struggles with doubt are consistent with justifying faith. These include the temptation of Jesus,⁴⁰ 1 Peter 4:12 (*fiery trials*), Matthew 26:41 (*watch and pray . . . enter not into temptation . . . spirit willing . . . flesh is weak*), and 1 Corinthians 12:26 (*one member suffers, all the members suffer with it*).⁴¹ These texts reflect Wes-

³⁶Peter Böhler noted in the spring of 1738, "Our mode of believing in the Savior is so easy to Englishmen that they cannot reconcile themselves to it, if it were a little more artful, they would sooner find their way into it. . . . They justify themselves; therefore they always take it for granted that they believe already, and would prove their faith by their works" (Lockwood, John P., *Memorials of the Life of Peter Böhler*, London: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1868, 68-69). Cf. Hutton, 28, 46; Zinzendorf, 1-9, see note 35 above.

³⁷Molther defined stillness in May, 1740, "1. To walk in the sight of God. 2. Waiting on him having the heart always praying. 3. Resignation to God's will" (Podmore, Colin, *The Moravian Church in England, 1728-1760*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998, 69).

³⁸*Works* 19:121.

³⁹The above five texts are from Charles Wesley's journal (Jackson, Thomas, *The Journal of Charles Wesley, 2 Vols.* Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing House, 1980 Reprint, 1:232). John also appealed to Acts 2:42 during the controversy.

⁴⁰*Works* 19:141.

⁴¹*Works* 19:149. Wesley argued that the Moravian's promise of spontaneous fruit, without struggle or effort, involves *guile* and deceives the listener by offering a false hope. By 1740 Wesley felt he had been deceived by Böhler's presentation of the gospel in 1738. Böhler had promised Wesley victory over *all* sin in the gift of faith (*Works* 18:239 note 10). The Stillness Controversy finally convinced Wesley that the Moravian's presentation of the gospel deceived their listeners with false hopes (*Works* 19:133, 191).

ley's own struggles with doubt following his evangelical conversion and stress the need for ongoing sanctification in the life of the newly justified believer. The Moravians, of course, rejected this reading in regard to the gift of faith as legalism since it undermined their teaching on the spontaneity of the regenerate life.

Finally, the Moravians and the Wesleys divided sharply over who should participate in the sacrament of communion. In keeping with their pietistic convictions, the Moravians welcomed only regenerate believers to the table. From their perspective the sacrament proffered *confirming* grace. The scripture they appealed to was Hebrews 10:22 (*let us draw near with . . . full assurance of faith*), which combined their definition of regeneration and who should approach the holy meal. In 1738 this more rigorous standard had led the Brethren in Germany to refuse Wesley access to the table because they deemed him *homo perturbatus*, one who lacked a full, clear assurance of saving faith.⁴² How this incident might have shaped Wesley's attitude toward the Moravians is difficult to determine. But from some time during his early (Oxford?) period he began to believe that the sacrament conveys *unrestricted* grace; that is, preventing, justifying and sanctifying grace.

So Wesley, influenced by his High Church tradition and Non-juror associations, argued for a more open table than the Moravians.⁴³ The difference spilled over into how both parties read two key passages on the subject. The Moravians argued from Colossians 2:20 (*if ye be dead with Christ . . . why are ye subject to ordinances*) that believers are not bound to partake of the sacrament, while Wesley countered that this verse refers to Jewish ordinances, not the ordinances of Christ. But the sharpest con-

⁴²Hutton, 40. Wesley makes no mention of this incident either in his journal or letters.

⁴³Contrary to the Moravians, Wesley held that communion was a "converting ordinance." Colin Podmore remarks that Wesley's views were contrary to both Catholic and Anglican requirements (64). Henry Rack insists that this feature of Wesley's sacramentalism was developed after his Aldersgate conversion, but his survey supports an earlier date (*Reasonable Enthusiast*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992, 405). Augustus Spangenberg states that Wesley held to the "converting ordinance" position while in America (Towlson, Clifford *Moravian and Methodist*. London: Epworth Press, 1957, 46). So the evidence points to Wesley's early period. It should be noted that, during the Stillness Controversy, Wesley never once appealed to scripture to support his position that communion is a converting ordinance; he always appealed to *experience*, the first one being his mother's (*Works* 19:93; cf. 19:98, 120-21).

flict was over how to read 1 Corinthians 11:24 (*do this in remembrance of me*). The Wesleys held that this is a *command*, while Molther and his English supporters understood this as a *privilege* (for those who already received the gift of faith).

From this survey we see just how deeply both sides were influenced in their reading of scripture by their respective faith traditions. It is little wonder that both sides collided over their respective narratives of conversion. Behind these issues stood two competing faith traditions that thoroughly colored the perspectives of each party, and shaped how they read and applied the sacred text to daily life.

How Faith Tradition Shapes Our Reading of Scripture

When we reflect on the Stillness Controversy and how each party read the Scriptures, pertinent lessons begin to emerge on how faith traditions will continue to shape *our* readings of Scripture.

1. Pervasive Presence. The first lesson involves the *pervasive presence* of faith tradition on our reading of Scripture. Since Christians can no longer sit at the feet of Jesus or the apostles, faith tradition and Scripture serve in tandem to bridge the gap of the centuries so that the one holy apostolic faith can be translated into the daily lives of believers. So while Scripture historically encapsulates the sacred narrative, it is the role of faith tradition to translate this sacred narrative into daily life. This means that faith tradition is organically connected to our *spiritual formation* and provides the *existential paradigm* that shapes our conscious and subconscious religious life. This explains why the Moravians and the Wesleys were *instinctively* drawn to different conversion narratives even though they embraced the same evangelical message. The hermeneutical conflict that divided the two groups simply reflected the pervasive presence of their respective faith traditions upon their reading of Scripture. The same lesson applies today: there is no escaping the pervasive presence of our respective faith traditions upon our readings of Scripture. Christians will continue to read the sacred text through the lens of their faith traditions.

2. Competing Interpretations. Secondly, this means that our respective faith traditions will continue to spawn *competing interpretations* of the sacred narrative. Since our faith traditions are rooted in the concreteness of life, the level of diversity within the global Christian fam-

ily guarantees that our respective faith traditions will generate competing interpretations of the gospel until Christ returns. The Stillness Controversy illustrates this point. It was just one episode among many within the larger story of the Christian faith where faithful believers parted paths because they could not agree on how to read and apply the Scriptures. Sadly, these differences often lead to sharp tensions between the parties. The Stillness Controversy was no exception, for both groups felt the need to demonize the other.⁴⁴ Therefore, any hope that a particular or denominational reading of Scripture will unite the global Christian family before the eschaton is simply naïve.⁴⁵ Our faith traditions are simply too diverse for that level of unity. So in the future competing interpretations and theologies will continue to shape the Christian faith until our Lord returns and sets all things right.

3. Danger of Blindness. This leads to a final, yet sober, lesson: our faith traditions can *blind* as well as *help* in the task of reading Scripture. Both sides in the Stillness Controversy became so entrenched in their respective positions that eventually neither side would, or even could, hear what the other side was trying to say.⁴⁶ This should give us pause. Eternal life is found in the sacred narrative of Christ's death and resurrection, not in our particular faith traditions. If we blend, merge, or confuse the two, the tendency will be for faith tradition to usurp the authority of the sacred narrative and thereby become an *idol*. This is an ever-present danger since our faith traditions are existentially linked to our daily lives and culture, which are always shifting. As a consequence, faith tradition tends to hold a powerful sway over how we conceptualize the faith, as well as translate the faith into daily life.

⁴⁴Both Wesley brothers attributed the Moravian position to satanic influence (*Works* 19:120; *CW Journal* 1:200). The Moravians and their supporters saw Wesley as grasping for power (*Hutton*, 46) and the Wesleyan position on Holy Communion to be of the devil (*CW Journal* 1:208).

⁴⁵A good example was the widespread belief among many of our holiness forefathers that the doctrine of entire sanctification would unite the Christian world in the early 1900's (Quanstrom, Mark R. *A Century of Holiness: The Doctrine of Entire Sanctification in the Church of the Nazarene 1905-2004*. Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 2004, ch. 2).

⁴⁶By April, 1740, both sides were deeply entrenched in their positions (cf. the journals of John and Charles Wesley).

Simply stated, we cannot do the ministry of the kingdom without faith tradition. Discipleship does not happen in a vacuum; it only transpires within the context of a living, dynamic faith tradition. But this underscores the need to keep our faith traditions from usurping the authority of Scripture as the depository of divine truth. So in the future we must remain vigilant that our faith traditions remain a *handmaiden* to the sacred narrative found in scripture, and not become the master of the house.

SCRIPTURE AS FORMATION: THE ROLE OF SCRIPTURE IN CHRISTIAN FORMATION

by

Mark A. Maddix and Richard P. Thompson

There should be little doubt regarding the role of the Bible among those who identify themselves as ecclesial and theological descendents of John Wesley. After all, Wesley described himself as *homo unius libri*, “a man of one book”¹—a description that makes a rather categorical declaration about the place of the Bible in his thought and life. Thus, one would hope and expect that the proverbial apple has not fallen too far from the tree, with Wesleyans viewing the Bible as central to matters of salvation and Christian faith and practice. Such emphases regarding the primacy of Scripture shaped both the earliest Methodists and are part of the DNA of the Wesleyan theological tradition. However, although Wesleyans specifically and Christians generally continue to voice assertions regarding the authority of the Bible, in recent years the appropriation and use of the Bible within the church have tended to decrease in importance when one considers the church’s formative practices (e.g., worship) and concerns for discipleship, thereby increasingly relegating the Bible’s role merely to the realm of Christian doctrine.

Although some may point an accusatory finger at general Christian apathy or the influence of postmodern culture on the church as reasons for such trends, it may be that some blame may fall on the church’s depend-

¹“Preface” to *Sermons on Several Occasions*, in *Works* (Bicentennial ed.), 1:105.

ence on the preferred approaches to the Bible that have largely characterized traditional biblical scholarship of the last two centuries. In particular, the general trends of biblical scholarship in the modern era have tended to focus on “what the text meant” since all biblical texts were written in and to particular historical contexts. Such emphases correctly seek to account for the intricate and complex webs of numerous historical contingencies, influences and particularities that make these texts what they are.

However, the typical interpretive approach to the Bible that tends to focus on the search for a selected text’s meaning as a historical, static entity shaped by the historical contingencies of its particular context has too often left the church wondering what the Bible might actually say in contemporary settings. In other words, modern interpretations of the Bible may guide the church by helping her to read biblical texts in light of their original contexts and to glean important information about the Christian faith, but in doing so may also leave the interpreter starving for even a few crumbs of some illusive message that engages the present and enables a current hearing of God.

Our attempt to address such issues focuses on the role of the Bible as sacred Scripture within the context of the church and explores how the biblical texts may be appropriated and may function within that ecclesial context in terms of formation and transformation, rather than merely in terms of information. What is offered here is a redefinition of the role of Scripture that is consistent with its historic role, particularly as that relates to the Wesleyan tradition. This essay has two distinct parts: (a) a delineation of the historic role of the Bible as sacred Scripture within the church; and (b) an exploration into the kinds of ways that the Bible as sacred Scripture forms and transforms Christians into faithful disciples within the context of the church.

The Historic Role of the Bible as Sacred Scripture Within the Church

Historically, there is a difference between interpreting the *Bible* and interpreting these same texts as *Scripture*, although persons often use these two designations for the biblical texts interchangeably.² This difference refers in no small part to issues related to authority, with which the

²Cf. Stephen E. Fowl and L. Gregory Jones, *Reading in Communion: Scripture and Ethics in Christian Life* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 20; and Joel B. Green, *Seized by Truth: Reading the Bible as Scripture* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2007), 1-25.

process of Christian canonization was concerned. Although the theological and historical notion of Christian canon typically contributes little to the interpretive outcomes of the professional guild of biblical studies, such a notion *is* critical to an understanding of the authoritative role of the collection of biblical texts *as canon* throughout the history of the church.

The common assumption is that the role of the Christian canon may be defined as epistemic in nature, so that one may assess the validity of Christian doctrine by what the Bible states. That is, the Bible functions to clarify theological *information* about the Christian faith. However, the canonical process itself suggests that the incorporation of the biblical texts into the Christian canon had more to do with their *formative* rather than epistemic role.³ That is, the early church appropriated and turned repeatedly to this particular collection of texts because of the formative ways that these texts (and not others) functioned within the Christian community.

One may perceive this formative understanding of the Bible as Scripture in the writings of John Wesley, who himself established a useful trajectory for those who came after him. He declared that he read the Bible “to find the way to heaven.”⁴ It is noteworthy that Wesley did not focus on heaven as a goal or ideal *per se*, but instead on the “way” that one leads . . . the way and life of salvation. Thus, the Bible functions as sacred Scripture in the various ways that these texts function to transform and shape the perspectives and lives of those who comprise the church, not simply in the kinds of arguments that someone may appropriate to validate the reliability of the Bible, or in the ways someone may appeal to specific data within the Bible.⁵

Wesley often did not cite or quote a particular passage of Scripture when addressing specific pastoral or social issues; rather, he often used

³See William J. Abraham, *Canon and Criterion in Christian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), esp. 1-56.

⁴“Preface” to *Sermons on Several Occasions*, in *Works* (Bicentennial ed.), 1:105.

⁵See Robert W. Wall, “Toward a Wesleyan Hermeneutic of Scripture,” in *Reading the Bible in Wesleyan Ways: Some Constructive Proposals*, ed. Barry L. Callen and Richard P. Thompson (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2004), 39-55.

the vocabulary and stories of the Bible to reflect on such matters.⁶ In so doing, his arguments suggest that they arose from a general theological and ecclesial context shaped significantly by a people living with and engaging the Bible as Scripture. Thus, while specific biblical texts may or may not address a particular contemporary issue, both Wesley and Wesleyans after him have considered any matter that intersects with those seeking to live faithfully for God to be fertile soil for a sanctified imagination to cultivate, in light of the various ways that biblical texts enable the church to envisage the world.⁷ This Wesleyan understanding of the Bible as Scripture, to be pursued in functional, (trans)formational terms, is consistent with the place of the biblical texts within the pre-canonical period of the early church.⁸

There are three distinct but related ways that one may further clarify this functional understanding of the role of Scripture. First, an understanding of the formative role of Scripture suggests that there is more to the interpretive process than the discovery of a historical meaning contained in the biblical text. Contrary to many interpretive ventures (particularly traditional, text-centered approaches), the criterion for the perception of these biblical texts as authoritative Scripture is not merely what these texts *state* (i.e., in the information of these texts) but what these texts *do* (i.e., the ways that these texts function to affect their readers). As important as the biblical text before Christian readers may be, something essential—beyond the information of the text—must happen within these readers so that this text becomes *Scripture*: there must be a convergence between the text and its readers that brings those otherwise dead words to life.⁹

⁶See Scott J. Jones, *John Wesley's Conception and Use of Scripture* (Nashville: Kingswood, 1995), 129-38; and "The Rule of Scripture," in *Wesley and the Quadrilateral: Renewing the Conversation*, ed. W. Stephen Gunter (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997), 44-48, who describes Wesley's use of Scripture in five ways: textual, explanatory, definitional, narrative, and semantic.

⁷Cf. Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation; A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1996), 1-11, 291-312.

⁸See Abraham, *Canon and Criterion in Christian Theology*, 1-56.

⁹See Richard P. Thompson, "Inspired Imagination: John Wesley's Concept of Biblical Inspiration and Literary-Critical Studies," in *Reading the Bible in Wesleyan Ways: Some Constructive Proposals*, ed. Barry L. Callen and Richard P. Thompson (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2004), 66-73.

Although secular literary theory explains this phenomenon merely in terms of readers' consistent and persistent evaluation and reevaluation of textual features and cues, Wesley stressed the essential role of the Spirit in terms of the inspiration of Christian readers so that they might think about and discern the will of God through a particular text of Scripture.¹⁰ There is no need to separate the respective roles of the faithful reader and the Spirit when engaging Scripture, as simultaneously both reader and Spirit are potentially at work. These co-operative partners in the reading of Scripture contribute to what may be described as "inspired imagination," which enables those readers to envisage or discover potential meaning(s) about God and God's ongoing salvific activities.¹¹ If the Bible potentially functions as Scripture in these formative ways, then there is no replacement for the active, consistent reading and engagement of these sacred texts by Christian readers. Like a joke that loses some of its effectiveness when explanation is required, Scripture loses its functional authority when persons appropriate it for information alone rather than engaging it in potentially formative and transformative ways.

Second, an understanding of the formative role of Scripture suggests the church as the location where these texts may function authoritatively. In significant ways, the Christian Scriptures themselves are related in the canonical process to the so-called "Rule of Faith," which assumes the confessional context within which the reading and interpretation of these texts were expected to occur. These basic core theological convictions contributed to the formation of both the Christian canon and the faith community that turned to these specific texts as sacred Scripture (before any confirmation by any ecumenical council). As a result, this interpretive context becomes a critical aspect for a Wesleyan understanding of Scripture, since the primary authority of these texts lies in their formative function within the Christian faith community. This is why the church returns to these and not other texts. One may state that these texts are on the table with a standing invitation to read them, listen to them, and reflect upon them, not merely as static historical documents for a different time, place

¹⁰See Wesley's comment on 2 Timothy 3:16 in his *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament* (London: Epworth, 1958), 794: "The Spirit of God not only once inspired those who wrote it, but continually inspires, supernaturally assists, those that read it with earnest prayer." See also the consideration of these issues in R. Thompson, "Inspired Imagination," 62-65.

¹¹See R. Thompson, "Inspired Imagination," 57-79.

and people of the past, but also as sacred texts that the historic Christian tradition has consistently revisited.¹² To be sure, a given faith community may not fully recognize or appreciate all the specific concerns of a respective passage that was written and received in a different historical context, yet it still approaches that passage with the hope that a fresh reading will speak to and shape that community in meaningful ways.¹³

If the church is to be faithful to her identity as the people of God and avoid mirror reading, substantive critical work is required in order to engage the biblical texts in contemporary settings because of the historical “otherness” of these texts.¹⁴ Still, such an interpretive context invites all who comprise the church to the table—laypersons and scholars, leaders and theologians—to consider how the text may speak to the contemporary context.¹⁵ It is in this interpretive context of the church, assumed by the Christian canon itself, where Richard Hays suggests an “integrative act of the imagination” occurs, in which the church places her faith and practices imaginatively within the world presented by these texts.¹⁶

Third, an understanding of the formative role of Scripture suggests the necessity of the performance or living out of the church’s engagement with these texts as Scripture. The basic standard by which to evaluate the functional role of Scripture within the church focuses on the reception of and response to these texts in the ongoing life of the faithful Christian community. The typical result of the interpretive task has been the reartic-

¹²Cf. Max Turner, “Historical Criticism and Theological Hermeneutics of the New Testament,” in *Between Two Horizons: Spanning New Testament Studies and Systematic Theology*, ed. Joel B. Green and Max Turner (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 57ff.

¹³Cf. Robert W. Wall, “The Significance of a Canonical Perspective of the Church’s Scriptures,” in *The Canon Debate*, ed. Lee M. McDonald and James A. Sanders (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002), 529-31.

¹⁴ See Stephen E. Fowl, *Engaging Scripture: A Model for Theological Interpretation*, Challenges in Contemporary Theology (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1998), 75-83.

¹⁵See Trevor Hart, “Tradition, Authority, and a Christian Approach to the Bible as Scripture,” in *Between Two Horizons: Spanning New Testament Studies and Systematic Theology*, ed. Joel B. Green and Max Turner (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 196; and Stephen B. Chapman, “Reclaiming Inspiration for the Bible,” in *Canon and Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Craig G. Bartholomew et al. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 183, who both suggest that biblical texts will speaking differently to contemporary contexts than to their original settings.

¹⁶Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 6.

ulation of a possible meaning of a given passage, a new set of words explaining what the “old” words may have meant. However, this runs counter to what the canonical process suggests: that some texts were accepted and others were not primarily because of how they functioned within the church and therefore what emerged from the church’s engagement with these texts as Scripture in terms of worship, practice and response to others.¹⁷ For Wesley and his theological offspring, to speak about the authority of Scripture meant that one must also consider the church’s mission and practices that encourage and incite holy living among her people. Therefore, the Bible functions in authoritative ways as sacred Scripture when the church engages the biblical texts so that she does not simply talk or write about what these texts may have to say, but rather actively responds in potentially faithful ways to the God about whom these texts speak and who speaks to her through them.¹⁸

This suggests that the ways the Christian faith community performs or embodies her encounters with the biblical texts reveal how these have truly functioned formatively as Scripture, as emergent outcomes disclose the actual importance and authority of these sacred texts for the church’s life and practice. This means that human life and activity, in addition to interpretive debates and pious conversations, must now be considered as possible realms for scriptural interpretation since, if the church takes seriously the task of reading and listening to the biblical texts as Scripture, *both* her vocal witness *and* emergent life will expose the functional role of these texts through the collective life that has been formed and transformed by those encounters with Scripture.¹⁹

Bible as Scripture: Forming Christians into Faithful Disciples

Christians believe that Scripture provides inspiration and guidance in Christian faith and practice. Since the Bible does more than inform but

¹⁷Cf. A. K. M. Adam, “Poaching on Zion: Biblical Theology as Signifying Practice,” in *Reading Scripture with the Church: Toward a Hermeneutic for Theological Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 28.

¹⁸Cf. Fowl, *Engaging Scripture*.

¹⁹Cf. Fowl and Jones, *Reading in Communion*, 20, who insist an indispensable standard for evaluating biblical interpretation is faithful living before God: “One cannot begin to judge whether this standard is being achieved unless and until the interpretation of Scripture becomes socially embodied in communities of people committed to ordering their worship, their doctrines, and their lives in a manner consistent with faithful interpretation.”

also forms and transforms, then Christians are to develop appropriate avenues to enable them to grow as faithful disciples. There is a wide range of avenues by which Scripture forms and transforms faithful disciples, but three major areas in which Scripture functions formatively are explored here: *lectio divina*, inductive Bible study, and worship (preaching, Scripture reading, and communion).

Making the transition from reading Scripture as information to formation can be difficult. Common ecclesial practices have ingrained an approach to reading Scripture that focuses on the discovery of certain kinds of biblical ideas or truths (i.e., information). Christians have been taught to read Scripture to master the text or to “properly divide the word of truth.” However, reading Scripture as formation requires a reorientation of how to approach and encounter Scripture.²⁰ Since Scripture is primarily formative in nature, any person, regardless of his or her level of biblical expertise, can read the Bible and encounter God. In this regard formational reading includes opening oneself up to the biblical text to allow it to intrude into one’s lives, to be addressed and encountered by it. Instead of mastering the text through study, formational reading invites that text as sacred Scripture to master and form its readers.

Faithful readers come to the text open to hear, to receive, to respond, and to serve. Sandra Schneiders asserts that biblical spirituality indicates a transformative process of the individual and communal engagement with the biblical text. The non-specialist can approach the biblical text, not merely as a historical record or even as a literary medium, but as that through which God speaks.²¹ The historical and critical analysis does not always lead to transformation, but the subjective reader may be transformed when God speaks through Scripture by the work of the Holy Spirit. When Christians read the Bible as formative Scripture, they find new excitement and energy in the text that they once viewed as boring and irrelevant.

Spiritual reading is a meditative approach to the written word. It requires unhurried time and an open heart. The purpose of reading is that

²⁰See M. Robert Mulholland, Jr. *Shaped by the Word: The Power of Scripture in Spiritual Formation* (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 2000); A. K. M. Adam. *Faithful Interpretation: Reading the Bible in a Postmodern World* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006); Marjorie J. Thompson. *Soul Feast: An Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995).

²¹Sandra Schneiders, “Biblical Spirituality,” *Interpretation* 56.2 (2002): 136.

God may address the faithful reader. In order for this to take place, it requires both the practice of attentive listening and a willingness to respond to what one hears. Among the purposes behind the writing of the biblical texts was the objective of conveying something about God's will. Since the purpose of spiritual reading is the opening of oneself to God's address, these purposes are completely consonant and interconnected.²²

1. *Lectio divina*. The ancient practice of *lectio divina* (sacred reading) has reemerged as a transformative process to engage Scripture. The practice of *lectio divina* among Christians originated with the desert fathers and mothers whose spirituality consisted primarily of prayerful rumination on biblical texts.²³ This practice was later developed by monasteries ordered around the Rule of St. Benedict (c. 540). John Calvin was among the Reformers who undertook this practice, as did the Puritan pastor Richard Baxter who advocated a method of reflective mediation with Scripture that is directly derived from Benedictine practice.²⁴ Today Christians and faith communities are regaining the significance of this ancient practice as a means to make Bible reading exciting and engaging once again.

Lectio divina is a process of scriptural encounter that includes a series of prayer dynamics, which move the reader to a deep level of engagement with the chosen text and with the Spirit who enlivens the text.²⁵ It begins with *silencio* (silence), as one approaches a biblical passage in open, receptive, listening and silent reading. The next step is *lectio* (reading), which is to read the text aloud, slowly and deliberately, to evoke imagination. Hearing the text read reminds the hearer of the spoken word of God. Following this reading is a time of meditation. To meditate is to think about or mentally chew on what has been read for a period of time. In the past, this process often included the commitment of the text to memory. By internalizing the text in its verbal form, one passes on to a rumination or mediation on its meaning (*meditatio*).

²²M. Thompson, *Soul Feast*, 19.

²³See D. Burton-Christie, *The Word in the Desert: Scripture and the Quest for Holiness in Early Church Monasticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

²⁴M. Thompson, *Soul Feast*, 22.

²⁵Doug Hardy, "Lectio Divina: A Practice for Reconnecting to God's Word," *Preacher's Magazine: A Preaching Resource in the Wesleyan Tradition*, Lent/Easter 2009, 38-41.

Because the text is engaged in experiential terms, the mediation gives rise to prayer (*ortio*) or response to God, who speaks in and through the text. *Ortio* (praying) is talking to God as someone would to another within a close relationship. Here one speaks to God, preferably aloud, or writes the prayer in a journal. Next, through fervent prayer one may reach that degree of interiority and union with God that result in contemplation. It is here that the participant is in union with God through the Spirit. In *contemplatio* (contemplation) the person stops and rests silently before God, receiving whatever the Spirit gives.

The final step of sacred reading is *compassio* (compassion), which is the fruit of the contemplation of God as love—love of God and neighbor. Whatever insight, feeling, or commitment emerges from time with Scripture is to be shared as grace with others. *Lectio divina* is a practice that one may experience on a regular basis to transform oneself into the image and likeness of Christ encountered in Scripture.²⁶ *Lectio divina* can be a personal or corporate spiritual practice. In either case, *lectio divina* provides a direct and subjective encounter with Scripture than forms and transforms a Christian.

2. Bible Study or Small Groups. Small groups and Bible studies provide a context for deepening relationships and connectedness. Reflecting the very nature of the Triune God, humans are created as relational beings in need of acceptance, love, and care. As John Wesley said, “There is no personal holiness without social holiness.” Spiritual formation and growth always take place within a social context. The Christian life is not a solitary journey, but a pilgrimage made in the company of other believers.²⁷ Although small groups have a wide range of purposes and approaches, one of the primary resources for shaping the life of the church emerges from Bible study in small groups.²⁸ Scripture forms and shapes people’s lives. A biblical spirituality represents a transformative process of person and communal engagement with the biblical text.²⁹

For people with a limited knowledge of the Bible, reading and studying the Bible as Scripture in the context of an intimate group gives

²⁶Schneiders, “Biblical Spirituality,” 140.

²⁷Roberta Hestenes, *Using the Bible in Groups* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983), 11.

²⁸Hestenes, *Using the Bible in Groups*, 15.

²⁹Schneiders, “Biblical Spirituality,” 136.

opportunities for learning and spiritual growth. People who will not read the Bible on their own at home may read it in the context of a small group. Studying the Bible in a small group helps people broaden and deepen their understanding of a given passage, while potentially guarding against misleading, individual interpretations (which is one of many reasons why biblical interpretation needs to take place in the context of community). Studying the Bible in a group also helps people make meaning of their faith by verbalizing what the Bible means and how it applies to a life of faith. On their own, people easily ignore the relationship of biblical truth to their own lives. In a group setting, people talk about Scripture together, which helps them apply what they are learning to their lives.³⁰

John Wesley's group formation provided a context for spiritual growth and development for Methodists. Some argue that his small group formation revolutionized early Methodism and that Wesley was the "father" of the modern small-group concept.³¹ Wesley employed a methodical approach to spiritual formation that focused on assisting participants to grow in holiness of heart and life. D. Michael Henderson argues that Wesley's interlocking groups included a hierarchy of instruction for each group, tailored to a specific function. Henderson distinguishes each groups, societies, classes, and bands, with a specific educational mode.³² The societies focused primarily on cognitive development, teaching Methodist tenets and doctrine; classes focused on changing and transforming human behavior; and the bands focused on growing in holiness and purity of intention. Wesley's group formation incorporated Scripture as central to the small group process. The reading, interpretation, and proclamation of Scripture were normal aspects of society meetings; the use of Scripture in shaping behavior and holy living was a formative aspect of classes and bands.

Studying the Bible in groups is a central aspect of Christian discipleship. Christians gather to study Scripture on a regular basis with a wide range of methods and approaches. One approach to Bible study is a deductive approach. It tends to be subjective and prejudicial. In this

³⁰Hestenes, *Using the Bible in Groups*, 17.

³¹See, e.g., David Hunsicker, "John Wesley: Father of Today's Small Groups," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 31.1 (Spring 1996): 210.

³²David Michael Henderson, *John Wesley's Class Meeting: A Model of Making Disciples* (Nappanee, IN: Evangel, 1997), 83.

approach the reader comes to the Bible with conclusions and then proceeds to the text to find proof for those ideas. The result is that the reader tends to dictate beforehand what Scripture may say rather than listening to the Scripture.³³ Contrastingly, an inductive approach to Bible study is more objective and impartial because it demands that a person examine the particulars of Scripture and then draw conclusions. The inductive approach to Bible study produces people who hear and listen to the text. An inductive approach to Bible study allows the reader to interpret the Bible through observation and reflection, by drawing out ideas and truths in Scripture. Inductive Bible study is an approach to inquiry in which persons learn by examining the objects of the study themselves and drawing their own conclusions about these materials from their direct encounter with them.³⁴

This inductive approach allows the interpreter to discover what God may say through the biblical text as Scripture and to allow those discoveries to be internalized, resulting in formation and transformation. It is important to note that no person can read the Bible purely inductively. The reader's life experiences, context, and personal bias impact the interpreter's study of Scripture. A Wesleyan approach to Bible study does not begin with deductive presuppositions *per se*, but rather seeks a creative engagement and inductive encounter with God through Scripture—which takes the faithful reader to a deeper level of understanding and experience than simply the gathering of factual information.

As faithful disciples gather in small groups and Bible studies to struggle over the meaning and contemporary understanding of Scripture, the Holy Spirit is active in the community to form and shape faithful disciples. Bible study incites readers to discern the deep meaning of the text and its implications for daily life. The practice of inductive Bible study, both personally and corporately, is a means of grace.³⁵ Congregations that see the Bible in active dialogue with the church seek to discern not only the questions they raise about the text but also the questions the text as

³³Robert A. Traina, *Methodical Bible Study* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980), 7.

³⁴David L. Thompson, *Bible Study That Works* (Nappanee, IN: Evangel, 1994), 12.

³⁵See Dean G. Blevins, *John Wesley and the Means of Grace: An Approach to Christian Education* (Ph.D. diss., Ann Arbor, MI: UMI / Claremont School of Theology, 1999).

Scripture raises about the life of the church. Learning to discern the deep meaning of the text does not give readers control of the Bible; it potentially prepares readers to hear what Scripture may say to challenge the church and the Christian walk of faithful believers. Faithful discipleship includes the willingness to engage in the sound study of Scripture by giving oneself to the difficult, yet rewarding task of disciplined Bible study.³⁶

3. *Scripture in Worship.* Christians can encounter the transforming reading of Scripture in worship through a variety of practices. First, Christians engage Scripture through the preaching of the Word. Historically, preaching in the early church preceded the writing of the New Testament texts. The eyewitnesses of the Christ-event testified to what they had seen and heard.³⁷ Preaching touched and transformed the lives of the early Christians. In similar ways, when the Scripture is preached today, the hope is that lives are changed and transformed through the work of the Holy Spirit. The proclamation of Scripture emphasizes the spoken Word of God that bears witness to the incarnate Word of Jesus Christ. But there is more to this than bearing witness. Through the proclamation of Scripture, the spoken Word becomes a fresh expression of the living and active word of God. In this sense, the spoken word becomes a “means of grace.”

The preacher speaks *for* God, *from* the Scriptures, *by* the authority from the church, *to* the people. God speaks through the proclamation of the word, through the inspiration of Scripture, to provide healing and reconciliation.³⁸ As Marva Dawn writes, “Sermons should shape the hearers by bringing the transforming Word to nurture the development of the character and pattern of Christ.”³⁹ When preaching is maintained as central to liturgy, through the following of the lectionary and the Christian calendar, preaching is the Scripture-driven, worship-centered act that makes meaning for a community’s life as it strives to bear witness to the

³⁶Dean Blevins and Mark Maddix, *Discovering Christian Discipleship: Foundations of Christian Education* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2010), 196.

³⁷Schneiders, “Biblical Spirituality,” 137.

³⁸James F. White, *Introduction to Christian Worship*, 3rd ed. (Nashville: Abingdon, 2000), 167.

³⁹Marva Dawn, *Reaching Out without Dumbing Down: A Theology of Worship for the Turn-of-the-Century Culture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 211.

truth of the gospel in the world.⁴⁰ The preacher interprets Scripture for the community, placing it within the larger narrative of the biblical witness, and helps congregants make meaning for life. Scriptural preaching allows the congregants to hear and discover their role in the broader narrative of God's redemptive work in the world.

Second, Scripture is encountered through the worship service or liturgy. It is the Word of God, read and preached and received, that calls the Christian community together to worship. When the people of God gather around Scripture, this reveals something of the heart of Christian worship.⁴¹ Without Christian worship there would be no Bible. The Bible, in a very real sense, is the product of the early church's common prayer. The earliest Christian communities circulated among themselves and read in common worship stories of the life and ministry of Jesus and the early apostles so that they could hear and respond.⁴² Similarly, the interrelationship between worship and the Scriptures is evident today as Scripture is preached, read, and experienced in worship.

Through worship, as the community of faith gathers, Scripture comes to life. Congregations that follow the Christian calendar and lectionary readings provide congregants with opportunities to participate in the story of God. The reading of Scripture is an interpretative act that provides an opportunity for worshippers to encounter the living Word of God. It is ironic that some Evangelicals and Wesleyans who view Scripture as primary and authoritative for faith and practice do not practice regular reading of Scripture in worship. In order for Scripture to be formative in the life of the church, Scripture must be read, experienced, and interpreted as a central aspect of the worshipping community. Also, through responsive readings, hymns, and choruses (assuming they have a biblical basis), the faith community provides various avenues for worshippers to interact with God's message through Scripture.⁴³

⁴⁰Debra Dean Murphy, *Teaching that Transforms: Worship as the Heart of Christian Education* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2004), 145.

⁴¹Susan J. White, *Foundations of Christian Worship* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 15.

⁴²White, *Foundations of Christian Worship*, 15.

⁴³ E.g., the Wesleyan tradition influenced by the hymnology of Charles Wesley (1701-1788), who wrote over 6,500 hymns and integrated Scripture in his hymns.

Third, congregations that engage in participation in the Eucharist encounter God through active expressions of Scripture in terms of ritual. The concept of the word and table or word and sacrament is an expression drawn from a particular theology of worship that has its roots deep in the early church. A service of the word and table is worship that emphasizes the dual aspects of the spoken Word built around Scripture and the embodied Word centered on the celebration of the Eucharist or Communion. Once the proclaimed Word is preached, the congregants respond to the spoken Word by participation in the embodied Word of Communion.⁴⁴

Word and Table were central to Methodist worship during the time of John Wesley, but are not as common today in many Methodist and Wesleyan congregations. Most Evangelical congregations identify with the proclamation of the gospel through preaching. These congregations, along with many Wesleyan congregations, see Scripture as central to formation and proclamation. This reflects the influence of the Protestant Reformation which placed a high value on Scripture and proclamation. Many of these congregations are less likely to participate in Holy Communion (or the Eucharist) on a regular basis. One of the primary reasons is that many Evangelical and Wesleyan congregations consider themselves “low” church, with a diminished view of liturgy, lectionary readings, and sacramental theology. But participation in the Eucharist (table) on a regular basis provides balance to the proclamation through Scripture in worship. The table expands our understanding and discourse about God’s grace by including a living sign of the gospel in tangible and visible form.⁴⁵

For Wesley, the Eucharist was an opportunity to experience and commune with Christ. Through Communion persons experience the very presence of Christ. Wesley taught that Christ was present in the elements, though he did not hold the Roman Catholic view of *transubstantiation* (the bread and wine actually becoming the body and blood of Christ). For Wesley, since Christ was present, everyone was invited to participate, believers and nonbelievers alike. Christ was present spiritually, immediately, and independently, interacting with the recipient to convey grace. Wesley’s

⁴⁴ Dennis Bratcher, “Word and Table: Reflections on a Theology of Worship,” <http://www.crivoice.org/wordtable.html>.

⁴⁵ Lester Ruth, “Word and Table: A Wesleyan Model for Balanced Worship,” in *The Wesleyan Tradition: A Paradigm for Renewal*, ed. Paul W. Chilcote (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002), 138.

view of the Eucharist as a sacrament reflects his belief that a person may receive forgiveness and reconciliation through obedient response to God's grace, including participation in the Eucharist. He believed that something divine takes place when a person comes with an open heart to receive the life-giving gift of the bread and wine as the Word of God.

In this respect, Wesley believed that the Eucharist was a converting element for those who confessed and believed *during* the Lord's Supper. Wesley's desire to see Methodist followers take Communion regularly was based on both obedience to Christ and the hope that blessing and holiness would follow the use of this essential means of grace. The Eucharist, according to Wesley, served as a channel of grace that formed and transformed the believer. Communion, as a means of grace, is formative for those who are being drawn toward holiness and those who have been sanctified. For those desiring to grow in God's grace, which is a deepening of love for God and neighbor, Communion is the ordinary means of such growth. The sacrament serves not only to preserve and sustain but also to further progress and growth in faith and holiness.

Conclusion

For many Christians, the Bible has become irrelevant, boring, and disconnected from their faith. This may be caused by the church's inability to educate and model for congregants that Scripture is less about information and more about formation and transformation. Christians who view Scripture in formative ways can newly experience and encounter Scripture. Since Scripture has been understood to be formative beginning with the canonization process, congregations are to develop practices of Bible reading, Bible study, preaching, and worship that mirror such formative purposes. When this shift in emphasis takes place, the church becomes the primary context within which Scripture functions to form and transform persons together as the people of God.

A Wesleyan view of Scripture in terms of formation shapes the way we think about God and ourselves as the people of God and the ways that we respond to one another and the world around us. From a Wesleyan perspective, the Bible speaks as sacred Scripture by calling us to respond in faithful ways in light of biblical provocations to faithful living. The formative role of Scripture necessitates an obedient response to its call for holy living. Congregations that view Scripture in formative ways provide the people of God with opportunities to encounter the text in fresh and new ways that form and transform them into faithful disciples.

EMPIRICISM AND WESLEYAN ETHICS

by

Kevin Twain Lowery¹

The term “Wesleyan ethics” is somewhat nebulous for several reasons. First, Wesley never systematized his own views on ethics. In fact, Wesley was seemingly not very concerned with systematizing his thought in general. Of course, he did maintain particular theological and intellectual commitments throughout his life, and these formed the backbone of his thought. Nevertheless, he did not focus on producing a systematic theology or a system of ethics. This permits any field classified as “Wesleyan” a significant amount of latitude in the ways that it interprets and develops Wesley’s thought. This breadth is even greater when we consider Wesley’s eclecticism, for he rather freely appropriated concepts from a wide variety of sources.

Consequently, Wesleyan ethics is a relatively open field. Attempts to articulate a system of Wesleyan ethics have been few, and given the parameters already mentioned, it would be virtually impossible for any one expression of Wesleyan ethics to be regarded as definitive for the tradition as a whole. As a result, it is not uncommon for Wesleyans to generate a rather broad spectrum of positions on any given ethical issue. Indeed, this pattern is evident within United Methodism, and the spectrum is wider still when we consider the broader family of Christian traditions that all trace their lineage through Wesley. Some may find this lack of definition disconcerting, but I believe that it allows sufficient latitude for the tradition to

¹I express my appreciation to Craig Boyd, Eric Manchester, Tom Oord, and Bryan Williams for their affirmation and helpful comments on this paper.

develop and to adapt to any cultural setting, thus ensuring its potential relevance in the long run. All of this is, of course, dependent upon constructive dialog between a plurality of Wesleyan voices.

This is not to suggest that any and every ethical stance and methodology can be regarded as Wesleyan, for there are distinctive theological and intellectual commitments that define what it means for ethics to be Wesleyan. For example, Wesley's emphasis on the centrality of the Love Commandments and his concern with the perfection of the individual make it necessary for any account of Wesleyan ethics to give due consideration to Christian virtues and the ways that they are inculcated, fostered, and expressed within the lives of individual believers. It thus seems that virtue ethics should be a central part of Wesleyan ethics, regardless of how it is articulated otherwise.

A number of eighteenth-century moral theorists, especially those within the British empiricist tradition, asserted that the ethicality of actions lies primarily in the motives behind them and not so much in the effects they produce. Wesley clearly followed this trend as is reflected in his definitions of sin and perfection. He believed that sin is a matter of intention, and he understood perfection to entail the refinement of motives.² Aside from some occasional casuistry, Wesley did not give significant attention to the systematic evaluation of the practical effects of actions. This is precisely the place where Wesleyan ethics must be bolstered, for it is not enough to say that all of our actions must be motivated by love for God and love for neighbor. We need to be able to determine what the most loving action would be in a particular situation. In essence, virtue ethics cannot truly stand on its own, for it requires an account of the good. Just as Aristotle's virtue ethics is supported by utilitarianism and Aquinas's virtue ethics is supported by natural law theory, so is Wesleyan ethics in need of a support system for its account of virtue.

In my opinion, there are a number of approaches that can be taken, and yet only those that remain consistent with Wesley's principal intellectual commitments should be regarded as Wesleyan in the fullest sense of the word. This is what distinguishes mere appropriations of thought from

²Wesley to Elizabeth Bennis, 16 June 1772, *The Works of John Wesley*, edited by Thomas Jackson (London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, 1872), 12:394; Wesley, "A Plain Account of Christian Perfection," §3, *Works* [Jackson ed.], 11:367; Kevin Twain Lowery, *Salvaging Wesley's Agenda: A New Paradigm for Wesleyan Virtue Ethics* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock), 287-93.

the intellectual development of that thought. Wesley has several commitments that should be taken into consideration, but I would like to focus on the Wesleyan epistemic commitment to empiricism. Wesley's identity as an empiricist and the influence of Aristotle and Locke on him are well documented and generally accepted, so it will not be necessary to repeat any of that material here.³ Rather, my specific purpose will be to briefly outline the ways that empiricism potentially impacts Wesleyan ethics.

I must admit that my own reasons for embracing empiricism have little to do with Wesley. I would be an empiricist even if I believed that Wesley was a Quietist. The fact that Wesley was an empiricist is a significant part of his appeal to me. His commitment to empiricism may not have been as strong as mine, but much of that is just the difference in intellectual climate between the eighteenth and twenty-first centuries. Wesley may not have been preoccupied with epistemological questions, but he gave them a fair amount of attention for a clergyman of his day. In this post-modern era, it is even more important that we give them due consideration, especially since epistemology is foundational to our perceptions and beliefs. I thus will briefly outline some basic ways that Wesleyan ethics is impacted by a commitment to empiricism. In order to do this, I first will need to discuss what it means for ethics to be understood from an empirical perspective.

Moral Discernment as Empirical

Obviously, empiricism is the view that all of our beliefs are rooted in sensory perception. Some people embrace empiricism more generally, but they consider ethics to be a special case. This was indeed part of the debate among eighteenth-century British ethicists, as a number of them described conscience as a "moral sense." The question concerns the extent to which moral judgment can be understood as the perception of an objective reality. Locke had noted, in a more general sense, that our minds form ideas from the objects we perceive, and the ideas are distinct from the objects from which they originate.⁴ For example, when I look at a tree, I form my own idea of that tree from my perception of it. On one hand, I can regard my idea of the tree to be objective, because it is formed from the percep-

³See Lowery, 65-121.

⁴John Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, collated and annotated by Alexander Campbell Fraser, §2.1 (New York: Dover, 1959), 1:121-43.

tion of a real object. On the other hand, there is still some subjectivity in my idea of the tree since I can only perceive it from a particular perspective. This is akin to Kant's distinction between the noumenal and the phenomenal, and epistemological discussions that occurred several decades earlier anticipated this distinction.

The British empiricists were willing to trust their perceptions of material objects, but they were more skeptical about moral discernment. They wanted to regard moral judgment as a type of perception, i.e. they wanted to believe that, when we judge something to be right or wrong, we are perceiving some kind of objective property or characteristic. This would make morality objective and ultimately binding on everyone. Nevertheless, many of the British empiricists were willing to acknowledge that moral perception is much more subjective than the perception of physical objects. This is precisely what Kant refused to accept, and he reacted strongly against it by taking an opposing stance. He asserted that moral discernment is not empirical at all but is equally accessible and obvious to all persons.⁵ Whereas he tried to make ethics universal by making it transcendental, the empiricists started to view ethics as more relative, albeit still rooted in some kind of objective reality that can be perceived, whether that be natural law or human nature.

All of this discussion helps us to identify some ways that Wesleyan ethics (and ethics in general) is shaped by an empirical perspective. First, moral knowledge is not learned through mandated or intuited absolutes. Rather, moral knowledge is derived from empirical sources. Wesley's doctrine of prevenient grace ascribes some degree of conscience to every human being, giving us both the responsibility and the freedom of moral deliberation.⁶ This is in stark contrast to those who stress human depravity to the point of being skeptical about the natural function of conscience, a skepticism that often leads to legalism and biblical literalism. By assuming that we cannot naturally discern good and evil, they conclude that we must be told what is good and what is evil.

⁵Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason and Other Writings*, ed. Allen Wood and George di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 112-5 [German (originally the Royal Prussian) Academy of Sciences edition, *Kants gesammelte Schriften*, 6:102-6].

⁶Wesley, Sermon 105, "On Conscience," *The Works of John Wesley* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1988), 1:479-90 [Jackson ed., 7:186-94]. Also, see Lowery, 224-8.

Such should not be characteristic of Wesleyan ethics, at least from an empirical perspective. Moral judgment should be recognized as being empirically grounded. Consequently, it is affected by situation and perspective. Although ethics is rooted in human nature, the nature of social relationships, and the structure of the world, our discernment of ethics, like all of our judgment in general, depends upon the particular experiences we have had. We must judge based upon the data that is available to us. That is why education is so important, for it allows us to vastly expand the database of information on which we base our judgments. Wesley, Locke, and other empiricists all stressed the importance of education, including the inculcation of morals.⁷ Indeed, it is foolish to base one's judgment solely upon one's own experiences, because wisdom is gained through perspective and understanding. This holds true for belief in general, and it is true for moral reasoning as well. Moral judgment is best made by integrating as many sources as possible. Therefore, a Wesleyan commitment to empiricism should lead to the rejection of the notion of *sola Scriptura*, for even the understanding and interpretation of Scripture are affected by perspective. Biblical hermeneutics cannot and should not take place in a vacuum. Instead, it should be informed by information that is gathered and integrated from a wide variety of sources. This approach is reflected in Wesley's own eclecticism.

In addition, ethics from an empirical perspective encourages the scientific study of moral reasoning. After all, science is essentially our best efforts to understand the world and ourselves based upon the empirical observations we are able to make. To say that reasoning itself can be studied scientifically is to recognize our ability to think recursively, i.e., to think about the process of thinking. When Wesleyan ethics is grounded empirically, it can be informed by the natural and social sciences. Current studies in fields like genetics and cognitive science hold great promise for unlocking more mysteries for us, and ethics should take them into account.

Of course, we have not even considered what is perhaps the greatest challenge to empirically based ethics, namely, the question of the naturalistic fallacy, and there are many who claim that we cannot derive "what ought to be" from "what is." It is obviously beyond the scope of this essay

⁷Locke, §§1.2.2-8, 1:66-72; §§1.2.22-5, 1:87-9; Wesley, Sermon 69, "The Imperfection of Human Knowledge," §3.1, *Works*, 2:582-3 [Jackson ed., 6:347-8]. Also, see Lowery, 114-21.

to give a fully adequate response to this objection. Nevertheless, I will briefly make a few points that I consider salient. First, although empiricism does not require one to reject the notion that there are moral absolutes, it does require one to admit that the certainty of our beliefs can never be absolute. All of our beliefs are formed from a particular perspective and have some degree of subjectivity. Consequently, even if there are moral absolutes, we can never be completely certain that we know what those absolutes are. Even if we merely aspire to approximate the ideals we hold, we can never be absolutely sure that we know precisely what the ideals should be. Instead, any ideals we hold are simply projected outward and extrapolated from the values we hold. In the final analysis, the existence of moral absolutes is ultimately a moot question.

Does this eliminate or undermine ethics? Not in the least. It only requires the empiricist to see ethics teleologically, at least in the sense that we should strive to constantly improve, refine, and, if necessary, correct our moral reasoning. This is what empiricism requires of our beliefs in general. At any given point in time our reasoning is dependent upon the data that is supplied to it. Strictly speaking, we are unable to see things from the standpoint of "all things considered," so we live within the parameters of "this much considered." We can only try to extrapolate from the data that we have in order to predict possible outcomes for a particular course of action. This is the best that we can do, and so our reasoning (especially our moral reasoning) always has a certain degree of speculation and must therefore be corrected over time as we acquire more data. This is how knowledge proceeds as a general rule.

Ethics is concerned with higher-level questions of value, so it should guide the way other academic disciplines are conducted and utilized. However, ethics is more speculative than most disciplines because it is further removed from direct empirical observation. Ethics is based upon empirical observations, but the conclusions it reaches require a lot of interpretation, and this is where it becomes more speculative. Consequently, it needs to be informed by the other disciplines, especially those most directly derived from empirical observation, i.e., those requiring the least amount of interpretation. In this way, the progress of ethics as a discipline is similar to that of philosophy and theology, because all of them focus on higher, broader questions of value, meaning, and purpose. They address the questions that are the most important overall, but since they are further removed from direct empirical observation, they are more speculative and allow much more room for disagreement.

These characteristics of ethics help us to see the limitations within which it is able to progress. As a discipline centered on higher, broader levels of interpretation, ethics works with data that is highly complex, especially the complexities of human behavior. As a result, ethics does not benefit from feedback as quickly as other disciplines of knowledge. Yes, there is nothing to prevent conclusions from being formed after just a small number of observations, but these conclusions are tentative and subject to revision. We are generally aware of this limitation. It is the very reason we disdain stereotyping and prejudice and regard them as unfair.

The complexities of ethical scenarios are also problematic in the sense that the context of moral reasoning is always changing. The empirical sciences test their theories by controlling variables in order to repeatedly re-create the same experimental conditions. Ethical scenarios cannot be controlled and repeated in the same way. Even if they could, considering to do so would itself pose an ethical problem because this would push the use of experimental subjects much further than what are now considered to be acceptable limits. For example, would we really want to test the ethicality of marital fidelity by having subjects engage in adulterous behavior? Of course not. Since much moral reasoning takes place in the abstract, its usefulness is limited until the occurrence of real-life scenarios allow for its testing. Even then, each scenario is somewhat unique, so moral reasoning quite often cannot be tested directly through particular experiences. Instead, we must learn over time by analyzing the similarities and differences between individual scenarios.

This brings us back to the heart of the supposed naturalistic fallacy. Can we determine what ought to be from the empirical observations we are able to make? On one hand, we cannot achieve absolute moral certainty, no matter how many observations we make, because there are always possible exceptions to every law, goal, and virtue. On the other hand, we are able to achieve a sufficiently high degree of moral certainty from patterns that we are able to observe over time, and this certainty can be strengthened as more observations are made. When understood in this way, it seems that the naturalistic fallacy objection made famous by Hume and Moore is actually a variant of the problem of induction that Hume articulated so well. For example, Hume pointed out that even though we cannot know with absolute certainty that the sun will rise again tomorrow, it is reasonable to infer that it will, because the fact that it has for many, many years makes the probability of tomorrow's sunrise extremely high.

Consequently, it would be foolish to allow any possible doubt of tomorrow's sunrise to affect one's behavior.⁸ Along the same lines, even if we can never attain absolute moral certainty, we are able to attain sufficient moral certainty so as to guide our behavior. As we learn more over time, we are able to adjust our mores accordingly. To illustrate, even though women and racial groups have been oppressed for many centuries, it became evident enough that this oppression lacks justification, and so people began changing their mores in that regard.

No doubt some will object to the way I am construing ethics because it makes ethics consequentialist to a great extent. They will say that the end does not justify the means. My response is that this assertion rests on a semantic ambiguity. To be sure, the desirability of an end does not justify every possible means of attaining that end, and so, in that sense, it is true that the end does not justify the means. Nevertheless, I firmly believe that the results that are produced by a particular course of action determine the extent to which the course of action is or is not justified. I believe this in a normative sense, and I believe that this is the way moral reasoning actually takes place, regardless of how we attempt to justify it, theoretically or otherwise. What disqualifies a particular means to a desirable end are the side effects that either are produced or are likely to be produced. Whenever we care more about avoiding the undesirable side effects than we do about attaining the desired end, we will deem that particular means unjustified.

A well-known example from history will help to illustrate this. Toward the end of his life, Kant's universal understanding of ethics was criticized by a younger contemporary in an article he published. He posed the question whether it would be moral to lie in order to save someone's life. In the scenario he offered, a man fleeing from a killer seeks refuge in a home, and the killer shows up looking for him. The article suggests that lying would be the moral action in that particular circumstance, contradicting Kant's view that we should always act on universalizable maxims. Rather than concede this apparent flaw in his theory, Kant's rejoinder was that telling the truth would still be the moral thing to do. Ironically, Kant was not satisfied to simply argue that ethics is always universal. On the contrary, he weakly suggested that one should still tell the truth since the man may have secretly fled from the house another way, and lying may in

⁸David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, §4.1 (Indianapolis, Hackett, 1993), 15-19.

fact help the killer to find him outside. Perhaps realizing how silly this response seemed, he then asserted that the harm caused by creating a slippery slope for the justification of lying is worse than the harm of losing an individual life.⁹ Whether or not Kant realized it, he ended up justifying his position with an empirical observation.

In a similar manner, many a consequentialist has shown how moral dilemmas, no matter how rarely they might actually occur in real life, force us to seriously consider making exceptions to the laws, goals, and virtues that we use to describe ethics, and these considerations are based on empirical observations and value judgments. In the final analysis, the situations we face in real life have many similarities, and this enables us to simplify moral reasoning by generalizing ethics in some theoretical way. Nevertheless, our moral reasoning is still ultimately based on the possible outcomes that we see for particular courses of action. Even though moral dilemmas of the type offered by consequentialists are so rare that they do not seriously cause us to abandon the theoretical ways we construe moral reasoning, we do gradually adjust our moral theories and our value systems based on the empirical observations we make over time.

Wesleyan Ethics as Empirical

Allow me to briefly restate my general argument. I began by noting how Wesleyan ethics is rather open-ended, and this allows it to be developed in a number of ways that can still be regarded as Wesleyan or are at least consistent with basic Wesleyan commitments. We then recalled Wesley's allegiance to empiricism, and I stressed the importance of addressing epistemological questions. Next, I attempted to outline what it means for ethics to be grounded in empiricism, and I offered a simple justification for viewing ethics that way. In this final section it only remains to point out the various options that exist for developing Wesleyan ethics within an empiricist framework.

There are several options that can be eliminated from the outset. To start, empiricism moves Wesleyan ethics away from Divine command ethics. The Wesleyan doctrine of prevenient grace acknowledges the role of conscience, even more so when bolstered by a commitment to empiri-

⁹Immanuel Kant, "On a Supposed Right to Lie because of Philanthropic Concerns," published with *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993), 63-7 [8:425-30].

cism. Moreover, Wesleyan ethics places great emphasis on moral motive, and this stresses the need for motive to originate in one's own reasoning. It is good to freely choose to obey what one is commanded to do, but it is even better to choose the action without having to be commanded to do it. For example, it is good for children to clean their rooms whenever their parents ask them to do so, but it is even better if they clean their rooms without needing to be told to do it. Divine command ethics is thus at odds with the Wesleyan view of moral perfection, in which the individual learns to love as Christ loves and to think as Christ thinks.¹⁰ It is a more synergistic view of grace, one that places both the freedom and the responsibility of moral deliberation on our shoulders. Whereas Divine command ethics quite often tends toward biblical literalism, Wesleyan ethics is best served by a more flexible hermeneutic, one that is comfortable with interpreting some scriptural passages either contextually or allegorically.

The next option to be eliminated is Kantian ethics. This choice is rather obvious because Kantian ethics is diametrically opposed to ethics that is empirically grounded. Kant believed that empirically grounded value judgments are ultimately reducible to self-interest, and he felt that ethics must transcend self-interest.¹¹ Wesleyan ethics comes from the very British empiricist tradition that Kant was opposing. From the standpoint of empiricism, Kantian ethics is self-deluding because we cannot neatly separate our feelings from our reasoning. This is what the pragmatists stressed a century after Kant. Rather than try to deny personal feelings, Wesleyan ethics focuses on the moral perfection of motives, because motive and intention are at the core of ethics. Ethics is not merely a rationalistic exercise. Instead, it starts with proper love for God, others, and self. In recognizing our epistemic limits, the empiricist realizes that ethics is not a set of inflexible rules. Rather, moral reasoning is always contextual, connecting the particular perspective of the moral agent with the specific situation at hand.

Wesleyan ethics should also avoid moral intuitionism, whether it be mystical or otherwise. Ethics requires deliberation, and this is part of our moral duty. Consequently, we must accept responsibility for our moral rea-

¹⁰Albert Outler made a similar point about the incompatibility of divine command ethics and the pursuit of Christian perfection. See Albert C. Outler, *Theology in the Wesleyan Spirit* (Nashville: Tidings, 1975), 81.

¹¹Kant, *Grounding*, §2, 45-8 [4:441-4].

soning and for the consequences of our actions. The empiricist realizes that moral education is important, because reasoning is most reliable when it is able to integrate much information from a wide array of perspectives. It is just as important to learn from the experiences of others as it is to learn from our own successes and failures. Of all the possible approaches to Wesleyan ethics, I believe that there are three that offer the most promise. All of these are fruitful options for empirical ethics, for they were utilized in this way by two of history's most notable philosophers: Aristotle and Aquinas.

1. Natural law theory. First, empirically based ethics can be expressed through natural law theory, and I believe that this is a viable option for Wesleyan ethics. Of course, it seems to me that the empiricist should not use the concept of natural law as an absolutist would, because our epistemic limitations prevent us from making such absolute claims. As I stated earlier, even if I believe that there are moral absolutes, I must admit that, since I am fallible, my understanding of those absolutes can never itself be absolute. Natural law can still be seen as an objective reality, but epistemic humility demands that we see the perception of natural law as an ongoing pursuit.

2. Virtue ethics. Second, Wesleyan ethics can be construed as a type of virtue ethics, and I spoke of this earlier. The Wesleyan emphasis on perfection in love can be understood through the development of various virtues, all of which describe different aspects of a person's overall personality and character. Empirical experience can inform the way we understand the virtues, and it is instrumental in ingraining the virtues into the psyche. In addition, virtue ethics emphasizes personal discipline and growth in a way that is very consonant with the Wesleyan understanding of moral progress and the means of grace.

3. Utilitarianism. Third, I believe that utilitarianism could also be appropriated for Wesleyan ethics.¹² Of course, this would require some nuance in order for it to be truly Wesleyan. God would be seen as the *Summum Bonum*, as he is in the thought of Augustine, Aquinas, and others.¹³ There would also need to be distinctions between various kinds of

¹²For example, see Wesley, Sermon 100, "On Pleasing All Men," *Works*, 3:415-26, Jackson edition, 7:139-46.

¹³St. Augustine, *On the Nature of Good*; St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, §II.II.26.2.1-3 (New York, Benziger Brothers, 1948), 1289-91.

pleasure, similar to the categories of higher and lower pleasures spoken of by Frances Hutcheson and John Stuart Mill.¹⁴ The danger of utilitarianism is that it can be narrowly defined in an attempt to justify selfish egoism. However, appropriating utilitarianism would require us to think about the way that piety affects moral motive. For instance, is it more moral to love others solely for their own sake or to love them primarily (if not solely) for God's sake? Utilitarianism would likewise require us to think about the proper role of self-love, avoiding the two extremes of either supposing that it can be transcended or ignoring it altogether.

It may reasonably be objected that embracing empiricism may lead to what some would regard as its excesses. There is always this possibility, but I do not believe that this would pose a significant threat. For example, embracing empiricism does not require us to entertain any form of Pelagianism, as Locke appears to have done.¹⁵ What we now know about our evolutionary dispositions makes it absurd to suggest that any human being can be born in a state of moral neutrality, without any selfish inclinations whatsoever. Consequently, accepting empiricism does not require us to entertain such notions.

Empiricism also does not obligate us to give up metaphysics and become scientific naturalists like the logical positivists. Recognizing our epistemic limits does not force us to conclude that reality does not extend beyond those limits. We are not required to say, "If I can't experience it empirically, then it must not exist." Furthermore, empiricism does not preclude divine revelation. What it does require is that we recognize with Aquinas that all of our concepts are formed empirically, so we can only understand God through the use of analogy. God's existence exceeds our epistemic limits, so any perception we have of God is interpreted through the lens of empirical experience.

Finally, embracing empiricism does not necessarily lead to the emotivist view of ethics like that proposed by Ayer.¹⁶ The fact that we cannot

¹⁴John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism* (New York: Bantam, 1993), 144-50; Frances Hutcheson, *A System of Moral Philosophy* (London: Continuum, 2006). Also, see Mark Strasser, "Hutcheson on the Higher and Lower Pleasures," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 25 (1987): 517-31.

¹⁵Locke, §§ 1.2.3-4, 1:66-9.

¹⁶Alfred Jules Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic* (New York: Dover, 1952), 102-14.

speak of ethics in absolute terms does not force us to accept utter moral relativism. We can still recognize objectivity and normativity in ethics as long as we do not ignore the subjective element of ethics. Empirical ethics rests on the hope of moral progress, attained as we learn from our experiences and then apply that wisdom to our future moral deliberations.

“PEOPLEHOOD” AND THE METHODIST REVIVAL

by

Jeffrey A. Conklin-Miller

In conversations seeking the proper location for the focus of renewal in the church, an oscillation between differing poles of emphasis can be discerned, moving from evangelism to social justice, or from spirituality to social responsibility. Regardless of the source of such differences, for those in the Methodist tradition(s) in America, our reading of John Wesley has certainly been influenced by these divisions, different camps making efforts to find in Wesley the warrant necessary to deploy him as a staunch advocate for a particular kind of renewal. This is possible, of course, because these divisions influenced Wesley himself! Despite any effort to read one particular emphasis to the exclusion of the other, in Wesley we find the effort to envision and articulate a unified hope for the renewal of holiness and the potential for reform located both in the individual Christian life and in the nation, society, and world, one leading to the other.

I will argue that, in addition to these familiar emphases, Wesley must also be read as envisioning, forming, and sustaining a “People” in the Methodist movement, and that he did so in the development and provision of the *General Rules of the United Societies* in 1743.¹ Further, with

¹John Wesley, “The Nature, Design, and General Rules of the United Societies” (1743), *Methodist Societies: History, Nature, and Design*, Ed. Rupert E. Davies. Vol. 9 of *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1976 –), 69-75.

reference to the work of John Howard Yoder, I will suggest that beyond concern for renewal of spirituality or social responsibility, such a sense of peoplehood is crucial to ecclesiological identity and renewal, and that it is from *within* this “people” that we should view Wesley’s efforts for renewal, seeking transformed lives and a transformed world. These concerns are not only significant in an historical sense, but push forward to inform contemporary conversation seeking renewal of ecclesial identity and mission.

After displaying a typology of renewal movements offered by Yoder, I will show why Wesley must be read as emphasizing renewal in contexts of both spiritual and social (national) life, against those (like Yoder) who read Wesley as accentuating one over the other. Next I will investigate why Yoder’s problematizing of the relationship between these two emphases is salutary, and why the category of peoplehood is vital for faithful ecclesiological renewal. We then will consider how Wesley conceived the Methodist renewal as a movement for individual and social reform that required location in a visible, practicing, and witnessing community of discipleship, and further, that it was the provision of the *General Rules of the United Societies* that gave form and shape to this idea of Methodist “peoplehood.”

John Howard Yoder’s Ecclesiological-Renewal Typology

In his essay “A People in the World” John Howard Yoder considers post-Reformation church renewal movements in order to identify a broad ecclesiological typology that he suggests repeats itself in critical periods of renewal. According to Yoder, there are three types: the theocratic, the spiritualist, and the believers’ church, the differences between them being most significantly their differing placement of the “locus of historical meaning” and, consequently, the proper form of ecclesial gathering.²

The theocratic type is associated by Yoder with any effort to connect renewal of the church to the larger renewal of society in general. The “locus of historical meaning” for the theocrat is “the movement of the whole society.”³ The church seeks a role of influence either through accepting its fusion with the state itself or, in disestablished contexts,

²John Howard Yoder, “A People In the World,” *The Royal Priesthood: Essays Ecclesiological and Ecumenical*, Michael G. Cartwright, ed. (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1998), 71.

³Ibid.

through supporting its members as they wield power in secular vocations, inviting them to do so specifically as Christians. In either case, the telos is the same: the church sees renewal in the totalizing vision of society where all are Christians and what counts as meaningful renewal is tied intimately to the transformation of the socio-politico-economic sphere.

Yoder’s second type is a reactive development to the first. The spiritualist type relocates the center of historical meaning from the theocratic focus on renewal in the whole society and into the inner realm of the individual’s spiritual life. Thus, renewal in the church tends toward eschewing the perceived “cold” formal practices of the established church and toward creating para-church forms that encourage and support the inward experience of vital Christian faith. Notably, Yoder adds, this type of renewal offers no distinct challenge to the “established” church and “tends to remain in the frame of the theocratic society to which it reacts.”⁴

In contrast to these two dominant traditions, Yoder suggests that his own tradition, the “Believers’ Church,” constitutes a third type which offers a way to “move beyond the oscillation between the theocratic and the spiritualist patterns.”⁵ However, it moves beyond not through compromise or synthesis, but by resisting elements of both the first and second types, namely the expansion of the church to a synonymous association with the society (within which all are baptized into the *corpus christianum*) and the reduction of the church to para-ecclesial forms that nurture the individual’s inner or spiritual life. In contrast, the Believer’s Church finds its place as a visible community of disciples who distinguish themselves from the whole of society by their shared commitment to a form of life revealed by Jesus and exemplified by the life of the early church. Yoder argues, it is not theocratic as it involves only “some” and not “all” of the society (emphasizing the “voluntary” nature of the community). Nor is it only a “spiritual” community, inasmuch as it has a political embodiment; it is an actual body or community of people sharing together in the ecclesiological forms and practices that are “according to scripture and that are expressive of the character of the disciples’ fellowship.”⁶

In Yoder’s typology, the church’s role or place is not questioned by either the theocratic or the spiritualist types. This is so because the center

⁴Ibid., 72.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid.

of historical meaning is located in the society or in the spiritual life of the individual; neither consider the church itself to be the central locus of historical meaning. Yet, Yoder suggests, this is to ignore the witness of the scriptures which proclaim the “centrality of the church in God’s purposes,” namely to break down walls of division and to raise up a new humanity. As Yoder puts it,

The work of God is the calling of a people, whether in the Old Covenant or the New. The church is then not simply the bearer of the message of reconciliation, in the way a newspaper or a telephone company can bear any message with which it is entrusted. Nor is the church simply the result of a message, as an alumni association is the product of a school or the crowd in the theater is the product of the reputation of the film. That men and women are called together to a new social wholeness is itself the work of God, which gives meaning to history, from which both personal conversion (whereby individuals are called into this meaning) and missionary instrumentalities are derived.⁷

Historical meaning finds its place, not in the state or in the inner life of the individual, but rather in the church, understood specifically as a visible community. In the Believers’ Church type, the church itself is this visible, historical, embodied group of people—thus Yoder’s title for the essay, “A People in the World.” This “people” is the church.

Yoder seeks to advance a particular argument for the ecclesiological significance of the Believer’s Church tradition within the larger ecumenical conversations on the nature and mission of the church. He portrays John Wesley in the midst of a stream of names and lives that reflect an essential commitment to the importance of what Yoder has broadly called the spiritualist tradition. He writes: “That God is gracious *to me* is the good news that Zinzendorf, Wesley, Kierkegaard, and today both Rudolf Bultmann and Billy Graham (in their very different ways) have derived from Luther and have labored to keep unclouded by any effort to derive from it (or to base upon it) a social program or any other human work.”⁸

⁷Ibid., 74.

⁸Ibid., 73, emphasis original.

In other words, to leave unchallenged the primacy of God’s gratuity in salvation, Yoder argues that these reformers, teachers, preachers, and leaders all made a primary distinction between the work of God in one’s individual spiritual life and the consequent formation of “human goals or achievements” that must “be studiously kept in second place.”⁹ As a result, because each of them has been so formed by the Protestant understanding of individual guilt and subjective forgiveness, they missed what has only come to light due to more recent exegetical work, namely the biblical witness to the centrality of the church to God’s purposes, the raising up of a particular, reconciled, and reconciling “people.”

It is instructive to consider Yoder’s use of Wesley inasmuch as it reveals what may be a popular understanding of Wesley and the reform he pursued in the development of the Methodist movement. Specifically, it has been argued that Wesley and Methodism can, even must be understood primarily as examples of Yoder’s spiritualist type, that the focus of the Methodist story can be limited to a particular “heart-warming experience” on Aldersgate Street in 1738, and that from this basis directions for renewal in the contemporary church should be taken. I ask, Is Yoder’s view of Wesley correct?

Wesley as Proponent of Spiritualist and Theocratic Renewal

The answer to the above question is “Yes and No.” Indeed, while Wesley and the Methodist movement were deeply influenced by the traditions of Continental Pietism, it can be argued that both types of renewal, theocratic and spiritualist, play a part in the developing identity of the Methodist movement. To many, the latter category will seem to fit better than the former because the history of Methodism itself is popularly understood as the history of a *spiritual* renewal movement within an established church, ostensibly seeking a place for the nurture and exercise of “real Christianity” within the cold formalism of the larger church. Wesley was deeply influenced by the Continental reform movements of Moravianism and Pietism which themselves sought a form of intentional Christian life within the larger context of an established church. It was from these movements that Wesley borrowed the structures that developed into the Methodist movement, specifically from the Pietists the concept of

⁹Ibid.

“ecclesiola in ecclesia,” the “little church” within the large, established church.¹⁰

In this tradition, renewal is nurtured in the formation of small groupings, the “ecclesiola” which Howard Snyder describes as “a voluntary sub community providing the option of a more deeply earnest experience of the Christian faith for those believers who sense such a need.”¹¹ Remembering the drive in this form of renewal toward addressing the individual’s interior spiritual life, we take particular note of the emphasis in that definition on the central importance of “earnest experience.” Were we to stop here, we might indeed conclude that Wesleyan Methodism fits the category assigned in Yoder’s typology. However, two further considerations problematize this conclusion and lead us to the broader position that Wesley and the Methodist movement fit not only some descriptive elements of Yoder’s spiritualist type, but also some associated with its theoretical (and historical) opposite, the theocratic type.

The first consideration is Wesley’s fundamental understanding of the irreplaceable role of the community in the development of the individual’s spiritual life. Influenced by his anthropology and moral psychology that placed emphasis on the necessity of ongoing formation of the affections and tempers, Wesley emphasized the importance of the community that provides accountability in the shaping of the “inner” and “outer” life, both being necessary for a life that could be called “holy.” Thus, Wesley clearly believed that, while each must “work out their own salvation,” none could do so outside of the connection to a community of fellow travelers on the *via salutis*.¹² Location in the faith community was required.¹³

¹⁰Kenneth Collins has argued that “. . . Wesley’s ecclesiology is unintelligible apart from [Pietist and Moravian] contributions.” Kenneth J. Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley: Holy Love and the Shape of Grace* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007), 247. See also Randy Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley’s Practical Theology* (Nashville: Kingswood Books/Abingdon Press, 1994), 241, and, for an in depth study of these relationships, see Howard Snyder, *Pietism, Moravianism, and Methodism as Renewal Movements: A Comparative and Thematic Study* (Ph.D. diss., University of Notre Dame, 1983).

¹¹Snyder, 15.

¹²See Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, op cit., and Randy Maddox, “Wesley’s Prescription for Making Disciples of Jesus Christ: Insights for the 21st Century Church,” *Quarterly Review* 23, no. 1, 15-28.

¹³John Wesley, Sermon 24, “Upon Our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, IV” §I.1, in *Sermons I*, ed. Albert C. Outler. Vol. 1 of *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1976–), 533-534.

It still might be argued that, even in the community context that is the *ecclesiola*, the spiritualist type continues to be descriptively powerful, to the extent that we are still concerned with renewal of the spiritual (and moral) lives of individuals. Whether focused on the believer located alone in the monastic cell or in the context of the gathered congregation, does not the spiritualist type limit the work of renewal to the spiritual development of the *inner* life of the individual? We can assume that Wesley would answer that question in the negative because it leads us to the second consideration that broadens Wesley's vision of renewal, namely, his postmillennial eschatological perspective.

While such vision developed over the course of his life, Wesley did come to believe that the reign of God could not be located solely in the abstracted, transcendent era to come, but rather appeared in the present “through the work of the Spirit in and through believers.”¹⁴ As Randy Maddox points out, despite the premillennial influences that appear in earlier years of Wesley's writing, Wesley's later sermons reflect themes influential in Puritan circles, specifically the commitment to the postmillennial emphasis on the “silent increase” of God's reign within the created order.¹⁵ This emphasis led Wesley to broaden his concern, not only for the renewal that takes place in the life of the individual believer, but also, and consequently, in the social renewal these believers would inspire because of their faithful acts in the creation at large.

These eschatological emphases influenced Wesley's understanding of the church, his understanding of the proper location of historical meaning, and thus the focus for renewal. To his preachers, Wesley declared that the mission of the Methodist movement was “not to form any new sect; but to reform the nation, particularly the Church; and to spread scriptural holiness over the land.”¹⁶ More particularly, Wesley once argued that the church “is a body of [people] compacted together in order, first to save each his own soul, then to assist each other in working out their salvation, and afterwards, as far as in them lies, to save all [people] from present

¹⁴ Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 239.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 238-9. It is important to note that, while Yoder associates the “Pietist” movement with his spiritualist type, he associates “Puritans” with the theocratic type. See Yoder, 71, note 8.

¹⁶ See John Wesley, “Large Minutes,” Q. 3, vol. 8 of *The Works of the Rev. John Wesley, M.A.*, ed. Thomas Jackson, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), 299.

and future misery, to overturn the kingdom of Satan, and set up the kingdom of Christ.”¹⁷ Thus, it is clear that Wesley did not locate the center of historical meaning solely in the life of the holy individual, but rather allowed significant room for the consideration of the particular effect such holy individuals would have in relationship to the nation and the world. One precedes and leads to the other. As Maddox puts it, Wesley saw the church as “a means of social grace—a setting for nurturing Christian character and spawning agents of God’s gracious presence in the world.”¹⁸ Spiritual renewal led to national renewal.

Thus, most Wesley scholars argue that a fundamental way to understand Wesley’s ecclesiology is to focus on its “functional” aspect.¹⁹ As Wesley once wrote, “What is the end of all ecclesiastical order? Is it not to bring souls from the power of Satan to God; and to build them up in his fear and love? Order, then, is so far valuable, as it answers these ends; and if it answers them not, it is nothing worth.”²⁰ In other words, the church is understood to sustain spiritualist renewal in order to foster support for theocratic renewal, as holy believers who love God will inevitably turn to love their neighbor(s). As a result, it is too simple to say that Wesley is merely a Pietist spiritualist, just as it is too much to say that he is solely concerned with reform of the society or the nation, the realm of concern for Yoder’s theocrat. Wesley is concerned with both spiritual renewal and national renewal, the one hopefully leading to the other.

Yoder’s Problematizing of Spiritualist and Theocratic Renewal

While this might help us overcome the limitations of Yoder’s description of Wesley and his Methodist movement, it does not help us

¹⁷John Wesley, Sermon 52, “The Reformation of Manners,” §2, in *Sermons II*, ed. Albert C. Outler. Vol. 2 of *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1976-), 302.

¹⁸Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 135. Maddox locates a consideration of Wesley’s ecclesiology directly following a treatment of Wesley’s postmillennialism.

¹⁹Albert Outler writes, “Significantly, and at every point, Wesley defined the church as act, as mission, as the enterprise of saving and maturing souls in the Christian life.” Albert Outler, “Do Methodists Have a Doctrine of the Church?” in *The Wesleyan Theological Heritage: The Essays of Albert C. Outler*, Thomas C. Oden and Leicester R. Longden, eds. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1991), 219. Also see Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 241, and Collins, 240.

²⁰John Wesley, Letter to “John Smith” (June 25, 1746), § 10, *Letters II*, ed. Frank Baker, vol. 26 of *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1976-), 206.

overcome the limitations Yoder identifies at work in both forms of renewal. He argues that each of these forms of renewal resist the other to the extent that they represent centers of historical meaning that can be plotted on opposite ends of a continuum, one end representing the inner life of the individual, and the other the society as a whole. Thus, to seek to bring spiritualist and theocratic positions into one another's orbit can only result (and has resulted) in confusions in defining the identity and mission of the church. This fundamental incompatibility leads to the oscillations between these polarities which, Yoder argues, describes much of the conversation in the modern ecumenical movement.

This, however, has not stopped efforts to bridge these differences. In fact, we can draw on Yoder's reference to the fact that, when one focuses on the issue of “ethics” or “holy living” from both perspectives, spiritualism and theocracy “are more alike than different, for the concentration on personal authenticity and on social control is not contradictory but complimentary.”²¹ This is because the converted individual who embodies the virtues of humility and servitude is most properly equipped for faithful and effective service in the roles given in the so-called secular state. Consequently, these two positions actually need one another. Spiritualists are drawn out of their sequestered settlement in the inward reaches of the individual soul and into the vital work of the “real world” to which they bring the fruit of a spiritual life and the zeal that only the truly converted can display.

Even so, given the fundamental difference in the location of historical meaning of these two types, Yoder argues that, while the Spiritualist may recognize the importance of the social action, this does not necessarily require the relocation of historical meaning from its placement in the spiritual renewal of each individual believer. The same issue applies when we begin from the other side of the spectrum. So, although the theocrat might understand the necessity of radical commitment or even “conversion” for the sustaining of agents in their work for social change, it remains the case that the location of historical meaning resides in the belief that “what ultimately matters in God's purpose is the building of better society.”²² What Yoder leads us to see is the futility of being stuck in endless and hopeless argument over which pole on the spectrum of

²¹Yoder, 79.

²²Ibid., 91.

renewal represents the greater faithfulness. The result, he suggests, is an oscillation between poles that should seem familiar to students of ecclesiastical history and to those engaged in contemporary ecumenical and intra-denominational arguments between those who prefer “evangelism” or “social justice.”²³

This leads Yoder to a third option, the location God has already chosen to carry historical meaning, namely, “a people in the world.” He says, “I shall claim that the church is called to move beyond the oscillation between the theocratic and the spiritualist patterns, not to a compromise between the two or to a synthesis claiming like Hegel to ‘assume’ them both, but to what is genuinely a third option,”²⁴ the Believer’s Church.

Considering Wesley’s postmillennial concern for renewal of holiness in the spirit and in the nation, we are led to ask if Wesley and early Methodism reflect, to some extent, threads of both what we are calling spiritualist and theocratic traditions of renewal. Does this mean that Methodism was, and is, consigned to the endless oscillation between types of renewal and their differing locations of historical meaning? Is Methodism located on shaky ecclesiological ground that ignores the central influence of Yoder’s third type? We now turn to a consideration of Wesley and the early Methodist movement to show that, while Methodism was a movement that sought renewal of the “Spirit” and the “Nation,” it only did so as a “People in the World.”

Wesley, the *General Rules*, and the Development of Methodist Peoplehood

Earlier we saw how some descriptions of Wesleyan Methodism might tend to identify the early movement as an example of the spiritualist type (as Yoder does), and also why we must broaden our appraisal to also see the presence of its opposite, the theocratic (Puritan) type. Now, we investigate the possibility that while both streams of tradition are present in Wesley and early Methodism, neither of them can stand, on their own or as woven together, as proper descriptions of the entirety of Methodist identity and mission. In fact, both identifications mislead us when they suggest that Methodism can be understood as either a movement focused on “spirituality” or “social responsibility” or some combination of the two.

²³Ibid., 90-1.

²⁴Ibid., 72-3.

Greg Jones and Michael Cartwright suggested that “one of the primary factors enabling the ‘people *called* Methodist’ to become the ‘*people called* Methodist’ in early Methodism was the practice of the *General Rules* through the class meetings and gatherings of the societies.”²⁵ Taking their lead, I hope to show how the *General Rules* accomplished this by reflecting three areas where Wesley placed particular emphasis when considering the ecclesiological shape of the early Methodist movement: (1) on the *Visibility* of the embodied, gathered community, (2) on the *Practices* that shape the inner life of the Methodist Societies, and (3) on the *Witness* this community offers to those outside in the “world.”

1. Visibility of the Embodied Community. First, the Rules describe the common life of a *visible* people. Wesley’s account of the *General Rules* begins not with any abstracted vision of what a community *might* be, but rather he begins with a historical account: “. . . eight or ten persons came to me in London who appeared to be deeply convinced of sin, and earnestly groaning for redemption. . . . I appointed a day when they might all come together, which from thenceforward they did every week. . . . This was the rise of the United Society. . . .”²⁶

Methodism cannot be understood apart from the historical reality of a gathered community of people seeking the holiness that the *General Rules* were developed to create and nurture. Behind this is Wesley’s understanding not only of the visibility of the church but also his commitment to the irreducible identity of Christianity as a “social religion” that “cannot subsist at all without society, without living and conversing with other [people].”²⁷ This communal emphasis problematizes any attempt to render Wesley or early Methodism as pure examples of Yoder’s spiritualist type. While there is a focus on the formation of holiness in the life of each believer, and while each is encouraged to “work out your own salvation,” there is no question that this cannot be an individualistic endeavor. Embodiment in community is required.

²⁵L. Gregory Jones and Michael G. Cartwright, “Vital Congregations: Toward a Wesleyan Vision for the United Methodist Church’s Identity and Mission,” in *The Mission of the Church in Methodist Perspective*, Alan G. Padgett, ed. (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1992), 96, note.22.

²⁶Wesley, “General Rules,” §1, §2, 9:69.

²⁷ Wesley, “Sermon on the Mount, IV,” §I.1, 1:533-534.

Of course, one reason this People called Methodist was visible was due to the contrast it created against the backdrop of the lack of visible Christian belief and practice in the larger established church. In some sense, this is why most of Wesley's writing about ecclesiology tended to be in the form of response to critics who claimed that in Methodism Wesley intended a separation from the Church of England.

2. Practices that Shape the Inner Life. The visibility of the people lay in the work of and ways of life that defined this community as a particular "People called Methodist." We see Wesley's commitment to the necessity of such practices in the visible, gathered community of faith in his well-known response to a critic:

If it be said, "But there are some true Christians in the parish, and you destroy the Christian fellowship between these and them," I answer: That which never existed cannot be destroyed. But the fellowship you speak of never existed. Therefore it cannot be destroyed. Which of those true Christians had any such fellowship with these? Who watched over them in love? Who marked their growth in grace? Who advised and exhorted them from time to time? Who prayed with them and for them as they had need? This, and this alone, is Christian fellowship. . . . The real truth is just the reverse of this: we introduce Christian fellowship where it was utterly destroyed. And the fruits of it have been peace, joy, love, and zeal for every good word and work.²⁸

Against invisibility, disembodiment, and the inconsequential ties that render the church a gathering of people no stronger than "a mere rope of sand," Wesley argues for the necessity of common discipline and accountability in an actual gathering of people for there to be a community present that can bear the name "Christian." Once again, in defending his movement, we hear Wesley arguing for a robust vision of a particular People who are made visible as they share in a particular form of life together.²⁹

²⁸Wesley, "A Plain Account of the People Called Methodist," §I.11, *Works*, 9:258-9.

²⁹See Wesley's sermon, "On Schism," also a sermon from the "Late Wesley," where Wesley makes a clear judgment about the relationship of "nominal" Christians to the Church. Considering the issue of schism and division in the body of the Church, Wesley writes, "This indeed is not of so much consequence

This emphasis continues in the “Late Wesley.” Even in Wesley’s nearly “last word” on ecclesiology, the previously considered sermon “Of the Church,” Wesley turns from encouraging a wide berth for the understanding of the church’s catholicity and toward a clear argument for understanding the holiness of the church, called to “walk worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called.”³⁰ Such walking is “to think, speak, and act, in every instance in a manner worthy of our Christian calling.”³¹ This issues into discussion about the spiritual formation necessary that will shape lives capable of living in such a manner, and concludes with a clear call for the necessity of such formation taking place within the context of the community that lives and practices this life together.

This should affect the way we read the *General Rules* and conceive of their function and purpose in the Methodist movement. It is clear enough that the Rules are structured in such a way as to encourage the formation of holiness in the classes and societies to which they gave shape and guidance. Under each of the three rules, Wesley is able to spell out in clear terms the particular adhesions and renunciations that constitute evidence of the “desire of salvation” and that reflect “walking worthily.” Because the requirements to join a class meeting in early Methodism were so minimal—only the desire for salvation was necessary—the *General Rules* supplied the “basics for Christian living in the world with whatever ‘degree of faith’ one had been graced.”³²

to you who are only a *nominal* Christian. For you are not now vitally united to any of the members of Christ. Though you are called a Christian you are not really a member of any Christian church.” John Wesley, Sermon 75, “On Schism,” §II.18 in *Sermons III*, ed. Albert C. Outler. Vol. 3 of *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1976-), 68 (italicized emphasis original, underlined emphasis is mine). Can we extrapolate from here that to be part of the church for Wesley, one must participate in the vital community produced by the fusion of practices and structures detailed in the *General Rules*?

³⁰Wesley, “Of the Church,” §II.20, *Works*, 3:53.

³¹*Ibid.*

³²David Lowes Watson, “Class Leaders and Class Meetings: Recovering a Methodist Tradition for a Changing Church,” *Doctrines and Discipline, United Methodism and American Culture*, vol. 3., Dennis M. Campbell, William B. Lawrence, Russell E. Richey, eds. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999), 245-264, and David Lowes Watson, “Aldersgate Street and the *General Rules*: The Form and Power of Methodist Discipleship,” *Aldersgate Reconsidered*, Randy Maddox, ed. (Nashville: Kingswood Books/Abingdon Press, 1990), 33-47.

The Rules, therefore, can be seen to have fulfilled a catechetical function, introducing the ways of discipleship, the specific patterns of the way of a Christian in the world. From these very social, communal practices of piety and mercy, the disciple “confidently expected the blessings of God’s grace, first to bring [her] the assurance of faith, and then to build [her] up as [an] obedient [disciple].”³³ Thus, resisting any tendency in the contemporary church to understand Methodist faith as solely an experience of the inward assurance of saving faith that precedes the engagement with the life and practices of the community, Lowes Watson argues strongly for the necessary engagement with the very particular practices among People called Methodist as integral to salvation. Here we must remember Yoder’s point that it is from the perspective of this particular community that both “personal conversion (whereby individuals are called into this meaning) and missionary instrumentalities are derived.”³⁴ Drawing from the first half of that sentence, we can see that the spiritual renewal of the individual is defined here by the central importance of the visible community and its shared practices, without which evangelism and conversion become unintelligible.

3. Witness Offered by the Community. The fact that “missionary instrumentalities” are also shaped by their primary location inside the community of faith guides us to the consideration of Wesley’s *third* emphasis. The visible and practicing People called Methodist are sent in mission and witness to the world. Wesley closes his sermon “Of the Church” with encouragement directed to this holy People in language that displays both the necessary visibility of the church as well as a vision of the church in eschatological terms that serve as a particular witness to the world. “In the meantime,” Wesley writes, between now and the coming of the Kingdom:

. . . let all those who are real members of the church see that they walk holy and unblameable in all things. . . . Show [men/the world] your faith by your works. Let them see by the whole tenor of your conversation that your hope is all laid up above! Let all your words and actions evidence the spirit whereby you are animated! Above all things, let your love

³³Lowes Watson, “Aldersgate Street”, 45-46.

³⁴Yoder, 74.

abound. Let it extend to every child of man; let it overflow to every child of God. By this let all men know whose disciples ye are, because you love one another.³⁵

Wesley makes a distinction here between the church and the “men of the world” and the “lover(s) of the world” who are guided by different commitments and who are “dead to God.” The “real members of the church” are called to a different way, not just in belief, but in “words and actions,” embodied and visible, on display to the world.³⁶

Such words and actions find clear and detailed expression in the *General Rules* where Wesley describes very specific spiritual, bodily, economic, and community practices that are required of Methodists. However, rather than just reading them as the encouragements to individuals continuing in the Society, we must note how these also reflect Wesley’s understanding of the relationship of church and world, and how the adherence to the injunction to do no harm and to do “good of every possible sort and as far as is possible to all men” has a cost for those within this community of witness. To live in this way, Wesley suggests, means that Methodists must also seek to do good. . . .

by running with patience the race that is set before them; “denying themselves, and taking up their cross daily”; submitting to bear the reproach of Christ, to be as the filth and off-couring of the world; and looking that men should “say all manner of evil of them falsely, for their Lord’s sake.”³⁷

The holiness of the church is discovered in the holiness of its members, and together, in the practices and ways of their common holy lives renders the church visible in the world, perhaps to be rejected by the world, but sent to witness to that world all the same. As Wesley put it,

We look upon the Methodists (so called) in general, not as any particular party; (this would exceedingly obstruct the grand design, for which we conceive God has raised them up), but as

³⁵Wesley, “Of the Church,” § III.30, *Works*, 3:56-57. See also Wesley’s sermon “Upon our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, IV,” particularly §II.2 and ff, where we have seen that Wesley makes clear that Christianity requires community, but also where he goes on to suggest that, when “real” among believers, it cannot be hidden from the watching world.

³⁶Wesley, “Of the Church,” §III.28, 29, *Works*, 3:56.

³⁷Wesley, “General Rules,” §5, *Works*, 9:72.

living witnesses, in and to every party, of that Christianity which we preach; which is hereby demonstrated to be a real thing, and visibly held out to all the world.³⁸

In these three emphases, particularly reflected in the *General Rules*, Wesley named the conditions necessary to create and sustain a particular “people,” defined by its visibility, formed and sustained by its practices, and sent to the world as a witness to God’s creating and reconciling work. When we keep in mind this peoplehood that Wesley encouraged and formed in his early Methodist movement through the *General Rules*, we are positioned to argue further that we see connections to Yoder’s third type, identified as the location of historical meaning and renewal discovered in the Believer’s Church tradition. Philip Meadows suggests:

This Anabaptist thinking [regarding the church as a social reality] tempts me to take liberty with the meaning of early Methodist “societies.” *Each society, bound by a common rule and a set of common practices could easily be thought of as a “social reality” in its own right.* Their public, cultural and political life was that of striving after scriptural holiness. The “General Rule” (of doing no harm, doing all the good they can, and attending to the means of grace) had the effect of holding them to a form of Kingdom living that resisted selfish ambition and accumulation in favour of good stewardship. . . . And he guides them in the use of money to earn all they can (i.e., without injury to self or neighbour), save all they can (i.e., not wasting what they have earned), and give all they can (i.e., of that which exceeds their own basic needs). Wesley aims to describe a way of life literally consistent with the language of the Ten Commandments and the teaching of Jesus found in the Sermon on the Mount (a text much used by Anabaptists). I am again indebted to the Anabaptists for helping me see how a Christian community that embodies the gospel does not happen by accident, but requires an intentional commitment to a form of life capable of resisting the dominant social realities of the world.³⁹

³⁸Wesley, “Reasons Against a Separation from the Church of England” (1758) §III.1, *Works*, 9:337.

³⁹Philip R Meadows, “Anabaptist Leanings of a ‘Kinda’ Methodist” on the website of the Anabaptist Network, March 2006; see <http://www.anabaptistnetwork.com/node/354>, accessed 4/13/10, emphasis added.

I suggest that making this connection between the Societies created and guided by the *General Rules* and their identification as ecclesial entities in their own right might not be taking “liberty” with the societies that comprised the early Methodist movement.

Given Wesley’s own commitments to a Methodist peoplehood defined by its visibility, holy practices, and witness to the world, Meadows’ connection may be more than an interesting idea, but reflective of Wesley’s manifestation of the influence from the Believer’s Church tradition. Consequently, the societies in the early Methodist movement should each be understood as a “People in the World,” each, as Meadows suggests, a social reality in its own right.⁴⁰ To fully understand the meaning of the Methodist renewal, then, we must take Yoder’s typology very seriously, and admit that beyond spiritualist or theocratic interests, Wesleyan Methodism began as a movement to develop a visible, practicing, and witnessing holy people called Methodists. If this is the case, then the understanding of early Methodism as a movement for spiritualist or theocratic renewal faces challenge, as both types of renewal must now be first located in and shaped by the primary identity of the Methodist “peoplehood.”

I believe this is what Wesley envisioned when he offered up the *General Rules*—not only a renewal movement within the larger church, but a community of holy people who are a visible community, practicing discipleship in the means of grace, and witnessing to the world. Thus, against interpretations of Wesleyan Methodism as a purely spiritualist or pietistic movement, and also against interpretations that place its sole focus on the reform of the nation, we must conclude that Wesley’s own hopes for renewal in the church and the nation could not be separated from their location within the visible, disciplined, and witnessing *people* called Methodist.

Implications for Contemporary (United Methodist) Ecclesiological Identity, Renewal, and Mission

If it is the case that such a sense of peoplehood informed early Methodism, then I suggest the necessary inclusion of the same as a vital element in contemporary conversations concerning Methodist ecclesial identity, mission, and practice. Reflection on the “people” called Methodist can provide contemporary Methodism with historical memory that has the potential to interrogate current assumptions and beliefs regarding

⁴⁰Ibid.

the nature of the church, its mission, and the potential sources for its renewal.⁴¹ More specifically, I further encourage the renewal of focus placed on *The General Rules*, as both United Methodist doctrine and as a key source to the development of a Methodist sense of peoplehood. This leads me to suggest the connection of the *General Rules* to the practical theological task of seeking the development of local expressions with concern for both traditional consistency and practical wisdom.⁴² I suggest what I think are three potential “leanings” or “directions” for such conversations.

First, these reflections draw focus to the congregation. Rather than seeking to balance ministries of spiritual renewal and evangelism with ministries of mission and social witness, a focus on the peoplehood formed and sustained in the *Rules* draws focus to the nature of the congregation itself. In that context, a key element of practical, pastoral theological leadership seeking the contemporary contextualization of the *General Rules* will be to facilitate questions like: “How do we ourselves, in our life together, reflect or fall short of the ‘new social wholeness’ that God seeks to create?”⁴³ “What are the practices of holy living and the means of grace among us today, and which have we forgotten over time?” And, “How is our life together as a people a witness to the world, a ‘sign, sacrament, and herald of God’s presence and God’s reign’?”⁴⁴ Small steps like these may help to broaden the ecclesial imagination, to re-vision the

⁴¹Rowan Williams is helpful on this point when he suggests that “good historical writing . . . is writing that constructs that sense of who we are by a real engagement with the strangeness of the past . . .” so that “the end product is a sense who we now are that is subtle enough to encompass the things we don’t fully understand.” See Rowan Williams, *Why Study the Past?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 23-4.

⁴²I take Bishop Rueben Job’s recent effort as a step into this conversation, (see Rueben P. Job, *Three Simple Rules: A Wesleyan Way of Living*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007) but despite his generous read of the *Rules*, there is room for much more to be done here.

⁴³Yoder, 74.

⁴⁴Phil Kenneson, “Visible Grace: The Church as God’s Embodied Presence,” in *Grace Upon Grace: Essays in Honor of Thomas A. Langford*, Robert K. Johnston, L. Gregory Jones, Jonathan R. Wilson, eds. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999), 169-179. Kenneson suggests that the church is the “embodied presence” of “visible grace” and as such, the church is sent to the world as the “sign, sacrament, and herald of God’s presence and God’s reign.”

congregation as a particular “people” in the world, and to reclaim the formative importance of the *General Rules*.

Second, I suggest that these emphases also draw us to look to broader conversations for potential overlap and mutual enrichment. Other signs of renewal appear in contemporary movements that have sought to reclaim the role of the common rule within disciplined communities. For example, we have much to learn from the ongoing conversations in the development of the “new monasticism” within communities that emulate the fusion of spiritual and social concern from within a distinct, rule-based community.⁴⁵ A recently released book by Elaine Heath and Scott Kisker, *Longing for Spring: A New Vision for Wesleyan Community*, may make these connections more explicitly.⁴⁶

These reflections push toward a third context for more conversation, which is the increased interest in new congregational development or “church planting.” The United Methodist Church seeks in one of its current “Vision Pathways” to start new congregations. However, in light of such missional commitments, we must ask what theological and ecclesiological imagination shapes such work? When we seek to plant new churches, are the visions for these communities of faith influenced by the vision of a people created and nurtured by the communal practice of the *General Rules*? Here again, a more focused reflection on Methodist peoplehood raises questions around the shape of new ecclesial community. Are such communities formed to resemble the mega-church or the monastery?

Conclusion

In his recent book *Evangelism After Christendom*, Bryan Stone argues for the necessity of “a visible people” as a primary condition for the possibility of Christian evangelism. However, because the church has lost much of this sense of its own identity and mission in the world, Stone rightly suggests that this “neglect of Peoplehood may well be the central challenge facing Christian evangelism.”⁴⁷ I want to extend this claim to

⁴⁵See *School(s) for Conversion: 12 Marks of a New Monasticism*. The Rutba House, ed. (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2005).

⁴⁶See Elaine Heath and Scott Kisker, *Longing for Spring: A New Vision for Wesleyan Community* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2010).

⁴⁷Bryan Stone, *Evangelism After Christendom: The Theology and Practice of Christian Witness* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2007), 194-5.

suggest that such a loss of Peoplehood is a challenge not just to evangelism, but to ecclesial identity and mission itself. Such a challenge will not be met solely through renewed commitments to either individual spiritual renewal or a robust social witness. Instead, it would be salutary to remember the character of the visible, practicing, witnessing community of disciples, shaped by the *General Rules*, and known as the *People* called Methodist.

IMAGES OF PERFECTION IN CHARLES WESLEY'S SHORT HYMNS

by
Patrick Eby

In 1762 Charles Wesley published a collection of poetry with his reflections on Scripture.¹ His stated purpose was both to prove and to guard the doctrine of Christian perfection. He wished to guard this doctrine against both enthusiasts and antinomians, “who by not living up to their profession . . . ‘cause the truth to be evil spoken of.’”² Charles noted the difficulty of this task. He felt he must “check the self-confident without discouraging the self-diffident.”³ Because of the diversity of his opponents—one denying Christian perfection and another claiming they had already attained Christian perfection, Charles noted that part of his task was to rightly “divide the word of Truth.”⁴

For Charles this meant holding in tension things others might call contradictory. For instance, he said, “I declare with St. Paul, ‘A man is

¹Charles worked on this collection during an extended illness that stretched over most of 1760 and 1761 and registered it for copyright at Stationers Hall on August 23, 1762. See, Charles Wesley, *Short Hymns on Select Passages of the Holy Scriptures*. 2 vols., with an editorial introduction by Randy Maddox (Bristol: Farley, 1762). http://www.divinity.duke.edu/wesleyan/texts/cw_published_verse.html. Hereafter *SHSPS* (1762).

²*Ibid.*, Preface: [i-ii].

³*Ibid.*, Preface: [ii-iii]. “Wanting in self-confidence; distrustful of oneself; not confident in disposition; timid, shy, modest, bashful” (*Oxford English Dictionary*, 2d ed., s.v. “diffident.”)

⁴*Ibid.*, Preface: [ii].

justified by faith, and not by works'; and with St. James, 'A man is justified by works, and not by faith only.'⁵ Because Charles wrote in this seemingly contradictory style, it is easy to misrepresent his teachings. This article will first look at Charles' approach to Scripture, and then show how Charles used the Scripture and poetry to check the "self-confident" and impatient enthusiasts in London.

Charles Wesley's Approach to the Scripture

It is impossible to know let alone list all the people and books which influenced Charles Wesley's approach to the Scripture, but it is worth noting the possible influence of three people he mentioned in the preface of *Short Hymns on Select Passages of the Holy Scriptures* (1762): Matthew Henry,⁶ Robert Gell, and John Albert Bengel.⁷ Charles Wesley's reliance on Henry, Bengel, and Gell may have helped to shape both his approach to and reflections on the Scripture.

Bengel endorsed Luther's method of study, which consisted of prayer, meditation, and spiritual attack. Luther used this triad to guard scriptural interpretation from certain perceived dangers.⁸ First, Luther taught that a theologian should not be concerned only with understanding the text, but more importantly a theologian should strive to be understood by the text. Luther's definition of a theologian was "a person who is interpreted by Holy Scripture, who lets himself or herself be interpreted by it

⁵Ibid., Preface: [ii]. Cf. Galatians 2:16 and James 2:24.

⁶Matthew Henry's commentary was treasured for its practical piety and good sense. Henry was a dissenter who preached regularly both in his pulpit and in the churches nearby (David L. Wykes, "Henry, Matthew" in H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Howard Harrison eds., *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography: In Association with the British Academy: From the Earliest Times to the Year 2000* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004]).

⁷See Matthew Henry (1662–1714), *An Exposition of the Old and New Testament*, 3 vols. (London: Stratford, 1706–10); Robert Gell (1595–1665), *An Essay towards the Amendment of the English Translation of the Bible; or, A proof, by many instances, that the last translation of the Bible into English may be improved. The first part on the Pentateuch, or five books of Moses* (London: R. Norton, 1659); and Johann Albrecht Bengel (1687–1752), *Gnomon Novi Testamenti: in quo ex nativa verborum vi simplicitas, profunditas, concinnitas, salubritas sensuum coelestium indicatur* (Tübingen: H. Philip Schram, 1742).

⁸I have relied on Oswald Bayer's *Theology the Lutheran Way* for this summary. Oswald Bayer, *Theology the Lutheran Way*, trans. Jeffery G. Silcock and Mark C. Mattes (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2007).

and who, having been interpreted by it, interprets it for other troubled and afflicted people.”⁹ The goal was not merely to understand the text historically or theologically, but to apply the text to one’s personal life. Luther taught that a person must pray in order to understand and be understood by the Scripture, because the message of eternal life could only be understood with the help of the Holy Spirit.¹⁰ Luther also taught that prayer was an antidote for speculative theology. In all his bluntness he wrote, “all speculative theologians who deal only with ideas and have learned everything from books and nothing from experience, and who want to judge divine things on the basis of philosophy and human reason, are of the devil.”¹¹

The second part of the triad—meditation—included both studying the text in order to apply it and listening for the voice of the Holy Spirit. For Luther the voice of the Holy Spirit would always agree with the Scripture. He encouraged going into the text, but not beyond it. However, using this method, Luther applied Scripture to his personal antagonists—the arrogant priests or tyrants.¹² The final stage for Luther was spiritual attack or experience. It was through suffering and experience that the Word was fully understood. Luther’s emphasis on spiritual attacks, tests, trials, and experience included an understanding of time, which was distinctively “apocalyptic.” Bengal also seemed to value the “apocalyptic” nature of the Scripture; he even set a date for the beginning of the Millennium. One of the perfectionists Charles dealt with in 1762, George Bell (d. 1807), also predicted a date for the return of Christ.¹³ Like Luther, both John and Charles Wesley emphasized the importance of experience and rejected speculative theology; Charles also agreed with Luther’s emphasis on suffering.

Charles Wesley also mentioned Robert Gell in the preface—he was a tutor of Henry More.¹⁴ Charles’s reliance on Gell was probably related to his understanding of holiness. Gell had a reputation for teaching “perfectionism.” He argued that the scope of pure religion “is to render the *man*

⁹Ibid., 36.

¹⁰Ibid., 43.

¹¹Ibid., 46.

¹²Ibid., 60.

¹³Ibid., 62.

¹⁴Henry More (1614-1687) was one of the Cambridge Platonists who influenced early Methodism.

like and to his *God*.” He also asked people to make it their “resolution, to walk in the *name, nature, or being* of the Lord our God for ever and ever; to be *holy* as he is *holy, pure* as he is *pure, merciful* as he is *merciful, perfect* as our heavenly Father is *perfect*.”¹⁵ Gell’s view of Scripture may also have influenced Charles. Gell argued for both a literal and a mystical understanding of the text: “The *holy Word* is not onely [sic] *literally* to be understood; but also *mystically*; yea, even the most *literal text*, according to the judgment of the best learned men, may, beside the *Letter*, have also a *spiritual meaning*.”¹⁶ Charles and the three commentators he mentioned all approached the Scripture both rationally and spiritually. To understand the Scripture took time and hard work, but also required reliance upon the Holy Spirit. The goal of studying the Scripture was not to develop a speculative theology; instead the goal was to create a practical theology and to apply the text to one’s own life. This approach allowed Charles to use the Scripture in ways that might test modern sensibilities, especially in the way he went beyond a historical-critical reading of the text.

Charles dealt with a variety of subjects in *SHSPS* (1762), including several poems that dealt with his understanding of the Scripture. Sometimes he focused on “Trusting in the literal word.”

1285. “They shall dwell in the land that I have given unto Jacob, &c.”—[Ezek.] xxxvii. 25.

When the house of Jacob’s sons
 Their Canaan repossess,
 Shall not all thy chosen ones
 Abide in perfect peace?
 Trusting in the literal word,
 We look for Christ on earth again:
 Come, our everlasting Lord,
 With all thy saints to reign.¹⁷

Even though Charles referred to trusting in the literal word in this poem, he used this passage to encourage people to look for the return of Christ. This is not a literal use of the passage. The passage is about Jacob’s sons dwelling in the land. Charles used this passage either as a type for the

¹⁵Gell, *Essay*, Preface, [2].

¹⁶*Ibid.*, [4-5].

¹⁷*SHSPS* (1762), 2:56.

return of Christ, or at the very least as a reminder that as the Israelites had possessed the land, Christ would one day return.

There were other times when Charles referred to more than just the literal word in his poems. He argued that only the Holy Spirit could reveal the deeper sense of the text. Two poems illustrate the importance of relying on the Spirit. The first argues that even the most learned person could not understand the saving sense of Scripture without the help of the Spirit, an emphasis of Luther.

1008. "Read this; I cannot for it is sealed."—[Isa.] xxix. 11.

Proud learning boasts its skill in vain
The sacred oracles t' explain,
It may the literal surface shew,
But not the precious mine below;
The saving sense remains conceal'd,
'Till by the Spirit of faith reveal'd,
The book is still unread, unknown,
And open'd by the Lamb alone.¹⁸

In a second poem stressing the work of the Spirit, Charles noted that the literal sense, even if heard or read ten thousand times, was still unable to dispense saving power. He once again insisted that to understand Scripture required the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

429. "It is the spirit that quickneth, the flesh profiteth nothing."—[John] vi. 63.

- 1 Thy word in the bare literal sense,
Tho' heard ten thousand times, and read,
Can never of itself dispense
The saving power which wakes the dead:
The meaning spiritual and true
The learn'd expositor may give,
But cannot give the virtue too,
Or bid his own dead spirit live.
- 2 But breathing in the sacred leaves
If on the soul thy Spirit move,
The re-begotten soul receives
The quickning power of faith and love;

¹⁸Ibid., 1:324.

Transmitted thro' the gospel-word
Whene'er the Holy Ghost is given,
The sinner hears, and feels restor'd
The life of holiness and heaven.¹⁹

For Charles, the goal of hearing the Scriptures through the witness of the Spirit was more than just a way to heaven; it involved being restored to a “life of holiness.” How Charles defined this life must be understood carefully.

Charles's Definition of Perfection

In the preface of *SHSPS* (1762), Charles Wesley mentioned two groups whose actions and theology were a threat to the doctrine of perfection, the enthusiasts and the antinomians. This article will focus on his concern with the enthusiasts who during the early 1760s were the perfectionist lay preachers in London, including George Bell and Thomas Maxfield (d. 1784). Charles used poetic reflections on the Scripture to respond to the perfectionist threat. These reflections both promoted and defended his theology of perfection, and gave him an opportunity to clarify his personal views on the subject.

Charles primarily promoted two qualities of perfection in the midst of this struggle—humility and patience. He did not abandon the possibility of being perfect in this life, but he did question those who were claiming perfection. One antidote to these claims seems to be a new emphasis on the corporate nature of perfection.

The problem Charles had with the perfectionists in London was that they did not exhibit what he considered a “godly character.” According to Charles, they were ambitious, impatient, schismatic, deceived, and worst of all in Charles's thought, they were proud. In other words, they lacked two of the main virtues Charles associated with perfection—humility and patience.

Charles saw humility as one of the most important Christian virtues. Humility was a theme he focused on throughout his life. His understanding of humility was similar to that stated in Henry Scougal's *The Life of God in the Soul of Man*, a book Charles had both read and recommended while still at Oxford. The primary focus of this book was how to be restored in the image of God. There are five main virtues of the divine

¹⁹Ibid., 2:249.

life. "The root of the Divine Life is Faith, the chief branches are Love to God, Charity to Man, Purity, and Humility. . . ." ²⁰ Scougal defined humility as

a deep sense of our own meanness, with a hearty and affectionate acknowledgement of our owing all that we are to the Divine Bounty, which is always accompanied with a profound submission to the Will of God, and great deadness towards the glory of the world, and the applause of men. ²¹

Scougal modeled his understanding of humility on the life of Jesus. He noted the "infinite condescension of the Eternal Son of God," and his "lowly and humble deportment while he was in the World." ²² His humility was demonstrated in his ascribing "the honour of all to his Father, telling them, *That of himself he was able to do nothing.*" ²³ This God-reliant and self-effacing attitude not only guided Charles's actions, but also formed the standard by which he would judge the actions and intentions of others.

Instead of exhibiting humility, Charles thought the perfectionists were acting pridefully. They displayed their pride through ambition and self-promotion. Charles' criticism in *SHSPS* (1762) was not limited to the perfectionists; he also attacked his brother John and other lay preachers who were not a part of the perfectionist controversy in London. John's self-promotion and ambition were leading to what Charles saw as an inevitable split from the Church of England. Charles believed that the reason John was engaged in "the work" was to immortalize his name, and he compared John to the "great Babylon."

1298. "Is not this great Babylon that I have built?"—[Dan.]
iv. 30.

1 And dost thou not thyself suspect,
Vain founder of the rising sect,
Or thine own language see?
"Is not this Babylon the great,
'Stablish'd in her sublime estate,
Built up to heaven—by me!"

²⁰Henry Scougal, *The Life of God in the Soul of Man*, 15.

²¹*Ibid.*, 17.

²²*Ibid.*, 25.

²³*Ibid.*, 26.

2 The plan, and finish'd discipline,
Th' exact economy is mine,
The whole, internal frame:
These mon'uments of my toil and thought
Now to perfection's summit brought
Immortalize my name.²⁴

According to Charles, pride not only encouraged John to establish an immortal name for himself, it also drove the “preaching witnesses” to “usurp the priestly character.”²⁵ Although the perfectionists’ spiritual problem was pride, the practical problem was that their actions were leading to a separation from the Church of England. The reason they felt comfortable withdrawing from the Church of England was because they claimed their authority was directly from God. Charles used several Old Testament stories to confront them. He used the story of Eldad and Medad in Numbers 11:27 to criticize those who would hold separate meetings and prophesy with only the authorization of God. He characterized them as “irregularly bold.”²⁶

Charles also compared the lay preachers’ desire to be priests to the admonition to Uzziah not to usurp the role of the priests. To be lawful priests, the lay preachers thought they only needed God’s approval, not the approval of the Church. If asked what order of priests they were, Charles said they were “a new Melchizedeck!” He also said they bore the same marks as Uzziah, but their leprosy was “The loathsom leprosy of pride.”²⁷ Charles argued their withdrawal from the Church of England was a result of a partial love, or love that had grown cold, not a perfect love:

2 If my own party I approve,
And cleave to my own sect,
Holding the few with partial love,
The many I reject;

²⁴*SHSPS* (1762), 2:60-61.

²⁵*ibid.*, 1:76.

²⁶*ibid.*, 1.67. In this passage Joshua wanted Moses to forbid Eldad and Medad from prophesying. Moses did not forbid them from sharing, instead he asked Joshua, “Enviest thou for my sake? would God that all the LORD’S people were prophets, and that the LORD would put his spirit upon them!” (Numbers 11:29). Charles clearly has misused this passage to support his point of view.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 1:207.

My nature's narrowness I feel,
Myself I blindly seek,
And still a slave in Babel dwell,
A shackled schismatick.²⁸

Pride also led to self-deception, leading them to mistake their weakness for perfection. Charles wrote:

1 Weakest, when I strongest seem,
Fall'n alas I am thro' pride,
Sinless then myself I dream,
Pure, and wholly sanctified,
Fold my arms, and take my ease,
Safe in perfect holiness.²⁹

John allowed that this may be the case, that some may have mistaken their initial victories as having become perfect, but John would not go as far as Charles in condemning those lay preachers who seemed to be full of pride. John rejected Charles's portrayal of these lay preachers and their followers as "false saints, false-witnesses for God!"³⁰

Charles was also concerned with the way the perfectionists were proclaiming their perfection. According to Charles the role of the Christian is not self-reflection or a desire to determine whether or not they had received the goodness of perfection; instead they were to be "Unconscious of the grace bestow'd / Simply resign'd, and lost in God."³¹ This raised a practical question—how should they share what they sensed God was doing in their lives?

Charles definitely believed that people should share what God had done in their lives, and, surprisingly, one of the things that kept people from sharing was their pride.

Pride may frown, and prudence chide,
Bid us keep our faith unknown;

²⁸Ibid., 2:184.

²⁹Ibid., 1:206. John Wesley underlined "Sinless" and "myself" in line 3 and "wholly sanctified" in line 4 of this stanza in his personal copy, commenting in the margin, "Perhaps so."

³⁰Ibid., 2:395-396. This is one of the verses John marked with $\phi\epsilon\nu$, which means "Alas!"

³¹Ibid., 2:415.

³²Ibid., 2:133.

Faith its light no more can hide
Than the meridian sun.³²

He even had experienced this struggle in his own life. When he first began writing hymns, he stopped in the middle of one hymn because he feared that he was writing out of pride. He was able to overcome that fear and go on to write nearly 9,000 poems and hymns, many of which reflect his personal experience.³³

Charles believed it was important to share what God was doing. The problem, according to Charles, was that the perfectionists were boasting about their own progress and perfection, and not focusing on the work God was doing. The tension between these two ways of sharing can be seen in a poem on Mark 5:19, “Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee.” Charles began this poem by stressing that people should share what God had done for them with a genuine humility in order that those who heard their witness would be awakened and that they too would “catch the heavenly fire.”³⁴ In verse three, Charles noted the tension between sharing and remaining silent. He asked,

3 Didst thou in me thyself reveal,
That I thy goodness *might conceal*,
Or boastingly proclaim?
No: but thou wilt my wisdom be,
And give me true simplicity
To glorify thy name.³⁵

There was however, one time that Charles insisted a person remain silent. Persons were not supposed to share that they had attained perfection. He even argued that to share that one had become perfect was to deny that perfection. He contrasted the one who would share a personal witness to perfection with those who were truly perfect. Those who were perfect would appear to deny their own perfection. He wrote,

³³“At nine began an hymn upon my conversion, but was persuaded to break off for fear of pride. Mr Bray coming encouraged me to proceed in spite of Satan. I prayed Christ to stand by me and finished the hymn” (Charles Wesley, May 23, 1738, *The Manuscript Journal of the Rev. Charles Wesley, M.A.*, 2 vols. ed., S. T. Kimbrough Jr., and Kenneth G. C. Newport [Nashville: Kingswood Books, 2008], 1:109).

³⁴*SHSPS* (1762), 2:202.

³⁵*Ibid.*, emphasis mine.

If perfect I myself profess,
My own profession I disprove:
The purest saint that lives below
Doth his own sanctity disclaim,
The wisest owns, I nothing know,
The holiest cries, I nothing am!³⁶

In addition to having trouble with the pride of the perfectionists, Charles also struggled with their impatience. Their impatience was evident in their attempt to usurp the priestly office. It was also evident in their attempt to claim the sinless character in a moment. Both Charles and the perfectionists took seriously the idea that one could be perfected here, but the perfectionists denied Charles's emphasis that perfection only came with time and through suffering. Reflecting on Matthew 5:48, "*Ye shall be perfect*," Charles wrote,

3 He saith, *Ye shall be perfect* here!
And should ten thousand souls presume
T' usurp the sinless character,
Before the perfect gift is come,
Yet on thy faithful mercies cast,
We shall obtain the prize at last.³⁷

In this poem, Charles criticized those who claimed or desired perfection in a moment or at least before God's time; but he also affirmed that people could be perfect—"We shall obtain the prize at last." The problem Charles had with the perfectionists was that, instead of waiting for the gift to come, instead of waiting for God's timing, they had attempted to usurp the gift of God and in the process were doing damage to the idea of being perfected. Even in the mist of this conflict, Charles continued to affirm that God was able to accomplish his purpose of having "a spotless bride" on earth. He wrote,

4 Whoe'er thro' ignorance, or pride,
Are found false-witnesses for God,
Thou hast on earth a spotless bride;
And trusting thine all-cleansing blood,
We too thine utmost truth shall prove,
Compleat in holiness and love.³⁸

³⁶Ibid., 1:228.

³⁷Ibid., 2:278-279.

³⁸Ibid., 2:279.

In this poem Charles used language that focused on a corporate understanding of being restored in the image of God, focusing not so much on a sinless individual, but on the spotless bride of Christ. Charles may have emphasized this corporate perfection to check the individual proclamations of perfection.

The major difference between Charles's view of perfection and the perfectionists was that Charles emphasized the gradual nature of perfection and that restoration normally occurred late in life. He attacked those who claimed an instantaneous perfection, who claimed to be restored in a moment. Those who were claiming instantaneous perfection were novices, according to Charles, believers whose race had just begun.³⁹ He compared them to the seed in Matthew 13 which sprung up in an instant. Like that seed, they were shallow and lacked the "toil of patient hope / they want [lacked] the root of humble love."⁴⁰ Charles wrote,

That work of faith the novice blind
Would fain, on fancy's horse, leap o'er,
A shorter way to Sion find.⁴¹

Charles also called them "delusion's ranting sons" who taught "all the work is done at once!"⁴²

Conclusion

Charles Wesley had an understanding of Scripture that went beyond the literal. He was also concerned with applying the Scripture. His application during the perfectionist controversy was that perfection included humility and patience. He continued to teach that perfection was possible, but focused more on the gradual nature. He argued that for one to claim the achievement of perfection was to deny that perfection. He also began to emphasize the corporate nature of perfection, referring to the "spotless bride" instead of the sinless individual. Most of what Charles wrote was a response to the damage people were doing both to the doctrine of perfection and to the Methodist movement's relationship to the Church of England.

³⁹Ibid., 1:95-96.

⁴⁰Ibid., 2:165.

⁴¹Ibid., 2:323.

⁴²Ibid., 2:354.

BOOK REVIEWS

Hempton, David. *Evangelical Disenchantment: 9 Portraits of Faith and Doubt*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008. 233 pages. ISBN: 978-0-300-14067-5.

Reviewed by Brian Clark, Adjunct Professor, Hartford Seminary, Hartford, CT.

David Hempton made his reputation among British and European historians of religion by producing work that combines sparkling creativity, devastating logic, and “imaginative sympathy” for the religious experience of “ordinary” people. He is also known for his resolute rejection of confessional partisanship, first demonstrated by his honesty in chronicling the anti-Catholicism of British Methodists, later manifest in his success in leading the confessional integration of the history department of Queens University Belfast.

Now writing from Boston in the midst of institutions that exemplify and embody the ideological polarities between evangelicalism and the academy, Hempton has brought the same qualities to bear in creating a generous book that explores the faith journeys of prominent artists and intellectuals who first became enchanted, and then disenchanted with evangelicalism—often evangelicalism of a Wesleyan sort. Hempton began writing this book while he was still at Boston University, teaching primarily at Boston University School of Theology, but he completed and published it early in his tenure as the first endowed Professor of Evangelical Studies at Harvard Divinity School, an institution which often has been defined by its rejection of both evangelicalism and orthodoxy. His inaugural lecture at Harvard, a meditation on the evangelical enchantment and disenchantment of George Eliot, drew from the first chapter of this book. I attended the lecture both as an HDS alumni and as one of Hemp-

ton's graduate students from BU. Rearrange these facts slightly, and you can see that *Evangelical Disenchantment* has the distinction of being the first book on evangelicalism to be published by an incumbent of the Evangelical Studies chair at Harvard Divinity School.

Evangelical Disenchantment: 9 Portraits of Faith and Doubt is a thematic set of mini-biographies of nineteenth- and twentieth-century artistic and intellectual luminaries of England and the United States, with Vincent Van Gogh thrown in for good measure. Taken together, they form a kind of Pointilist portrait of the travails of the Anglo-American soul. The biographical subjects include: writer George Eliot; Anglican Missionary Francis W. Newman; anti-slavery activist Theodore Dwight Weld; feminists Sarah Grimké, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Frances Willard; painter Vincent Van Gogh, and writers Edmund Gosse of England and James Baldwin of the U. S. Through these intimate portraits, Hempton sketches a much larger story, the story of how the artistic and intellectual elites of England and America came to reject Orthodox Christianity. It turns out that, for all of these individuals and countless others of their generations, a critical phase in this process was a period of fervent evangelical faith.

These biographical sketches explain how each individual came to be “enchanted” with evangelicalism, nearly always as a young person who had come under the influence of an admirable evangelical mentor. Several were drawn into evangelical communities and then became enamored of the figure of Jesus. Others were drawn to the ethical ideals of the Gospels, enchanted by the hope that “the gospel” could empower their crusades to abolish slavery, bring racial equality, or emancipate women, only to be disenchanting by the regressive politics of their fellow believers. Others were disenchanting by evangelical dogmatism, exclusivity, and apparent ethical or intellectual problems with the Bible. Many of Hempton's biographical subjects were encountering Calvinist strains of evangelicalism, and in these cases moral revulsion over doctrines such as reprobation and predestination was a vital element of their disenchantment. Nearly all were disheartened by experiences that demonstrated that evangelical leaders and institutions were very fallible or were implacably opposed to the social reforms or artistic freedoms these idealists cherished.

It is unjust to sum up Hempton's argument with such brevity, since the value of the work lies in the care and respect with which he portrays each biographical subject. Not that anyone is given a free pass. Hempton is as quick to point out inconsistencies and self-serving distortions in the writings of these breakaway intellectuals as he is to point out the foibles of

the churches and movements they left. His portraits seem to show that, although the intellectual plausibility of orthodoxy was often at issue in these episodes of disenchantment, its effects were often far weaker than doubts concerning the moral and ethical plausibility of Christianity. More often than not, really corrosive doubts concerned not the truth, but the goodness of the Bible and orthodox theology. The ethical failures of Christendom and the moral failures of Christians and Christian communities were far more damaging to the cause than anything written by the German textual critics, although there was a powerful synergy at work as well.

As Hempton demonstrates with painful clarity, the ineffectual responses of evangelicals to questions concerning both the ethical and intellectual intelligibility of their faith often made matters far worse. And this is where Hempton engages the most painful question of all for evangelicals like himself to contemplate, the question of whether these disenchantments with evangelicalism were inevitable given the inherent limitations of the movement. Is evangelicalism, as a popular, often populist expression of Christianity, doomed to retreat and retrench in the face of questions from elites concerning its intellectual and ethical plausibility? Given its inherent biblicism, does the movement have any alternative to its vehement insistence on an inerrant Bible and its bitter defense against all apparent challenges to the ancient text? Does the lack of authoritative traditions or governing structures mean that evangelicalism will always remain a splintered movement, constantly driven by sectarian infighting? Does that same lack of larger governance mean that the movement will eventually, inevitably, fall prey to a depressing majoritarianism that pits it against the interests of vulnerable minorities and the humanitarians who defend them?

Hempton does not definitively answer any of these questions, and he rarely states them in so many words. Instead, he broods over them. He agonizes over them. Like all his books, *Evangelical Disenchantment* is brilliant in its arguments, but it is uniquely poignant because here Hempton is arguing with himself. He identifies with the protagonists in both their moments of enchantment and disenchantment. He wants to believe that their stories could have turned out differently, that evangelicalism could have treated its precocious children more kindly, but he is far too honest with himself and his readers to declare it so. And it is precisely that depth of honesty about the holy joys and abject failures of evangelicalism that make this slim volume a rewarding read—the same qualities that made it possible for him to become an oxymoron, the first Chair of Evangelical Studies at Harvard Divinity School.

Raedel, Christoph, ed. *Methodismus und charismatische Bewegung*. Reutlinger Theologische Studien Band 2. Göttingen: Edition Ruprecht, 2007.

Reviewed by Kenneth J. Collins, Professor of Historical Theology and Wesley Studies, Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore, KY.

One of the most exciting developments in European Christianity, a movement that has been buffeted by wave after wave of secularism, has been the growth of the charismatic movement over the last thirty-five years. Since a number of similarities exist between the charismatic movement and Methodism, particularly in terms of their understanding of grace, Wesleyan theologians and pastors are thinking through the parallels between these two vital movements and are charting a course for the future.

To aid in this reflection, Christoph Raedel, Lecturer in Christian Theology at the CVJM-Kolleg (YMCA-Training College) in Kassel (Germany) and a Methodist theologian, has brought together a number of leaders, mainly from the United Methodist Church in Germany (EmK), in an edited work that has proved to be both wide ranging and carefully argued. *Methodismus und charismatischer Bewegung* is divided into five major sections with contributions from (1) history, (2) hymnology, and (3) theology, to which are added (4) a report of practice (*Praxisberichte*) and (5) a summary document.

In the first major section, historical contributions, four essayists grapple with the relationship, at times rocky, of the charismatic movement with the United Methodist Church in Germany. Bishop Walter Klaiber's contribution is valuable for the overall discussion because of its frankness and honesty. He notes, for example, that it has been difficult at times to integrate charismatic spirituality with the tradition of Methodist piety. Given this situation, it is important for charismatic renewal communities to recognize that renewal can indeed come in many forms.

The rise of the charismatic emphasis in the United Methodist Church in former East Germany is a fascinating and engaging story containing all the elements of human drama, ranging from enthusiasm sparked by pointed evangelical preaching to persecution of faithful and courageous pastors by the Stasi, the earlier East German secret police. Indeed, Pastor Küttner, a key charismatic leader, was arrested, thrown into prison and deemed to be an enemy of the state by the communist authorities for his

faithful witness to Jesus Christ. However, as with the historic church of the early centuries (“the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church”) persecution of the EmK in the east could not stop the revival that erupted in 1952. Later, from 1975 to 1986, a spiritual awakening broke out in Mecklenburg, with numerous conversions, much deliverance, and the inculcation of holiness, such that Klaiber wryly notes that many of the charismatic congregations are found east of the Elbe and Saale.

Developments within the United Methodist church in the former East Germany are, however, not simply of interest to German Methodists, but should prove to be valuable for North American evangelical and charismatic Methodists who continue to suffer under the leadership of mainline, anti-evangelical denomination officials. To illustrate, in the EmK in the east, church officials enforced repressive regulations against the “dangerous” charismatic trends in the church. Two key criticisms emerged: first, the charismatic emphasis, so it was claimed, constituted a parallel structure within the church and would therefore likely result in a split. Second, denominational officials reminded the charismatic Methodists, in a very condescending way, “You have not loved *our* church.” Remarkably enough, the same two criticisms were repeatedly leveled against evangelical Methodists in North America by culturally accommodated denominational officials.

In the second major section, the included essays indicate that the contemporary charismatic movement in Europe and historic Methodism are similar in terms of their use of hymns in the context of worship and in ongoing Christian discipleship. John and Charles Wesley, for example, referred to their collection of hymns as “a little body of practical divinity.” This emphasis on real, vital transformation now (what John Wesley himself referred to as Scriptural Christianity) has been duplicated in many of the hymns of the charismatic movement within the EmK. In other words, both movements have stressed a living faith in Jesus Christ that is personally appropriated. However, as James Steven points out in a helpful essay, some differences have arisen, in that 18th-century Methodism underscored the atoning work of Christ as the means by which persons gain access to God, whereas the praise songs of the contemporary charismatic movement by and large focus on the joy of the Christian faith and the love of God, with few offerings treating weighty topics such as confession of sin and the ethical challenges of the faith. As Steven observes, in charismatic hymns the Holy Spirit is primarily the Spirit of Power; in Wesleyan hymns the Holy Spirit is primarily the Spirit of love.

The third major section, which focuses on theology, demonstrates quite clearly that not only is the church the work of the Holy Spirit, in that the Spirit is the effective presence of God in the Body of Christ, but also that Wesley's theology was well focused on the reality of the Holy Spirit in both the community of the faithful and in the depths of human hearts through a direct witness. Also helpful is the clear distinction in this book offered by Schneeberger between the work of Fletcher and that of Wesley, a distinction that has not always been honored by contemporary North American theologians who end up making Wesley a mere mouth-piece for Fletcher's views. It was, after all, John Fletcher and not John Wesley who tightly identified the baptism of the Holy Spirit with entire sanctification. Beyond this, Raedel's contribution to this theological section displays the important truth that the personal communication of God through the Holy Spirit is not only tied to the practices of the church in terms of the sacraments and other means of grace, but it also must be comprehended in terms of both personal and social dimensions.

Problems, however, emerge in the theological section and in the appended document (*Dokument*, a General Conference text, originally published in the Book of Discipline, 1996) with respect to Wesley's theology itself, specifically in terms of both the new birth (and the larger theological complex of conversion) and entire sanctification. Failing to pick up several of the nuances of Wesley's own theological formulations, Schneeberger states quite bluntly that Aldersgate was not Wesley's conversion (*Es ist ganz gewiss keine Bekehrungserfahrung*). He then repeats the well-worked claim that Wesley hardly ever mentioned Aldersgate in his works again—as if such an observation by itself would diminish the soteriological significance of Aldersgate. However, some of the best scholarship in Wesley studies today has marshaled considerable evidence to underscore the idea that Aldersgate is perhaps best described as Wesley's *evangelical* conversion or, to use his own language, a conversion to “real, true, proper, Scriptural Christianity.” Not only did Wesley, for example, place a “narrative insert” summarizing his spiritual experience prior to May 24, 1738, thereby highlighting its significance, but he also specifically referred to this date several months later in a letter to his brother, Samuel Jr., in October, 1738 and a full *seven* years later in a missive to “John Smith.” Does anyone remember what they did seven years ago today? If so, it must have been a very important date. That Wesley did not repeatedly mention his evangelical conversion throughout his life, perhaps for the sake of modesty or due to some other motivation, in the end proves little about the nature of

his Aldersgate experience since this argument proceeds largely by silence, one of the weakest forms of reasoning.

In terms of entire sanctification, it appears that some of the theological formulations of the last section of the book (*Dokument*) actually confuse the process leading up to entire sanctification with Christian perfection itself. For example, after pointing out that Wesley was at times somewhat imprudent when he called for sanctification (*Heiligung*) immediately after the experience of justification, the document then goes on to speculate that, were Wesley to write today, he would probably emphasize sanctification as a step-by-step work of grace characterized by many experiences of daily repentance. However, it would have been far more helpful to the reader, in light of Wesley's many theological nuances on this topic, to proceed with a number of carefully drawn distinctions.

First, holiness begins at the new birth in what can be called initial sanctification (though Wesley himself does not employ this exact phrase). Second, after the new birth, believers grow by degrees (or step by step as the *Dokument* puts it) in the process of sanctification. Third, entire sanctification, unlike the preceding process of sanctification, is *not* a change of degree; in other words, it is not a little more of what already was, but represents a *qualitative* change marked by the transition from *impurity* to an entirely pure heart. Simply put, to claim that entire sanctification is a process might just be another way of stating that Christian perfection never actually happens, that one is always on the journey but one never quite arrives.

Despite these criticisms, *Methodismus und charismatische Bewegung* makes a generous contribution to our understanding of the problems and possibilities of the relationship between Methodism and the charismatic movement. The lessons learned will no doubt have consequence not simply for German Methodists but for the broader Wesleyan community as well, for all those heirs of Wesley who seek to be transformed by a God of holy love through the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit. As Raedel puts it, "The conversation between the Methodist tradition and the charismatic movement is not one between strangers but between related partners. It cannot be other than a family conversation."

Kisker, Scott. *Mainline or Methodist? Rediscovering Our Evangelistic Mission*. Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources, 2008. 128 pages. ISBN 9780881775419.

Reviewed by Benjamin B. DeVan, Ph.D. Candidate in Ethics and Theology, Durham University, Durham, UK.

On September 2, 2010, Richard Hays at his installment as Dean of Duke Divinity School quoted comedian Jon Stewart's skewering of Chelsea Clinton's affiliation with the United Methodist Church. Commenting on the occasion of Clinton's wedding to her Jewish groom, Marc Mezvinski, Stewart wanted to poke fun at idiosyncratic Jewish and Methodist practices. But Stewart was (nearly) at a loss for anything distinctively Methodist, "Being a Methodist is easy! It's like the University of Phoenix of religions!"¹ Hays replied: "It's not hard to see . . . how Jon Stewart could have a misimpression, because often our churches have . . . acquiesced to a lowest-common-denominator religion that offers faith without discipleship, inclusivity without transformation, and blessing without mission. Even where we find examples to the contrary—and if we look . . . there are many such examples—we are often surprised, inappropriately."²

In the same spirit, Evangelism and Wesley Studies professor Scott Kisker of Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington D.C. seeks to challenge Stewart's perception and reenergize traditional spiritual and communal Methodist vitality. Kisker sets forth his vision in six pithy chapters, complemented by a forward from Florida Area Resident Bishop Timothy Whitaker.

Kisker diagnoses United Methodism as "systematically sick" (10). He sees Methodist malaise exemplified not only by declining numbers since the 1960s, but by Methodism becoming a bland, almost secular religion of the establishment that has marginalized both civil rights fervor and enthusiasm for Christian evangelism. Kisker also points out what he sees as the socially acceptable but fictional construct of a "mainline" church: "No one has ever promised to uphold the 'Mainline Church' with prayers presence, gifts, and service" (13).

To remedy Methodism's "Mainline" malaise, Kisker supplies an historical survey of Wesley and the earliest people called Methodists who

¹<http://www.thedailyshow.com/watch/mon-august-2-2010/wedding-of-the-decade-of-the-century-of-the-millennium>. Accessed September 26, 2010.

²<http://www.divinity.duke.edu/sites/default/files/documents/news/2010-09-02-hays-sermon.pdf>. Accessed September 26, 2010.

sought to invite individuals to spiritual rebirth and to spur stagnated or corrupted political, societal, and ecclesial structures and institutions to reform. Wesley believed in the “final triumph of love in the world. Christ would come in final victory . . . the Holy Spirit was active now in history to bring about God’s promises . . . the gospel, embodied by a people possessed by it, can change things” (35-36).

For example, in his lifelong campaign for personal and societal “conversion” (36), John Wesley penned the final letter of his long life to British Parliamentarian and committed Christian William Wilberforce, who spearheaded the struggle and subsequently succeeded in abolishing the slave trade within the British Empire. “Unless God has raised you up for this very thing, you will soon be worn out by the opposition of men and devils. But if God be for you, who can be against you? Go on in the name of God and in the power of his might till even American slavery, the vilest that ever saw the sun, shall vanish away before it” (37).

For Kisker, Wesley’s zeal to “reform the nation, particularly the church; and to spread scriptural holiness over the land” (35) partners with God’s intention for people to love God and neighbor, and embodies God’s unfurling kingdom which “all creation waits (or yearns for) in eager expectation” (Romans 8:19). The grace of God which makes salvation possible concurrently makes personal and corporate transformation possible. But grace must be received, embraced, and proclaimed. We then “become like that love that has embraced us” (68).

Considering methods for implementation, Kisker not surprisingly turns to the Wesleys as exemplars for boldly initiating opportunities for good works and preaching the gospel. One facet of cultivating disciples who live holy and vigorous lives is reclaiming the legacy of “class meetings” or, in contemporary terms, small groups or communities within the larger church body for mutual support, strengthening, confession, accountability, and discipline, “hospitable caring fellowships for non-Christians and Christians alike” (85). Through such groups, the Holy Spirit worked in the past and continues to work to rejuvenate nominal Christians, as well as to evangelize and develop non-Christians into fully devoted followers of Christ.

In addition to reviving commitment to small groups, Kisker calls for releasing annual conferences from their current captivity to special interest lobbying. He calls instead for prayer and exploring each others’ insights into “what the reign of God demands” (97). This requires at least five steps: (1) Humility, acknowledging that none of us on our own perceives God’s will perfectly; (2) Gentleness that forsakes manipulation and

coercion of brothers and sisters into lines of combat conceived as win/lose propositions; (3) Patience with one another as we wait on the Holy Spirit; (4) Bearing with each other in love; and (5) Unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Wesley taught, “We may die without the knowledge of many truths and yet be carried into Abraham’s bosom. But if we die without love, what will knowledge avail” (105)?

For Kisker, living out these principles by Wesley’s example could involve Christians from any number of denominations effectively becoming “Methodist.” Correspondingly, being “part of a United Methodist congregation” (115) doesn’t necessarily make you Methodist in the truest sense. But whether via institutional or grassroots revolution or both, Methodists can no longer afford to “maintain our detached respectability” (122). We must aggressively confront the world with the reality of sin and invite the world that God “so loved” (John 3:16) into the kingdom of forgiveness and new life. We can do this creatively through utilizing the arts, technology, and simple relationship building over shared meals or coffee. Kisker concludes:

Methodism began as a means of grace and a system of accountability. It was an order within the larger church for the renewal of the church. . . . Recovery from an illness is rarely fun or easy. But it is better than the alternative, which is not recovering. My hope is that these chapters . . . provided the beginnings of a thoughtful conversation about what it means to be Methodist and perhaps a beginning for renewal. . . . I long for companies of the faithful to be once more living and dying for the spread of scriptural holiness across these lands. (128)

In critiquing Kisker, several questions arise. What is Kisker himself doing to implement this longing for renewal? Publishing a book helps readers to capture a vision to a certain degree, but what else is happening? *Mainline or Methodist: Reclaiming Our Evangelistic Mission* could be intensified by alluding to specific initiatives, congregations (formally Methodist or not), or small groups and classes where Kisker detects the Holy Spirit at work in the way he envisions.

The most obvious weakness of this work is its lack of sociological or statistical evidence for the nature and extent of Methodist decline. This need not be copious or exhaustive, but neither should it be virtually nonexistent in Kisker’s book. Yes, United Methodism’s market share in the American religious landscape has diminished, but even this is not sufficiently demonstrated. Where are the membership statistics or weekly

attendance rosters for worship and Sunday school? Are there records regarding Methodist clergy or parishioner doctrinal and ethical beliefs, charitable activities, and spiritual satisfaction? How does data for recent years compare historically, and to the extent historical data is available? Intuiting that a situation is dire has a certain appeal, but it falls short of accounting for the actual state of affairs.

Despite such flaws, Kisker delivers a concise and riveting read and casts afresh a Wesleyan vision for a new generation of official, unofficial, actual and potential Methodists.

Cunningham, Floyd, ed. *Our Watchword and Song: The Centennial History of the Church of the Nazarene*. Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 2009. 736 pages. ISBN-13: 9780834124448.

Reviewed by William Kostlevy, Associate Professor of History and Political Science, Tabor College, Hillsboro, KS.

The publication of a centennial history by the largest North American denomination birthed by the Holiness revival of the nineteenth century is a noteworthy event. The authors, Floyd Cunningham, Stan Ingersol, Harold E. Raser, and David F. Whitelaw, are gifted and well-trained historians who bring a high level of professional expertise to their task. As general editor, Floyd Cunningham has done an excellent job in crafting a unified text that avoids many of the stylistic problems common in multi-authored works. Written to supersede Timothy L. Smith's masterful *Called unto Holiness* (1962), this work inevitably invites comparisons with noteworthy and officially sanctioned denominational histories. While this reviewer will continue to keep Smith's classic work close at hand, *Our Watchword and Song* will be proudly perched next to it, a fitting companion volume that deserves to be read not only by Church of the Nazarene pastors and church members but by serious students of American religion and culture.

One of the most telling details in any history is the authors' choice of the point of departure. In *Called unto Holiness*, Smith begins the story with the Holiness revival of the nineteenth century. *Our Watchword and Song* begins, perhaps fittingly given the role of Church of the Nazarene scholars in the revival of Wesley studies, with John Wesley and his Anglican roots. Interestingly, chapter one ends not with Wesley but John Fletcher, whose teaching on the baptism of the Holy Spirit is interpreted as a significant departure from Wesley's own. Accepting the pioneering interpretative framework of Donald W. Dayton and Randy Maddox, the authors choose to ignore the recent studies of Laurence Wood and the older studies of Timothy L. Smith that cast doubt on a serious Wesley-Fletcher divide.

One of the book's most intriguing features is the authors' decision to divide along generational lines. This framework allows for four relatively co-equal sectional divisions at roughly twenty-five year intervals. These divisions establish a structure that allows the authors not only to tell the story of institutional growth but changes in the Church of the Nazarene

ethos, culture, worship and intellectual life over its first century. While chapters one and two are probably essential for lay people needing grounding in the Methodist and Holiness roots of the Church of the Nazarene, the truly innovative parts of the work begin with chapter three. Especially notable are the second and third parts of the book that tell the story of Church of the Nazarene from roughly 1915 through the 1970s. As one of the most rapidly growing Christian denominations, especially from the 1920s through World War II, these years laid the foundation for the subsequent rapid growth of the Church outside of North America. As the authors note, "The Church of the Nazarene's growth rate . . . was maximal when its position in society was most marginal" (575).

While it is impossible in a normal book-length review to capture all the nuances or even all of this work's virtues, three seem especially noteworthy. First, *Our Watchword and Song* is far more sensitive than *Called unto Holiness* in dealing the Church of the Nazarene as a popular folk movement. Using one notable illustrative example, where Smith's history had little place for such Nazarene cultural icons as Bud Robinson, the new centennial history lavishes appropriate attention on Robinson and other actor preachers who were the real creators of the Holiness Movement and the Church of the Nazarene.

Second, the growth and development of denominational institutions receive adequate attention, but not at the expense of the story of the Church's growth and maturation as a spiritual movement. The authors understand the Church of the Nazarene as built, not on uniformity of doctrine or even common behavioral standards, but on a common recognizable religious experience. Quoting Hiram F. Reynolds, "real Pentecostal Nazarene people . . . have the experience for which we stand" (184). As the authors note, even leaders such as S. S. White who were nurtured during the height of the fundamentalist leavening of the Church insisted that the personal experience of grace, not doctrinal rigidity, was the central Christian concern. In fact, as the authors note the Church of the Nazarene stance, rejection of modernism was less about doctrine and more about a simple observation. Modernism failed to produce revivals.

Finally, the international scope of the work is to be applauded. As with other Wesleyan groups, such as the Church of God (Anderson), Free Methodist Church, and even small bodies like the Metropolitan Church Association, the explosive growth of the Church of the Nazarene outside of North America is truly remarkable. As the text makes clear, the emer-

gence of indigenous churches has not been without conflict with North American institutions. One does come away from this book with a renewed respect for both North American missions' promoters, such as Hiram F. Reynolds and native leaders such as H. T. Reza.

This is a work filled with delightful anecdotes and new discoveries even for specialists in the field. The text deals honestly with denominational failures to be racially inclusive while reminding us of heroic stands against lynching by early Nazarenes in Texas. It appropriately highlights the role of women as pastors, teachers, missionaries, missionary supporters and theologians. Fittingly, the book highlights Mildred Bangs Wynkoop, perhaps the most notable evangelical woman theologian of the 1960s and 1970s. Contrary to the common stereotype of the Holiness Movement as being brain dead, this work provides ample documentation of the rich intellectual tradition nurtured in the Church of the Nazarene.

In a work characterized by even-handed treatment of controversial subjects and generosity of spirit, it is unfortunate that the work's treatment of Pentecostalism retains too much of the early spirit of sectarian rivalry. In truth, despite statements to the contrary, many figures with ties to the Church of the Nazarene did become Pentecostals. In fairness, few of them were leaders. But the very intensity and frequency of Nazarene polemics against Pentecostalism suggest that this is in fact a family feud. In other regards, the fact that this work does not contain an index is especially unfortunate, and one hopes that future editions will rectify this serious omission.

Nevertheless, this is an important and well-done history. It is, in this reviewer's opinion, one of the few authorized histories that will stand the test of time.

Sanders, Fred and Klaus Issler, eds. *Jesus in Trinitarian Perspective: An Introductory Christology*. Foreword by Gerald Bray. Nashville: B & H Academic, 2007. ISBN 9780805444223.

Reviewed by Philip N. LaFountain, Assistant Professor of Theology, Eastern Nazarene College, Quincy, MA.

Fred Sanders and Klaus Issler, both of Talbot School of Theology (Biola University), edit this volume of essays that is intended to introduce students to recent theological developments in the relationship between Christology and the social trinity. A significant work, the six evangelical contributors attempt to help readers understand how the person, life, and work of Jesus of Nazareth are most appropriately understood in light of the Trinity. There is an apologetic flavor to the book as each author lays out “axioms” for understanding Christology. Also, recognizing the need for an interdisciplinary approach to this subject, Sanders and Issler have invited evangelical scholars from across the disciplines—systematic theology, historical theology, philosophical theology, and practical theology—to discuss Jesus’ identity from a Trinitarian perspective.

Fred Sanders establishes the parameters of theological reflection on Christology and Trinity in his introductory chapter by laying out evangelicalism’s indebtedness to the Chalcedonian categories of “one person, two natures” for understanding Jesus as the second person of the Trinity. For Sanders, only the classical categories of Chalcedon, and their later elaboration in a Trinitarian context at Constantinople II, provide the appropriate context for the Christian confession “Jesus died for me.” And, only the Trinitarian framework can adequately explain that in Jesus—“the second person of the Trinity, God the Son”—“God died.” Sanders argues that the “Cyrillian Chalcedonianism” of Constantinople II lays the foundation for theological reflection on Christology and Trinity for evangelicals today. Why? Because it best situates the faith that lies behind orthodox Christology. It did this by “bringing Christological and Trinitarian terminology together, by giving priority to the person in Christology, and by telling the long story of salvation” (29). For Sanders, a retrieval of the theology of the fifth council is long overdue. It is here that evangelicals and the church fathers can enter into intimate communication and find mutual agreement around the “mythological descent-ascent motifs.”

J. Scott Horrell, in his chapter entitled “The Eternal Son of God in the Social Trinity,” follows the lead of Karl Rahner and attempts to show

more clearly for evangelicalism the close relationship between the economic Trinity and the immanent Trinity. Horrell appropriates the “social model” of the Trinity as a way of framing this relationship. He defines a social model of the Trinity as “the one divine Being [who] eternally exists as three distinct centers of consciousness, wholly equal in nature, genuinely personal in relationships, and each mutually indwelling the other” (48). Primarily, for Horrell, the economic Trinity as revealed in Scripture informs and controls how to think about the eternal relations of the Godhead as expressed by the immanent Trinity. Horrell’s goal is the elaboration of a biblical social trinitarianism that clarifies the Son’s role in relation to the Father and the Spirit in order to understand and make sense of the ministry of Jesus Christ and his death on the cross. In his depiction of the Trinity, Horrell believes he avoids the Scylla of an egalitarian Godhead which collapses personal distinctions, and the Carybdis of subordinationism which threatens the loss of intratrinitarian *koinonia*.

In his essay “The One Person who is Jesus Christ,” Donald Fairbairn elaborates further on the patristic theology of Cyril of Alexandria. Initially, Fairbairn begins by arguing that the Christological discussion in the early church was not a clash between two schools of thought, nor was it over the divine and human nature. On the contrary, he contends that the real argument was over “who” the one person of Christ was. The consensus, argues Fairbairn, was that Christ was God the Logos, the second person of the Trinity. If we apply this insight to the suffering of Christ, it was God the Son, one of the persons of the Trinity, who died for humanity on the cross. Fairbairn goes on to argue that the development of thought from Chalcedon to Constantinople II crystallized around the thought of Cyril of Alexandria, who held that the one person Christ was God the Logos.

Further metaphysical issues are teased out by Garrett J. DeWeese in his chapter “One Person, Two Natures: Two Metaphysical Models of the Incarnation.” DeWeese suggests that the “standard” metaphysical model (dyothelite) requires reformulation because metaphysical assumptions have shifted since its elaboration in the patristic period and its medieval expression following Constantinople III. The primary problem revolves around the issue of divine aseity. What is the human nature that the Logos assumes? Was this a necessary relationship, or contingent? These questions have prompted contemporary philosophers to suggest an alternative model. The contemporary model states that “the Logos essentially instan-

tiates the divine nature, while the instantiation by the Logos of the human nature is contingent—that is, the Logos would still be the second person of the Trinity apart from the incarnation” (144). DeWeese explores the theological and practical implications of such a reformulation.

Bruce A. Ware works out the Trinitarian implications of the atonement of Christ. The work of Christ in atonement is efficacious because of his identity as “the theanthropic person.” He is the savior who is the Son of the Father, sent by the Father to do the Father’s will, and who is the Spirit-anointed Messiah, the God-man who supernaturally accomplishes the Father’s will through the leading and empowerment of the Spirit.

Klaus Issler shows in his chapter, “Jesus’ Example: Prototype of the Dependent, Spirit-filled Life,” that Jesus is “a genuine example for how to live the Christian life beyond the limitations of an average human life” (189). As the Messiah-King, Jesus shows us the *manner* in which he lived and carried out his mission. This is the theological ground for the practical expression of the *imitatio Christi* (imitation of Christ). Issler anticipates objections to the possibility of following Jesus’ example and addresses these at the end of his chapter.

There are three reasons why Wesleyans should read this collection. First, it is an important and creative example of evangelical scholarship: evangelical theologians who embrace the Chalcedonian framework of Christology as orthodoxy and who engage the contemporary issues of social Trinity. Another interesting example is Stanley Grenz. Second, several writers reference the thought of John and Charles Wesley as representative of such orthodoxy. Wesley scholars will find an important dialogue regarding the Wesley’s view of Christology, Trinity, and atonement. Finally, these six evangelicals begin to think critically about the theological implications of Jesus as the Spirit-anointed Messiah, an often neglected aspect of Christology in evangelical theology.

Greathouse, William M., with George Lyons. *Romans 1–8 and Romans 9–16*. New Beacon Bible Commentary. Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 2008. 287 and 285 pages. ISBN 9780834123625 and 9780834123632.

Reviewed by Suzanne Nicholson, Associate Professor of Biblical Studies, Malone University, Canton, OH.

The editors of the New Beacon Bible Commentary wish to present pastors and students with a commentary that “reflects the best scholarship in the Wesleyan theological tradition.” In choosing William Greathouse to write the two-volume Romans commentary, they have delegated the task to an experienced author—Greathouse wrote both the “Romans” portion of the earlier Beacon Bible Commentary (1968) as well as a Romans devotional commentary (1975). Nonetheless, Greathouse accurately states that this new work is not a revision of these earlier works, but rather a fresh commentary that addresses significant developments in Romans scholarship in the past three decades.

The commentary is laid out as a paragraph-by-paragraph study of Romans, using a threefold structure that discusses what lies “behind the text,” what can be found “in the text,” and what readers can take “from the text.” In the sections entitled “Behind the Text,” Greathouse discusses the historical, literary and cultural contexts affecting interpretation. In the sections called “In the Text,” which are the most extensive of the three sections, Greathouse identifies what the respective biblical passage says verse-by-verse through an investigation of its grammar, vocabulary, and canonical context. In the final section, “From the Text,” he considers such issues as the theological significance of each passage, the history of interpretation, the interpretation of the Old Testament in the New Testament, and the modern application of the passage. This last section often focuses on the difference between Calvinist and Wesleyan interpretations of Romans and could be strengthened by including more specific applications for the contemporary reader. Although the threefold division often works well, occasionally the lines between the three are muddled. For example, Greathouse occasionally begins to address the history of interpretation issues in the first section rather than the third. However, this may be hard to avoid, given the complicated nature of some of the topics (predestination, for example).

In addition, the commentary frequently offers sidebars and excurses to discuss special topics. For example, Greathouse defines Paul’s use of

the word “flesh”, the Hebrew background of the concept of peace, holiness, a Wesleyan understanding of predestination, vegetarianism in the ancient world, Paul’s interpretation of Scripture, and a Wesleyan understanding of sanctification by the Holy Spirit. The sidebars give excellent clarifying information and are very helpful. Frequently, Greathouse quotes John Wesley and explains a Wesleyan perspective on various relevant issues. It would be helpful, however, if the commentary contained an index of these sidebars so that the reader could look back at these issues as needed.

One may wonder why a two-volume format was chosen (a single volume would have run about 540 pages); essential sidebar information is found more frequently in the first volume than in the second. If a reader referred to the second volume only, would all of his or her questions be answered? Perhaps not. For example, the comment on 13:14 regarding the translation of “flesh” refers back to the sidebar in chapter 7, but this sidebar appears in the first volume. Predestination provides another example: the issue is addressed at the end of the first volume (8:29-30), so that those who only used the second volume might find the discussion in Romans 9 to be lacking.

Nonetheless, Greathouse’s research is first-rate. He frequently incorporates comments from such renowned Pauline scholars as Ernst Käsemann, Joseph Fitzmyer, James Dunn, N. T. Wright, Robert Jewett, Richard Hays, Stanley Stowers, and Leander Keck (to mention but a few). Greathouse addresses the discussion arising out of Karl Donfried’s *The Romans Debate*, as well as the various issues raised by the New Perspective on Paul. In general, Greathouse affirms the conclusions of New Perspective scholars.

In his preface, Greathouse agrees with Käsemann’s assessment that God’s righteousness is not simply God’s gift (as in Reformed theology), but it is also God’s demand. Greathouse argues that this understanding prepares the way for a Wesleyan view of sanctification. Frequently throughout the commentary he highlights this difference between a pessimistic Reformed reading of Romans and an optimistic Wesleyan reading, with the latter reading focusing on the believer being enabled to live the holy life now through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit.

Greathouse sees Paul’s purpose in writing Romans as a missionary one: Paul wants to deepen the readers’ commitment to the gospel and he hopes to gain the support of a divided Roman audience as he prepares for

his trip to Spain. The commentary also points out the impact of the Claudian edict on the Roman church—at the time Paul wrote (around A.D. 57) Jewish Christians who had returned to Rome now found themselves in the minority and at odds with the Gentile believers. As a result, Greathouse sees the central issue in Romans as the relationship of the Gospel to the Mosaic law. He argues that the “righteousness of God” refers to God’s saving activity in Christ—salvation that is offered to all humanity. Thus, Greathouse contends that Paul’s emphasis is on the corporate nature of salvation.

Although he regularly cites various scholars, occasionally Greathouse could clarify his own stance on specific issues. For instance, in his discussion of “The Unifying Theology of Romans” in the Introduction, Greathouse discusses Keck’s view of the faithfulness of Christ, but does not comment at this point on the interpretation of *pisteos Christou*. The reader must turn to 3:22 to discover that Greathouse prefers the objective genitive interpretation of this phrase (“faith in Christ”). Most of the time, however, Greathouse is clear regarding his own stance on debated issues.

The commentary uses the NIV for most citations, but when Greathouse offers his own translation, the words are in italics. It is easy to forget this distinction as one reads through the commentary. In addition, the “In the Text” section lists the verses only phrase by phrase. It would be helpful to the reader for each section to begin by listing the NIV version of the entire passage in question. This would help to clarify the difference between the NIV and Greathouse’s own translation, which he incorporates into the comments.

Overall, these commentaries provide an excellent overview of recent Pauline scholarship and present a distinctly Wesleyan perspective on Paul’s letter to the Romans. The sidebars are quite helpful, and Greathouse includes important historical, cultural, and literary issues for consideration. His discussion of theological developments throughout the history of the church, especially in relation to Wesleyan doctrine, will help the reader to see the implications of various different approaches to reading Romans.

Brower, Kent E., and Andy Johnson, eds. *Holiness and Ecclesiology in the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007. 385 pages. ISBN-13: 978-0802845603

Reviewed by Brent D. Peterson, Associate Professor of Theology, Northwest Nazarene University, Nampa, ID.

Brower and Johnson have compiled a substantive collection of essays exploring holiness and ecclesiology in the New Testament. Taken as a whole, this collection offers a useful survey of the various treatments and considerations of holiness and ecclesiology within the New Testament. As with any volume employing multiple authors, the great challenge of this work is the level of consistency in form and method for looking at these important subjects.

In the introduction Brower and Johnson state explicitly their overriding concern. Too often the topic of holiness in academic and lay settings has been individualized and personally appropriated to the exclusion of a robust ecclesiology, often with a focus on what will occur in the life to come. The New Testament stands in stark contrast to notions of holiness that are not first and foremost about God and God's formation of a people set apart for God's purposes. Within the multiple voices and perspectives of the New Testament, this volume's primary thesis concerning holiness and ecclesiology explores how "God not only calls a people as a whole to reflect God's holy character, but the Spirit enables the fulfillment of that call *to some extent* prior to the eschaton" (xvii). The essays faithfully celebrate this center as they engage the Dead Sea Scrolls and different books of the New Testament.

While this center is readily apparent, the methodological approaches employed in each essay are diverse. Some essays engage in semantic and linguistic methodologies in approaching the collection's topics while others offer more narrative and even prophetic approaches to these issues. A few essays offer more detailed historical analyses that are informative but only marginally contribute to the larger conversation regarding the theological topics of the volume.

As a whole, this collection of essays not only pushes against poor ecclesiological and holiness ideologies but also draws upon the New Testament to find a center of holiness in God and God's call to the church, and through the church to creation. The diversity of authors offers a helpful matrix when considering the relationship between holiness and eccle-

siology. While some authors engage holiness through an ecclesiological lens, others do the reverse by seeing ecclesiology through the lens of holiness. Taken as a whole, this volume makes an implicit yet powerful statement: no longer can conversations about holiness or the church ever be disjoined. Although the Wesleyan tradition has emphasized the communal approach to salvation and holiness, making the holiness conversation explicitly ecclesial is an achievement of this volume that one should not ignore.

Several themes emerge that continue to push the larger Wesleyan, holiness, and ecclesiological conversation forward. First, the call to “Be holy as I am holy” centers in the New Testament around Jesus Christ (Donald A. Hagner, “Holiness and Ecclesiology: The Church in Matthew”). Christian holiness is the process of being renewed into the image of Christ. Therefore, several of the authors note that the cruciform Christ reshapes one’s picture of holiness as well as the empowerment to be made holy (Michael Gorman, “‘You Shall Be Cruciform for I Am Cruciform’: Paul’s Trinitarian Reconstruction of Holiness”). At this point another achievement of the book is illumined. Focusing on the cruciform Christ is not reduced to an atonement theory, thereby celebrating what Christ has done for the individual; rather, the cruciform Christ offers the church an invitation to join Christ and be fully human as one is being set apart for God. Wesleyans should rightfully celebrate that Christ’s life not only offers us forgiveness but a healing transformation—to be made holy. In this way, Christians who are being renewed together in the body of Christ are called to continue Christ’s ministry in the world.

A second overarching theme is the critique of individual holiness in contrast to ecclesial holiness that also fosters the breakdown of the sacred/secular dualism. Many authors draw upon the New Testament to challenge the posture that describes holiness as a private or personally pious lifestyle. These authors state clearly that, although the church is called and raised up by God, the church is not excluded or separated from the society. The church that is being made holy by God is never called to retreat and hide from the “pagan” world. The call of holiness to “be ye separate” is not separate *from* the world but instead a continuation of the ministry of Jesus Christ *for* the world. The church is being set apart to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ in all the world (Richard Bauckham, “The Holiness of Jesus and His Disciples in the Gospel of John”). Too often persons claiming holiness have disengaged from the culture and

society. The New Testament directly challenges any such reclusivity. The called-out people, set apart for God, are not to live *profane* lives in sin and selfishness, yet this transformation to be more like God must result in the church being made present to all those under the oppression and alienation of sin (Joel B. Green, “Living as Exiles: The Church in the Diaspora in 1 Peter”).

Likewise, this volume reframes the grammar of “purity” in relationship with holiness as those who are with God, given over to God’s mission (Kent E. Brower, “The Holy One of God and His Disciples: Holiness and Ecclesiology in Mark”). Holiness is about much more than being “good”; it is about a relational renewal and perfection in love. This relational foundation of holiness does not suggest that being made holy allows for any type of “loose” living. Rather, as holiness is a renewal in covenant, the church’s holiness is a sign of her being set apart by and for God (Robert W Wall, “Reading Paul with Acts: The Canonical Shaping of a Holy Church”). The church’s love for God through embodied obedience was its primary act of worship throughout the week (George Lyons, “Church and Holiness in Ephesians”). By the Spirit, the Christian’s life reflects a proper love of God, oneself and fellow creatures. How one lives is the embodiment of one’s continual renewal in love.

In my estimation, another important accomplishment of this volume centers on holiness as relationships in love with God and others as opposed to holiness as moral elitism (Richard Thompson, “Gathered at the Table: Holiness and Ecclesiology in the Gospel of Luke”). Furthermore, in this breakdown of the sacred/secular dualism there is a reminder that since *all* the world is God’s, the church is called to embody God’s mission so that all the earth may be blessed. God’s mission for the world is accomplished in the eschatological hope offered through a sanctification of the imagination of not simply what *is*, but what *will be* (Andy Johnson “The Sanctification of the Imagination in 1 Thessalonians”). Furthermore, being set apart as God’s people, one’s membership in the church is to be one’s primary politics. As such, the church is being made holy in mission and love; it is a participation in God’s kingdom further coming on earth as it is in heaven (Dean Fleming, “‘On Earth as It is in Heaven’: Holiness and the People of God in Revelation”).

Brower and Johnson have successfully created a volume that both instructs and inspires the church today to more faithfully imagine God’s call to be holy as an invitation to life and mission in the world.

Hammond, Geordan, and David Rainey, eds. *Wesley and Methodist Studies: Volume I*. Manchester, UK: Didsbury Press, 2009. 89 pages. ISBN-13 978-0955250712.

Reviewed by Jennifer L. Woodruff Tait, Affiliate Professor of Church History, Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore, KY; Adjunct Professor of Church History, United Theological Seminary, Dayton, OH; Adjunct Professor of History, Huntington University, Huntington, IN.

This volume represents the first installment in a proposed annual publication from the Manchester Wesley Research Centre, a center promoting “research in the life and work of John and Charles Wesley, their contemporaries in the eighteenth-century Evangelical Revival, their historical and theological antecedents, their successors in the Wesleyan tradition, and contemporary scholarship in the Wesleyan and Evangelical tradition” (1). The MWRC is located on the campus of Nazarene Theological College in Didsbury and affiliated with the Methodist Archives in the John Rylands Library of the University of Manchester.

One could wonder if any more words need to be written about the Wesleys. However, we still need a great many words which take the Wesleys and their contemporaries out of the realm of hagiography and into the realm of their historical and theological contexts. Thankfully, the words in this volume go a long way towards doing the latter. This first volume focuses on the Wesleys and their contemporaries; the 2010 volume, now available, branches into British and Irish Methodism of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It also has a slightly more diverse group of contributors in terms of gender and geographical location, and includes book reviews (a notable absence here).

This volume features essays by senior Wesley scholar Henry Rack (author of *Reasonable Enthusiast: John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism*) and four doctoral students at NTC and the University of Manchester. Rack’s “A Man of Reason and Religion? John Wesley and the Enlightenment” weighs how much enthusiasm and how much “reasonableness” made up the “complicated balance between rationality and credulity in Wesley’s mind” (16). Was Wesley a reactionary and superstitious anti-intellectual or a socially concerned and scientifically advanced reformer? The truth lies somewhere in between, and Rack argues for a more nuanced view of what the Enlightenment looked like on the ground in Wesley’s era. England in

the eighteenth century contained less “contrast between ‘enlightened’ and ‘evangelical’ mentalities” than was once thought (5). Many Anglicans combined “belief in biblical revelation and church tradition” with “rational theological reflection on ‘Nature’s God’ ” (4).

Rack treats Wesley as indicative of his era in his empiricist approach as seen in many different ways: his natural and theological reflection, his desire to simplify and essentialize theological categories, his moderate tolerance of differing opinions, his commitment to education (though tempered here by a deeper commitment to original sin than many Enlightenment intellectuals had), his concern for charity to the poor, and his commitment (though sometimes an ambiguous one) to a voluntary church order. Rack admits that Wesley’s commitments to supernatural, miraculous and providential occurrences are indeed stronger than many intellectuals of his time, but argues that these commitments in themselves are not enough to stamp him as anti-Enlightenment. This essay admirably summarizes a great deal of recent scholarship on this issue, and each of its points deserves to be examined in further detail.

Joseph Cunningham’s “Pneumatology Through Correspondence” also considers John Wesley and empiricism in its study of Wesley’s correspondence with “John Smith” on the issue of “perceptible inspiration”—the belief that “men and women of faith could perceive the operations of the Holy Spirit at work in the soul” (18). Smith finds Wesley’s contention that “the Spirit of God offered a direct testimony of faith to human beings” (19) to be puzzling. Cunningham uses Wesley’s resulting explanations as a window onto his pneumatology and religious epistemology, concluding that “Wesley’s theology of knowledge owes less to early-modern empiricism than many have supposed” (31) since empiricism must ultimately be rooted in sense perceptions of the visible world, while Wesley’s ideas about spiritual knowledge were not ultimately so rooted. Instead, Cunningham feels we can talk more fruitfully about Wesley and the Holy Spirit by thinking about the relationship between humans and the Spirit in terms of intimacy, participation, and relationship—calling us to consider Wesley’s *via salutis* as in fact a *via Spiritus*.

J. Russell Frazier asks us to think about John Wesley as an historian in “John Wesley’s Covenantal and Dispensational View of Salvation History.” He notes how Wesley firmly believed that the study of history “provided an explanation of the providence of God within history, displaying divine wisdom in God’s interactions with human beings” (34). Specifi-

cally, Wesley employed the metaphors of covenant and dispensation to understand salvation history and to argue for the significance of history “against the Calvinistic doctrine of divine decrees and morphology of conversion which seemed to undermine the value or significance of history” (54). Frazier argues that Wesley moved from covenantal towards dispensational language, but that this did not undermine his basic commitments to understanding God’s providential action in personal and general history, and to “the unity of the testaments and the consistency of the salvific activity of God in every age of history” (54).

Randall McElwain shifts the focus from John to Charles in “Biblical Language in the Hymns of Charles Wesley.” While considerable work has been done on John Wesley’s hermeneutics, McElwain laments that Charles has received considerably less attention, especially considering how much theology early Methodists learned from his hymns and how his hymns are “saturated with Scripture” (57). Wesley’s use of biblical language ranged from incidental allusions to a deliberate “intertextual” use of Scripture passages to full-blown sermonic exposition which takes up entire hymns. McElwain himself intends to develop these ideas further in his doctoral dissertation, and there is much here to spark discussion by others as well.

Finally, D. R. Wilson writes on “Afterlife and Vocation in the Ministry of Mary Bosanquet Fletcher.” While he admits there has been a “burgeoning interest in the religious experience and vocational work of early modern women” in recent decades, he thinks it has given insufficient attention to “the extent to which belief in the afterlife shaped women’s sense of vocation and provided ongoing agency” (73). He argues that, for Mary Fletcher and her compatriots, agency to act religiously in this life was initiated and sustained by ideas of surrender and self-transcendence—“undergirded” by a strongly felt eschatology, which for Fletcher was especially symbolized by the vision of Christ saying to her “Thou shall walk with me in White” (76). Wilson discusses further the biblical and prophetic images Fletcher used to express this sense of calling, and concludes that we need far more study on how such arguments for preaching authority fit into the eighteenth-century context and its concepts of family and church.

Overall, this represents an intriguing group of essays which raise many possibilities for future research. Further volumes in the series should add much to our understanding of Methodism in its social, cultural, and theological contexts.

Jones, Charles Edwin. *The Keswick Movement: A Comprehensive Guide*. Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow, 2007. 403 pages. ISBN -13: 978-0810858619.

Reviewed by Jennifer L. Woodruff Tait, Affiliate Professor of Church History, Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore, KY; Adjunct Professor of Church History, United Theological Seminary, Dayton, OH; Adjunct Professor of History, Huntington University, Huntington, IN.

Charles Jones's *Guide to the Study of the Holiness Movement* inaugurated ATLA's Bibliography series in 1974 and has been recognized as the go-to guide for holiness literature ever since. However, all good bibliographies, especially those that exist solely in print format, need updating and expanding, and what was once *one* guide has now become three; a two-volume guide to the Wesleyan Holiness movement (2005), this bibliography regarding Keswick expressions of holiness, and a guide to Pentecostalism as birthed from the holiness tradition (2008).

The Keswick holiness tradition originated in Bible teachings which occurred at conferences in Keswick, England, beginning in 1875. These focused on a "reading of Romans 7 which described the Holy Spirit's work as counteraction of sin (rather than of deliverance from sin as the Wesleyans said)" and was attractive to Keswick's largely Anglican and Reformed constituency (xv). While Keswick teaching has sometimes seemed more marginal to those of us who are planted firmly in the middle of the Wesleyan-Holiness movement, this is the expression most visible to outsiders through its influence on the fundamentalist and evangelical subculture in a line tracing through Dwight Moody to Billy Graham—as Joel Carpenter's excellent brief forward to the book makes clear. Therefore, this is an indispensable guide for anyone interested in understanding the boundary area between the holiness and evangelical movements.

The guide is divided into a number of parts: (1) historical works which "illumine the settings and intellectual climates in which the Keswick movement originated and spread and in which the works included were written" (xv); (2) "authoritative biography" of historical figures from all eras of church history revered by holiness people; (3) the movement itself as a whole, including "organizations and churches allied with it" and subdivided into categories such as doctrinal works, fiction, history, hymnals and songbooks, missions literature, juvenile literature, sermons, and tracts; (4) schools associated with the movement; and

(5) biographies of modern leaders in Keswick and Keswick-influenced evangelical circles.

In the computer age there is still value in printed bibliographies to give “structure and categorical logic” (as Carpenter notes) to the vast universe of potential primary and secondary sources on a topic. This book certainly fulfills that function and is particularly valuable in several other ways. One is in its calling out of the “evangelical hall of fame” represented by the Authoritative Bibliography. This eclectic group—everyone from Augustine, Richard Baxter, and Thomas à Kempis to David Brainerd, Luther, Spurgeon, the Wesleys, and Whitefield—has been covertly shaping, *and* their interpretation covertly shaped by, evangelical attitudes about theology and church history for generations. Secondly, the brief descriptions of various Keswick-related organizations, many quite obscure, and the listings of schools and modern leaders will prove invaluable to future graduate students lost in a sea of names, dates, and places. There may be other sources to turn to for the biographies of Billy Graham, Hannah Whitall Smith, Dwight L. Moody and the history of Wheaton College. Though you will find them all here, this may well be the place where researchers begin for information on the Donhavur Fellowship or Jonathan Blanchard. There are, as in any bibliography, a few puzzling omissions—e.g. if there is a biographical entry for Joel Carpenter, why is there none for George Marsden?

Because this is a printed bibliography, it does freeze the secondary literature at a particular point in time. Unfortunately, it does so at a point in time several years before the book’s publication, and the last few years have been particularly fruitful in secondary studies of evangelicalism and American culture. Additionally, there is little focus on interpretive essays and articles. The primary source sections of the book do point the reader to sermons and articles from official Keswick publications as well as books. Finally, one could wish that Jones had helped us separate the dross from the gold among online primary and secondary sources. Thus, the book will need to be supplemented with discerning further research. Still, it is a valuable addition to the bookshelf of any serious student of evangelicalism.

Oden, Thomas C. *Doctrinal Standards in the Wesleyan Tradition*. Revised Edition. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2008. 293 pages. ISBN 978-0-687-65111-5.

Reviewed by Robert Webster, Assistant Professor of United Methodist History, Doctrine and Polity, The University of the South, Sewanee, TN.

Thomas C. Oden, Henry Anson Buttz Professor Emeritus of Theology and Ethics at Drew University, has provided in his revised *Doctrinal Standards in the Wesleyan Tradition* a work originally published in 1988—an important evaluation of doctrinal history and theology for Wesleyan and non-Wesleyan scholars alike. Oden’s book is divided into three sections: (1) a brief historical introduction to the problems and issues surrounding the continued debate about doctrinal standards in the Methodist and Wesleyan communities of faith; (2) an historical and apologetic treatment of the Wesleyan doctrinal standards in both British and American ecclesiastical history and polity; and (3) an evaluation of the doctrinal documents in the Wesleyan family. Supplemented by this treatment, Oden also adds an outline of a syllabus for teaching the *Articles of Religion*.

Several years ago in an interview for a teaching position at a major Methodist seminary, I tried to make the argument that the break of American Methodists from its British roots was not a sharp and distinct one. Furthermore, I maintained that to a certain extent John Wesley was avidly interested in the development of Methodism in North America, despite some of his rhetoric. One of my interviewers was adamantly opposed to my suggestion. The argument of Oden’s essay, however, may provide some corroboration to my unsuccessful attempt to make the case to my former interviewer. In this work, the noted historian argues quite persuasively that preaching in the Methodist connection has been adjudicated throughout its history by referencing the *Sermons* and *Notes* along with the *Articles of Religion* (post-1784) and the *Confession* (post-1968).

What emerges in Oden’s assessment is an interesting and provocative treatment that demonstrates that the break between American and British Methodism was not as precise as scholars have often assumed. Commenting on the utilization of Wesley’s *Large Minutes*, along with other doctrinal documents, it is claimed: “There is no official record of any Conference between 1773 and 1808, or in any of Asbury’s journals or in the memoirs of other eyewitnesses (such as Lee, Whatcoat, or Bangs),

that suggests that these early doctrinal commitments were ever overtly revoked, formally amended, or even seriously contested” (27). Additionally, Oden draws on the subscription of 1781, the *Articles of Religion* of 1784, and the American *Discipline* of 1786 that was printed in England under the endorsement of John Wesley himself (38)!

Some might argue that this could be due to the domineering influence of John Wesley during his lifetime. However, this raises another important question. After the death of the grand architect of the Methodist movement in 1791, what became of the American Methodist church and its relationship to the doctrinal standards that Wesley had stipulated? Oden takes up this issue in chapters three and four of his book and demonstrates that, even after Wesley’s death, the doctrinal documents continued to hold authoritative place for Wesleyans and Methodists alike in the nineteenth century. The *Discipline* of 1805, for example, maintained that every American Methodist preacher spend no less than forty hours a month studying Scripture along with the *Notes* and select *Sermons*.

In part two of Oden’s book, he undertakes an interesting treatment of key doctrinal texts. Particularly insightful is the treatment of the *Sermons on Several Occasions* (*SOSO*). The preface to *SOSO* is partially reprinted here by Oden (102-105), who also correctly notes that it was reprinted in every edition of the *Sermons* published during Wesley’s lifetime. It provides a stirring exercise in homilectical theology and indicates how Wesley viewed sermonic form, which modern students sometimes find laborious and too logical, a splendid format for teaching the Methodist people the rudiments of Christian doctrine. Another productive feature in this section of the book is Oden’s course syllabus for the study of the *Articles of Religion*. Divided into ten different sessions, the articles are also separated into topical sequence and include suggested scriptural guidelines for each session, portions of the Coke-Asbury *Notes* on the Articles, succinct outlines, and possible discussion questions. This outline would be advantageous for teaching Methodist doctrine and theology at the seminary level or in a local church.

The only real criticism I would register regarding Oden’s book is his bibliography at the end. It tends to be overly cumbersome with its historical sequential order. A simple “primary” and “secondary” division I think would be more helpful. All in all, however, I found the book very helpful and useful at several junctures.

Kinghorn, Kenneth Cain. *The Story of Asbury Theological Seminary*. Lexington, Kentucky: Emeth Press, 2010. Hardback. 498 pages. ISBN: 978-1609470104

Reviewed by Laurence W. Wood, Professor of Systematic Theology/Wesley Studies, Asbury Theological Seminary.

Asbury Seminary has just released (October 2010) *The Story of Asbury Theological Seminary*, written by Kenneth Cain Kinghorn. In 1910 Henry Clay Morrison became president of Asbury College, and that year the school began a special course of study for those planning to enter full-time ministry. At that time, the college constructed a two-story frame dormitory solely for those ministerial students. These divinity students soon formed a Theologues Club, which grew impressively until the Seminary was officially launched in 1923. The year 1910 was a year of beginning, so in a sense this institutional history is a centennial volume.

The 498-page *Story of Asbury Theological Seminary* is a comprehensive chronicle of the seminary, carefully documented with endnotes following each of its twenty chapters. Kinghorn has written a faithful, factual, and fair account, devoid of his personal opinions to the degree that is possible. He says, “Although the chronicles of the Seminary are filled with numerous instances of God’s miraculous intervention, guidance, and blessing, this book is not intended to be hagiographic. The story of Asbury Theological Seminary includes misunderstandings, missteps, and mistakes—and this book does not avoid reporting them.”

Kinghorn’s writing style makes this real history read like a fascinating story, except there is nothing fictitious or unreal within these pages. Kinghorn carries the reader along with the inclusion of sagas of heroic drama, inspiring episodes, accounts of courage, examples of faith, and incidents of divine providence. An added feature of this book is its inclusion of more than 300 photographs. The appendices consist of a chronology, a list of faculty members from 1923 to 2010 (with their dates of service), an index of subjects, and an index of photographs.

The author closes the book with the following words: “Charles Wesley’s hymn—*And Can It Be That I Should Gain?*—is the Seminary’s official hymn. . . . Considering the challenges that the founders faced and the obstacles the generations have overcome, Asbury Seminary’s very existence and the global work of theological education in which it is engaged

are at once unlikely and astonishing. Indeed, one might ask, ‘And can it be?’ ”

Those interested in the history of Asbury Theological Seminary will find this book fascinating reading, although at times it becomes a bit tedious by giving too much attention to incidental details.

WESLEYAN THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Membership Application

Complete and return this form *with dues enclosed* to:

Samuel M. Powell
Wesleyan Theological Society
3900 Lomaland Drive
San Diego, CA 92106

Name _____

Present Position _____

Address _____

City _____ State/Prov. _____ Zip _____

EDUCATION—Schools attended beyond high school, with degrees earned and dates:

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

IF CURRENTLY A STUDENT, indicate school and current degree program:

MEMBERSHIP in religious or professional societies:

BOOKS OR SCHOLARLY ARTICLES RECENTLY PUBLISHED:

MAJOR RESEARCH COMPLETED OR IN PROGRESS: _____

FIELD(S) OF SPECIAL THEOLOGICAL OR RESEARCH INTEREST:

CHURCH AFFILIATION: _____

MEMBERSHIP REQUESTED (payment enclosed):

- | | |
|---|-------------------------------|
| Full member: | () Associate member—\$30 |
| () Annual income less than 22k—\$30 | () Institutional member—\$40 |
| () Annual income between 22k and 41,999—\$35 | () Retired member—\$15 |
| () Annual income above 42k—\$40 | () Student member \$10 |