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## EDITOR'S NOTES

The 47th Annual Meeting of the Wesleyan Theological Society will convene at Trevecca Nazarene University, Nashville, TN, March 2-3, 2012, with the program theme "On Faith(s): The Wesleyan Tradition and the World's Religions."

Our thanks goes to the thirteen article writers and eleven book reviewers who have made outstanding scholarly contributions to this present journal issue. The two lead articles were keynote addresses at the 2010 Arminianism Symposium convened at Andrews University in Michigan.

Particular congratulations goes to Dr. Howard A. Snyder (response from Snyder found here) and Dr. John Wigger (Oxford University Press book ad for his biography of Francis Asbury found here). These scholars are the winners of the Society's 2011 Lifetime Achievement Award and the Smith/Wynkoop Book Award respectively. In addition, Dr. Brent Peterson won the Outstanding Dissertation award and Major JoAnn Shade the Pastor-Preacher-Scholar award.

The identity of the officers of the Society and their email addresses are available in this issue. The WTS web site is [Wesley.nnu.edu/wts](http://Wesley.nnu.edu/wts). Available there is a searchable CD containing the full content of all issues of the *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 1966-2010, and much more information about the Society, past and present. The WTS officers to contact for particular needs you may have are:

1. If you wish to apply for society membership—Dr. Sam Powell
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Barry L. Callen, Editor  
October, 2011



# ARMINIANISM IS EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY<sup>1</sup>

by

Roger E. Olson

One of the most distressing criticisms of Arminian theology is that it is not evangelical. One does not have to read far into modern Calvinist literature to find this either implied or explicitly stated. One example is from influential Reformed theologian Michael Horton, editor of *Modern Reformation* magazine and one-time director of the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals.

## Arbitrary Definitions of “Evangelical”

The May/June, 1992 issue of *Modern Reformation* was dedicated to criticism of Arminianism. The issue’s title was simply “Arminianism.” The cover showed an imaginary ballot labeled “Important Election.” The question was “Will you be saved?” On the ballot God voted for the person and Satan voted against and at the bottom it declared “A TIE! Your vote must decide the issue” as if this illustrated Arminian theology. In fact, the imaginary ballot image was taken from a Southern Baptist evangelistic tract. The “tie-breaking vote” illustration originated with Southern Baptist preacher and theologian Herschel Hobbs.

Inside the special Arminianism issue of *Modern Reformation*, various Reformed theologians blast Arminianism as tantamount to the heresy

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<sup>1</sup>This article was presented at the symposium on “Arminianism and Adventism” convened at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, October 14-16, 2010.

of semi-Pelagianism. The best example of this misrepresentation, and of the claim that Arminianism cannot be authentically evangelical, is in Michael Horton's article "Evangelical Arminians" that is subtitled "Torn between two systems, evangelical Christians must make a choice." Near the end, Horton declares his thesis that "An evangelical cannot be an Arminian any more than an evangelical can be a Roman Catholic" (18). Why did Horton and why do many other Reformed critics of Arminianism exclude it from evangelical theology?

Horton's reasons are representative of many other Reformed critics of Arminianism. I know this because I was invited to participate in a meeting of the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals in Colorado Springs in 2001. I was their token Arminian brought in to explain why I think Arminian theology can be authentically evangelical. The discussions held over those two days revealed clearly that Horton's article nicely sums up the main line of thinking about this matter among at least some Reformed theologians.

Horton defines "evangelical" as adherence to the Reformation tenets of salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, because of Christ alone (15). He admits that before 1520, the year in which Luther was excommunicated and therefore the date of the beginning of the Protestant Reformation, "evangelical" had a different meaning. It referred to anyone who had a sincere love for Christ and a zeal for missions. After 1520, however, Horton claims, "an evangelical was a person committed to the sufficiency of scripture, the priesthood of all believers, the total lostness of humans, the sole mediation of Christ, the gracious efficacy and finality of God's redemptive work in Christ through election, propitiation, calling and keeping" (15). Ultimately, according to Horton, authentic evangelical faith does not exist without what he regards as the distinctive Reformation doctrines of *simul justus et peccator*—"simultaneously justified and sinful" and monergism—unconditional election and irresistible grace. He concludes "[h]istorically speaking, those who do not affirm those doctrines are, by virtue of the law of non-contradiction, not evangelicals" (16).

I would like to suggest that Horton has simply committed an error of thought and argument. He has defined a label in such a way as to exclude people he does not want in his camp or party. In other words, his claim that these doctrines are necessary to authentic evangelical faith since 1520 is a mere assertion; he cannot prove it or even support it except to say that



he and his peers have always used the label this way. That others, such as Wesleyans and Anabaptists, have defined it differently is simply dismissed as irrelevant. In fact, one can peruse the major historical treatises about the history and theology of the evangelical movement and not find this strict limitation to all the Reformation principles to which Horton appeals.

For example, David Bebbington and Mark Noll, two widely acknowledged experts on the history and character of the evangelical movement, nowhere limit evangelical theology to Horton's doctrinal hallmarks. Their InterVarsity Press series *A History of Evangelicalism* traces the movement back to the Great Awakening with Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield, and the Wesley brothers as its progenitors. Obviously, the Wesleys did not embrace all of Horton's crucial doctrines. And neither have many evangelicals since the Great Awakening.

In his introductory article to the special Arminianism issue of *Modern Reformation*, Horton equates Arminianism with the ancient heresy of semi-Pelagianism which places the *initium fidei* in the sinner rather than in God and his grace (4). And he says that for Arminianism man's contribution to salvation becomes central (6). He writes that "Evangelicalism stands or falls with Calvinism" (10) and claims that Arminianism denies the Reformation belief that faith is a gift (16). Horton's argument can be summed up by his assertion that monergism, belief that God alone saves without any cooperation by the person being saved, is necessary for authentic evangelicalism (17).

Horton and others like him reveal two things by these statements. First, they arbitrarily pre-define evangelicalism their way so as to exclude adherents of theologies they don't like, and second, they clearly have not read Arminius or any true, classical Arminian thinkers. They may have read Charles Finney and misused him as a true representative of classical Arminianism, and they may have read B. B. Warfield's critical review of 19<sup>th</sup>-century Methodist theologian John Miley's *Systematic Theology*, but they cannot have read Arminius or Wesley or Fletcher or Watson or Pope or Summers or Wiley or Oden. If they had, they would know that classical Arminians *all* believe that salvation is all of grace and by faith alone.

Without accepting Horton's narrow definition of evangelicalism, I will now demonstrate that Arminius, the touchstone of Arminian theology, and later Arminian theologians affirmed the core soteriological tenets of the Reformation. Whether one must affirm them to be authentically

evangelical I'll leave to others to decide. For my purposes, I will simply show that Arminius and his faithful followers of the past and present have always embraced salvation by grace alone through faith alone apart from works or merit on the part of the person being saved. This seems to be the central fear of critics such as Horton—that Arminianism somehow attributes merit to the human person being saved so that salvation is not a free gift of God's grace alone acquired through faith alone. Of course, I cannot satisfy him or other Reformed critics insofar as they simply, arbitrarily insist that authentic evangelicalism must include belief in strict monergism. But I consider that claim historically inaccurate and unsupportable.

For me, following Bebbington and Noll and a host of other scholars of the evangelical movement such as Marsden, Carpenter, Stone, Collins, Bloesch, Balmer, and McGrath, authentic evangelicalism necessarily includes a conversional soteriology that emphasizes salvation as regeneration as well as justification and rejects works as any foundation for it. Evangelicalism centers around the unconditional good news that anyone who throws himself or herself on the mercy of God through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ and his atoning death on the cross, leaving behind all claims to meritorious righteousness, is saved. This classical Arminianism teaches and therefore is a form of evangelicalism.

### **Arminius on Salvation**

Some critics accuse Arminianism of implicitly denying this soteriology. So I will begin my refutation with appeal to Arminius himself. Then I will proceed to the Remonstrants such as Simon Episcopius and Philip Limborch and then to John Wesley and his followers, the 19<sup>th</sup> century Methodist theologians mentioned above, and conclude with appeal to 20<sup>th</sup> century Arminian theologians such as H. Orton Wiley and Thomas Oden.

What did Jacob Arminius himself say about salvation? He went out of his way to affirm in every way possible its nature as sheer gift not dependent on good works or merits—except the merits of Christ. Giving the lie to claims that he was a Pelagian or semi-Pelagian, making salvation partly dependent on good works or on human initiative (e.g., by exercising a good will toward God apart from supernatural assisting grace), Arminius strongly affirmed that regeneration precedes anything good in man and that grace is the beginning and continuance of all good that a person has or does.

In his “A Declaration of Sentiments” delivered to the Lords of the States of Holland less than one year before his death in 1609, Arminius said:

[i]n his lapsed and sinful state, man is not capable, of and by himself, either to think, to will, or to do that which is really good; but it is necessary for him to be regenerated and renewed in his intellect, affections or will, and in all his powers, by God in Christ through the Holy Spirit, that he may be qualified rightly to understand, esteem, consider, will, and perform whatever is truly good. When he is made a partaker of this regeneration or renovation, I consider that, since he is delivered from sin, he is capable of thinking, willing, and doing that which is good, but yet not without the continued aids of Divine grace (*The Works of James Arminius*, Volume I, 659).

Shortly after that he added:

I ascribe to grace the commencement, the continuance and the consummation of all good—and to such an extent do I carry its influence, that a man, though already regenerate, can neither conceive, will nor do any good at all, nor resists any evil temptation, *without this preventing and exciting, this following and co-operating grace*. From this statement it will clearly appear, that I am by no means injurious or unjust to grace, by attributing, as it is reported of me, too much to man’s free-will . . . (Ibid., 664).

Immediately after this statement, Arminius went on to deny irresistible grace. This, he thought, was the nub of the disagreement between him and Gomarus and the other Calvinists who were persecuting him. With them, however, he agreed entirely that salvation is all of grace and not at all based on any goodness or merit or even autonomous decision or choice of the person being saved.

Arminius’ affirmation that regeneration precedes even the first movement of the will toward God may surprise even many Arminians. It is usually thought that only Calvinists believe that regeneration precedes conversion. However, as later Arminians explain, perhaps better than Arminius himself did, the regeneration of which the Dutch theologian here spoke is not complete regeneration but a partial regeneration in which the bondage of the will to sin is released so that the sinner can for

the first time respond freely to God's offer of mercy in Jesus Christ. This is, of course, prevenient grace—an Arminian doctrine much neglected, misunderstood and sometimes maligned by Reformed critics of Arminianism. It is a, if not *the*, distinctive doctrine of Arminian theology that sets it apart from all forms of monergistic soteriology. For Arminius, at least, this prevenient grace of God, which is not merely common grace but supernatural grace, is not automatically salvific, but it is essential to salvation. Without it, the fallen human person could never exercise a good will toward God.

In virtually every essay answering his critics, Arminius extolled the power and necessity of prevenient grace for salvation. In his "Letter Addressed to Hippolytus A Collibus" he wrote:

Free Will is unable to begin or to perfect any true and spiritual good, without Grace. That it might not be said, like Pelagius, to practice delusion with regard to the word "Grace," I mean by it that which is the Grace of Christ and which belongs to regeneration: I affirm, therefore, that this grace is simply and absolutely necessary for the illumination of the mind, the due ordering of the affections, and the inclination of the will to that which is good: It is this grace which operates on the mind, the affections, and the will; which infuses good thoughts into the mind, inspires good desires into the affections, and bends the will to carry into execution good thoughts and good desires. This grace...goes before, accompanies, and follows; it excites, assists, operates that we will, and cooperates lest we will in vain. It averts temptations, assists and grants succour in the midst of temptations, sustains man against the flesh, the world and Satan, and in this great contest grants to man the enjoyment of the victory. It raises up again those who are conquered and have fallen, establishes and supplies them with new strength, and renders them more cautious. This grace commences salvation, promotes it, and perfects and consummates it (*Works, Volume II*, 700).

A few sentences later, Arminius wrote: "That teacher obtains my highest approbation who ascribes as much as possible to Divine Grace; provided he so pleads the cause of Grace, as not to inflict an injury on the Justice of God, and not to take away *the free will to that which is evil*" (Ibid., 700-701).

In other words, Arminius believed and taught that the source of all good is God and his grace; nothing spiritually worthy arises from the human person alone—not even the first inclination of the mind or heart toward God. God “bends the will” to the good, but not irresistibly. And God does not take away the person’s freedom to resist God’s grace. In essence, then, what Arminius was saying is that the only thing the human person does in salvation is *not resist the grace of God*. Everything else is God’s work alone and human non-resistance to God’s grace can hardly be called a “work.” It certainly cannot be claimed as meritorious.

And yet, some critics will claim that it is meritorious. A common saying among Reformed critics of Arminianism is that it makes the human decision not to resist the grace of God “the decisive factor in salvation,” thus robbing salvation of its entirely gracious character. This, of course, is sheer folly. Suppose that critic gave a check for \$1,000 to a student to save him from starvation and homelessness. Suppose then that the student went around claiming that by endorsing the check and depositing it in his account he actually earned part of the money so that it was not a sheer gift. Suppose further that, when challenged, the student said, “Well, I know of others who were offered money and didn’t accept it, so I must be better than them.” Who would consider the student anything other than a stupid, ungrateful wretch? Surely the Calvinist critic would so consider him. So why do Calvinist critics of Arminianism continue to claim that the sheer decision to not resist the grace of God makes God’s salvation something less than a gift? It boggles the mind.

In order to put to rest any notion that Arminius denied the sheer graciousness of salvation or somehow fell short of the fullness of Reformation belief in justification by grace alone through faith alone, note that he adamantly denied any merits in human persons and affirmed even faith as a gift. He also affirmed justification as the imputation of righteousness on the basis of faith alone as merely the instrumental and not effectual cause of justification. In other words, he affirmed everything the critics demand except their version of monergism—unconditional election and irresistible grace.

With regard to merits and the means of the blessings of salvation, Arminius wrote that “God destines these means to no persons on account of or according to their own merits, but through mere grace alone: And he denies them to no one except justly on account of previous transgressions” (*Works, Volume II*, 395). With regard to justification, he expressed

full agreement with the Reformed and Protestant churches' doctrines, saying: "I am not conscious to myself, of having taught or entertained any other sentiment concerning *the justification of man before God*, than those which are held unanimously by the Reformed and Protestant Churches, and which are in complete agreement with their expressed opinions" (*Works, Volume II*, 695).

Lest anyone doubt, Arminius laid out his doctrine of justification clearly and unequivocally: "I believe that sinners are accounted righteous solely by the obedience of Christ; and that the righteousness of Christ is the only meritorious cause on account of which God pardons the sins of believers and reckons them as righteous as if they had perfectly fulfilled the law" (*Ibid.*, 700). What about faith? Arminius had a motto that he frequently stated and that was quoted by most of his followers, especially the 19<sup>th</sup>-century Methodist Arminian theologians: "To a man who believes Faith is imputed for righteousness through grace" (*Ibid.*). To those who questioned then or question now his meaning, he wrote of Calvin's doctrine of justification as imputed righteousness by faith alone that "[m]y opinion is not so widely different from his as to prevent me from employing the signature of my own hand in subscribing to those things which he has delivered on this subject, in the Third Book of his *Institutes*; this I am prepared to do at any time, and to give them my full approval" (*Ibid.*).

Some critics, such as Horton, have accused Arminius and his followers of turning faith into a good work and teaching by this motto, "faith imputed for righteousness," that faith is a substitute for righteousness. Nothing could be further from Arminius' meaning. That is demonstrated clearly by the context quoted above. Clearly, for Arminius, faith is no substitute for righteousness; it is merely the instrumental means or "proximate cause" of obtaining the imputation of Christ's righteousness. Christ's righteousness is the "meritorious cause of justification" and that which is imputed to the repentant sinner on account of his or her faith (*Works, Volume II*, 701-701). Furthermore, Arminius argued that faith is a gift of God *as well as* an act of the believer; his teaching is a classical example of "both/and" thinking in theology. Call it a paradox, if you will, but clearly Arminius held faith to be *both* a gift and a human act. What he wanted to avoid by calling it a gift is any hint that it is a good work that merits salvation; what he wanted to avoid by calling it an act of the believer is any hint that the God-human relationship is an impersonal or mechanical one. So,

on the one hand, according to Arminius, “Faith is *the requirement of God, and the act of the believer when he answers the requirement*” (Ibid., 49-50). On the other hand, “Faith is the gift of God, which is conferred on those only whom He hath chosen to this—that they may hear the word of God, and be made partakers of the Holy Spirit” (Ibid., 67).

Normally people think that only Calvinists teach that faith is a gift of God; allegedly all others, including Catholics and Arminians, believe faith is a work of man that partially merits salvation. This is simply false. Arminius, at least, believed faith to be *both* a gift of God *and* an act of man in response to prevenient grace. How can this paradox be relieved? Is it a sheer contradiction? I think not. What Arminius meant is that God offers saving faith to a sinner under the influence of prevenient grace and the sinner, under that influence, allows himself to receive the gift. The reception of the gift is also called “faith.” But it is properly the empty receiving of the gift of faith which is confidence in God’s grace through the cross of Christ to the exclusion of one’s own righteousness. At the moment a person receives that gift of faith by the act of faith, he or she receives the imputation of righteousness. The righteousness imputed is Christ’s (Ibid., 701). So, when Arminius says that “faith is imputed for righteousness,” he is not making a work out of faith; he is simply saying that faith is the condition of the imputation of righteousness. But we must understand that for Arminius even the condition is supplied by God. All the person being saved does is freely receive it, which is an act that can also properly be called “faith.” The “faith that saves,” however, is a gift of God passively received.

What about good works? Did Arminius leave out good works entirely? Was he an antinomian as some accused Calvinists of being? Naturally, he did not want to emphasize good works because he was wrongly accused of making them a condition of salvation. However, he often mentioned good works as a necessary concomitant of faith. For example, in his “Letter Addressed to Hypollitus A Collibus,” he stated that “Faith, and faith only (although there is no faith alone without good works) is imputed for righteousness.” In other words, with Luther Arminius affirmed that true faith is always accompanied by good works, but good works are not part of faith or a condition of justification.

I think that Arminius’ true soteriology would come as quite a shock to many people—both Reformed critics and uninformed Arminians. It is thoroughly evangelical in the sense of attributing all of salvation entirely

to God and his grace and requiring nothing of the human person except passive reception of the gifts of grace. And it is thoroughly Protestant in the sense of viewing justification as the gracious imputation of Christ's righteousness on account of faith alone. Whether Arminius would affirm the *simul justus et peccator* is open to debate, but I think he would.

### The Arminians after Arminius

What about Arminians after Arminius? Did the Remonstrance and Wesley and the 19<sup>th</sup>-century Methodist theologians carry on Arminius' strong affirmation of salvation by grace alone through faith alone because of Christ alone? I believe a strong case can be made that they did, with some slight alterations of emphasis.

In 1621 Arminius' main disciple, Simon Episcopius, wrote a document called "Confession or Declaration of the Remonstrant Pastors" which is commonly known as "The Arminian Confession of 1621." Interestingly, the self-proclaimed "Calvinist pastor of a Reformed baptistic church" who edited and translated the Confession for new publication in the Princeton Theological Monograph Series in 2005 writes this in the Introduction: "[i]f one allows history to define labels, neither Arminius nor the Remonstrants were semi-Pelagian" (*The Arminian Confession of 1621* [Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2005], vi). What do we find in this early Remonstrant Confession about grace and faith? Echoing Arminius, the Confession says:

We think therefore that the grace of God is the beginning, progress and completion of all good, so that not even a regenerate man himself can, without this preceding or preventing, exciting, following and cooperating grace, think, will, or finish any good thing to be saved, much less resist any attractions and temptations to evil. Thus faith, conversion, and all good works, and all godly and saving actions which are able to be thought, are to be ascribed solidly to the grace of God in Christ as their principal and primary cause (*Ibid.*, 108).

What about faith? Is it a work that merits salvation as critics of Arminianism say? Hardly. According to the Confession, "Man...does not have saving faith from himself, nor is he regenerated or converted by the powers of his own free will, seeing that in the state of sin he cannot of himself or by himself either think or will or do anything that is good enough to be saved" (*Ibid.*, 107). The Confession goes on to say, with Arminius, that



the sinner must first be regenerated by God in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit before he or she can even will anything that is savingly good (Ibid., 107-108).

What about justification? Does it require any good works? Or is it wholly and exclusively by grace alone through faith alone? Here is what the Confession says:

Justification is a merciful, gracious and indeed full remission of all guilt before God to truly repenting and believing sinners, through and because of Jesus Christ, apprehended by true faith, indeed, even more, [it is] the liberal and bountiful imputation of faith for righteousness. For indeed in the judgment of God we cannot obtain to it except by the pure grace of God and only by faith in Jesus Christ . . . without any merit of our own works (Ibid., 111).

What more do critics of Arminianism want? Well, I suppose they want a clear and unequivocal affirmation of monergistic grace, but the evangel only requires this—the confession that salvation is a gift and not of works lest anyone should boast (Ephesians 2:8-9). The Arminian Confession goes so far as to say, with Arminius, that faith is a gift and that regeneration must precede conversion and that justification is without merit a pure imputation of righteousness on account of faith alone.

A case can be made that Arminianism began to take a wrong path with Episcopius's disciple and nephew Philip Limborch whose system of theology minimized human depravity and downplayed the supernatural aspect of prevenient grace. What actually happened, however, was not that Arminianism took a wrong path but that it split into two paths—what theologian Alan P. F. Sell calls “Arminianism of the head” and “Arminianism of the heart.” Limborch and his late Remonstrant followers headed toward rationalism and deism; John Wesley and his followers preserved the true spirit of evangelical Arminianism. Nevertheless, even Limborch affirmed that God, not man, is the primary cause of both repentance and faith, even though the person being saved must “concur” with the divine operation of grace (*A Complete System, or, Body of Divinity*, trans., William Jones [London: John Darby, 1713], 531). Of justification Limborch wrote that “[i]t denotes a declaration of righteousness, that is, absolving a man from guilt, and treating him as one that is righteous” (Ibid., 835). Also, in justification, “[a] man is esteemed by God as righteous upon account of his faith” (Ibid., 836).

Finally, Limborch's full definition of justification is as follows: "[j]ustification is the merciful and gracious act of God, whereby he fully absolves from all guilt the truly penitent and believing soul, through and for the sake of Christ apprehended by a true faith, or gratuitously remits sins upon account of faith in Jesus Christ, and graciously imputes that faith for righteousness" (Ibid., 836). Limborch's description of the synergism of salvation was not as subtle or paradoxical as Arminius's and that is where he begins to get into trouble as an evangelical. In some places he emphasized the human side of the synergism, calling faith an "act of obedience," and he denied that the righteousness imputed to the believer is Christ's (Ibid., 838 and 837 respectively). Nevertheless, he clearly rejected any idea of human merit in faith and taught that salvation is a free gift of grace received by faith alone.

### **The Stance of John Wesley**

John Wesley was a true Arminian in spite of what some Calvinists claim. One notable Reformed theologian has called him a "confused Calvinist"—probably because of his strong belief in human depravity apart from supernatural grace and because of his strong emphasis on grace. Wesley himself said many times that his theology was "on the very edge of Calvinism" or a "hair's breadth from Calvinism." In his 1994 book *John Wesley's Scriptural Christianity*, Thomas Oden quotes from Wesley's "Minutes of 1745."

Question 23. Wherein may we come to the very edge of Calvinism?

Answer. (1.) In ascribing all good to the free grace of God. (2.) In denying all natural free will, and all power antecedent to grace. And (3.) In excluding all merit from man, even for what he has or does by the grace of God (253).

Wesley's Arminianism is evident in his strong rejection of unconditional election and irresistible grace—see his sermons "Predestination Calmly Considered" and "Free Grace"—and in his affirmation of synergism in salvation. What did he mean by synergism—a dirty word to Calvinists? Wesley explicitly rejected semi-Pelagianist synergism and defined his synergism this way (as paraphrased by Oden):

By synergism we do not imply that fallen freedom retains a natural capacity to reach out and take the initiative and establish a restored relationship with God. Rather by synergism we

mean that human freedom by grace is being enabled to cooperative interactively with God's saving plan. It is the coworking by grace of human willing with the divine willing (Ibid., 269).

This is what I call "evangelical synergism" as opposed to semi-Pelagian or Roman Catholic synergism.

Some Calvinist critics accuse Wesley of attributing a part of salvation to human effort in a way based on human merit rather than solely on grace. This is Horton's treatment (or one should say "mistreatment") of Wesley in his article "Evangelical Arminians." Nothing could be farther from the truth. Hear Wesley on salvation:

[i]t is free in all to whom it is given. It does not depend on any power or merit in man; no, not in any degree, neither in whole, nor in part. It does not in any wise depend either on the good works or righteousness of the receiver; not on anything he has done, or anything he is. It does not depend on his good tempers, or good desires, or good purposes and intentions; for all these flow from the free grace of God ("Free Grace" in *The Works of John Wesley, Volume 3*, ed., Albert Outler [Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1986], 545).

Also, Wesley wrote that "Whatever good is in man, or is done by man, God is the author and doer of it." What more can anyone ask of an evangelical theologian? Contrary to what Horton and other critics imply, Wesley attributed everything in salvation to God alone.

What about justification and faith? Wesley preached two sermons entitled "Salvation by Faith" and "Justification by Faith" in which he delivered as strong an account of justification by grace alone through faith alone as possible. In the former sermon he even declared all good works "unholy and sinful" (*John Wesley: The Best from All His Works*, abridged and edited by Stephen Rost [Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1989], 91). Of course, he meant good works insofar as they are compared with Christ's righteousness and viewed as a cause of salvation, which they are not and cannot be. In the same sermon Wesley declared that "[n]one can trust in the merits of Christ till he has utterly renounced his own" (Ibid., 99). He also preached that in salvation God does all so that he "leaveth us nothing whereof to glory" (Ibid., 98).

So what is justification according to Wesley? Here he departed somewhat from Arminius and other Arminians in asserting that justifica-

tion is *not* an imputation of Christ's righteousness to the sinner, which Wesley considered a legal fiction and therefore unworthy of God. He defined justification as "[p]ardon, the forgiveness of sins" (Ibid., 182). However, he clearly distinguished it from sanctification: "[i]t is not the being made actually just and righteous. This is sanctification..." (Ibid., 181). So, for Wesley, justification is not *forensically* imputed righteousness, but neither is it, as in Roman Catholic theology, being made righteous inwardly. It is the total and complete forgiveness of sins for the sake of Christ and his atoning death on account of faith alone. Wesley preached:

Faith . . . is the *necessary* condition of justification. Yea, and the *only necessary* condition thereof. . . . [t]he very moment God giveth faith (for *it is the gift of God*) to the "ungodly" that "worketh not," that "faith is counted to him for righteousness." He hath no righteousness at all antecedent to this, not so much as negative righteousness, or innocence. But "faith is imputed to him for righteousness" the very moment that he believeth. Not that God...thinketh him to be what he is not. But as "he made Christ to be sin for us," that is, treated him as a sinner, punishing him for our sins; so he counteth us righteous from the time we believe in him. That is, he doth not punish us for our sins,        yea, treats us as though we were guiltless and righteous (Ibid., 188).

I suggest that what Wesley is saying is that the righteousness we have in justification, on account of faith only and by God's grace alone, is not Christ's righteousness imputed to us but God's *considering us as if we were righteous*. That is, in justification God treats us as if we were righteous while knowing we are not. Wesley was apparently afraid that the doctrine of the imputation of Christ's righteousness to us would lead inevitably to antinomianism. Admittedly, Reformed folks will never be satisfied with this, but the point is that Wesley affirmed the forgiveness of sins in which we are accounted righteous by God to be wholly and exclusively a gift. Even faith, he said, is a gift of God and not a meritorious work. I think Wesley *could have* affirmed the doctrine of imputed righteousness, even the imputation of Christ's righteousness, if he had not been so nervous about antinomianism and if he had not been afraid of implying that God deceives himself about what we actually are.

### 19<sup>th</sup>-Century Arminian Methodist Theologians

What about the 19<sup>th</sup>-century Arminian Methodist theologians—Wesley’s main interpreters and the main conveyors of evangelical Arminianism in that century? Were they evangelical in their soteriology? That is, did they remain faithful to the great Reformation truth of *sola gratia et fides*? I believe they did. They consistently rejected salvation by works and human merit as having any role in salvation. Their version of the gospel of Jesus Christ was genuinely good news—that God loves all people, wants all to be saved, has freely provided salvation for everyone, and requires nothing but faith for salvation.

One of the earliest and most influential of these 19<sup>th</sup>-century Arminian theologians was Richard Watson whose *Theological Institutes* was published in 1851. Another was William Burton Pope who wrote *A Compendium of Christian Theology* and died in 1903. Another was Thomas O. Summers, author of *Systematic Theology: A Complete Body of Wesleyan Arminian Divinity* published in 1888. Finally, there was John Miley who wrote *Systematic Theology* in 1893. Together these four represent the cream of the Arminian crop between Wesley and the twentieth century. They largely handed on the Arminian faith. I will select quotes from some of them on the crucial subjects of evangelical soteriology. They largely agree on these matters; their differences are minor. One area of disagreement among them is the atonement; some of them believed in the penal substitution theory, with Wesley himself, and some of them believed in the governmental theory with Arminius’ follower Hugo Grotius. On the major soteriological doctrines, however, they were largely agreed.

First, then, consider the necessity of supernatural grace for anything spiritually good in the human person, including even a first inclination toward God. Watson: “It is not denied, that the will, in its purely natural state, and independent of all grace communicated to man through Christ, can incline only to evil” (*Institutes, Volume II*, 438). According to him, even repentance is a gift of God; sinful men are not capable of repentance (*Ibid.*, 99). Watson emphasized that even repentance does not save; only the death of Christ saves and restores the lost relationship with God. Finally, Watson writes that “[s]acred is the doctrine to be held, that no person can repent or truly believe except under the influence of the Spirit of God; and that we have no ground for boasting in ourselves, but that all the glory of our salvation, commenced and consummated, is to be given to God alone, as the result of the freeness and riches of his grace” (*Ibid.*, 447).

William Burton Pope declared in his *Compendium* the “inability of man to do what is good” apart from renewing grace (*Volume II*, 65, 67). Also, “The natural man . . . is without the power even to co-operate with Divine influence. The co-operation with grace is of grace. Thus it keeps itself for ever safe from Pelagianism and semi-Pelagianism” (80). With regard to grace, Pope wrote that “It is the sole, efficient cause of all spiritual good in man: of the beginning, continuance, and consummation of religion in the human soul. The manifestation of Divine influence which precedes the full regenerate life receives no special name in Scripture; but it is so described as to warrant the designation usually given it of Preventient Grace” (359). Also, “[t]he salvation of man is altogether of grace” (p. 361) and “The Grace of God and the human will are co-operant, but not on equal terms. Grace has the pre-eminence . . .” (364).

What about Thomas O. Summers? He strongly defended the doctrine of inherited total depravity, firmly rejecting Pelagianism and semi-Pelagianism. According to him, “Apart from grace the will is bad, because the man’s nature is so bad that of himself he cannot choose that which is right” (*Systematic Theology, Volume I*, 64-65). Also, “It is impossible for a man in this [natural] state to will and to do works pleasant and acceptable to God” (*Ibid.*, 68). Finally, he affirmed that “[n]oone can repent or believe without the aid of God’s grace...” (*Ibid.*, 120).

Our final 19<sup>th</sup>-century witness to Arminianism’s emphasis on the priority of grace is John Miley, who said of man’s “native depravity,” “This is a state of alienage from the true spiritual life, and utterly without fitness for a state of holy blessedness. Nor have we any power of self-redemption” (*Systematic Theology*, 529). Miley argued that the power of choice in spiritual matters is a “gracious endowment” and not a natural capacity, and that moral regeneration is entirely a work of the divine Spirit (*Ibid.*, 305). Only with the help of the Holy Spirit can a person choose to accept God’s mercy.

What about justification and faith? Did the 19<sup>th</sup>-century Arminians believe, like Arminius and Wesley before them, that justification is entirely a work of grace through faith without meritorious works? Did they believe righteousness is imputed and not imparted or infused? Richard Watson affirmed that “Justification by faith alone is . . . clearly the doctrine of the Scriptures” (*Theological Institutes, Volume II*, 246). He also affirmed faith as the sole condition for justification to the exclusion of virtue or good works (*Ibid.*, 253) and taught that sanctification cannot

be a formal cause of justification (Ibid., 251). As for imputation of righteousness, Watson claimed the motto “the imputation of faith for righteousness” and explained it thus: “The Scriptural doctrine is . . . that the death of Christ is accepted in the place of our personal punishment, on condition of our faith in him; and, that when faith in him is actually exerted, then comes in, on the part of God, the act of imputing, or reckoning righteousness to us” (Ibid., 242).

William Burton Pope wrote that “[j]ustification is declaratory and altogether of grace” (*Compendium, Volume II*, 411) and faith is its sole instrumental cause, while Christ’s obedience is its sole meritorious cause. The Holy Spirit is justification’s sole efficient cause (Ibid., 414). About justification he said: “Justification is the Divine judicial act which applies to the sinner, believing in Christ, the benefit of the Atonement, delivering him from condemnation of his sin, introducing him into a state of favour, and treating him as a righteous person. . . . [i]t is the imputed character of justification which regulates the New Testament use of the word” (Ibid., 407).

Thomas Summers unequivocally affirmed justification by grace through faith alone, as well as justification’s declaratory nature and the imputed nature of righteousness. “In justification we are *accounted* , *accepted*—dealt with—as if we were righteous, just as pardoned culprits, who are not by their pardon made innocent, are dealt with as if they were not criminals” (*Systematic Theology, Volume I*, 121).

John Miley also affirmed justification by grace through faith alone: “The imputation of faith for righteousness is...easily understood. It means simply that faith is accepted [by God] as the condition of justification or the remission of sin, whereby the believing sinner is set right with God” (*Systematic Theology, Volume I*, 320). He taught that faith as trust is the only condition of justification (Ibid., 323) and that justification requires no interior moral change (Ibid., 312). According to him, justification is at once complete the moment the believing sinner exercises faith in Christ—it sets him right with God as if he had never sinned (Ibid., 313).

I could go on and offer similar quotations and arguments from 20<sup>th</sup>-century Arminians such as H. Orton Wiley, the leading 20<sup>th</sup> century Nazarene theologian, and Thomas Oden, a contemporary evangelical Methodist theologian. Time and space prevent it. Suffice it to say that both teach unequivocally that salvation is a sheer gift of God’s grace given apart from any human merit, received by faith alone and resulting in the imputation of righteousness.

### What More Do Reformed Critics Want?

So what more do Reformed critics of Arminianism want? First, they want affirmation of monergistic grace—something they require not because it is clearly taught in Scripture but because they think it is logically necessary for salvation *sola gratia et fides*. Of course, it isn't. Second, they want affirmation of justification as the imputation of Christ's active and passive obedience to the sinner. Arminians have been reluctant to offer that because it is not specifically taught in Scripture and because it could easily result in antinomianism. Finally, Calvinists want a clear and unequivocal affirmation of the *simul justus et peccator*—something many Arminians are reluctant to offer because it implies a static salvation that ignores the transforming power of the Holy Spirit in sanctification.

Arminians affirm everything necessary for a fully evangelical soteriology; Calvinists require more. Why? One wonders if it is because they are over reacting to the Roman Catholic doctrine of salvation that includes salvation by means of human merit and confuses justification with sanctification? I suspect that is the case. But it is always wrong to over react, and the Calvinist over reaction of strict monergism suffers a fate as bad or worse than its opposite. It makes salvation a mechanical process in which those being saved are puppets rather than free partners in a relationship.



# SOTERIOLOGICAL SYNERGISM AND ITS SURROUNDING SEDUCTIONS<sup>1</sup>

by

Barry L. Callen

My title features alliterative overkill, just as many presentations of our subject suffer from serious imbalances. This is my attempt at proper balance. Given the radical consequences of the fall into sin, human salvation can only be the result of God's unmerited grace extended on our behalf. But—and here is the key question—"Is salvation also, in some important sense, *our work*?" Is the clearly unconditional somehow also to be conditioned? How do we avoid pitfalls lurking on all sides of such a theological minefield? Is it really the case that, as biblically revealed, a proper understanding of salvation requires a necessary *synergism*—and then a careful avoidance of its surrounding seductions? My answer is, "Yes."

In this same journal issue, Roger Olson notes that Reformed critics of both Arminianism and John Wesley usually insist on a clear statement of "*monoergistic* grace" in order to qualify one as truly "Reformed" and "Evangelical." He judges such an insistence purely arbitrary on the part of the critics and instead affirms an "*evangelical synergism*." My argument and conclusion will also reject the Reformed critics, generally echo Olson, and explore more broadly the importance of a well-crafted "soteriological *synergism*" in spite of the surrounding seductions.

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<sup>1</sup>This article was presented at the symposium on "Arminianism and Adventism" convened at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, October 14-16, 2010.

## A Personal Context

I was reared in a very Arminian/Wesleyan-oriented church tradition. I doubt that those good people in my home church had ever heard the word “Arminian” or could have named the centuries in which John Calvin and John Wesley lived. Regardless of such unawareness, they held a sophisticated synergism in relation to salvation, maintaining dual and simultaneous assumptions that were not seen as in conflict, but rather functioning together as a pivotal paradox of Christian belief. Humans have free will and the responsibility of activating their own salvation by receiving the unmerited divine gift of redemption through heart-felt repentance of sins. To be sure, the available salvation comes only from God’s *entirely* unmerited grace, but it nonetheless is activated by repentant humans who “work,” willingly respond to the loving work of God’s Spirit within them.

This synergistic duality, God alone, although activated by the conscious actions of humans, was the theological air we breathed. But then I found my way to Geneva College where high Calvinism was taken for granted. These Reformed Presbyterians knew the word “Arminian” and relegated it to their list of seductive Christian heresies. I soon began to sense keenly the tension between redemptive grace divinely given and grace intentionally received by faith, between the unconditionality and yet the conditionality of salvation. The tension has remained with me. I see the same tension in the New Testament itself.

As a boy, my home pastor was an exceptional woman, which might have rendered me particularly open to appreciating someone like Ellen White, although, of course, we had never heard of her either. In the Church of God (Anderson), the Adventist that we did hear about was Uriah Smith. His work on the Book of Revelation had influenced our primary pioneer, Daniel S. Warner, who argued against Uriah’s thinking—just before he cleverly redirected some of it to bolster his own emerging reform movement. Warner was soon followed by the Church of God version of Uriah Smith, Frederick G. Smith, and his influential book *The Revelation Explained* (1908).

I don’t know how the thinking of Uriah Smith has survived among Adventists. I do know that F. G. Smith’s thought has faded away for most in our contemporary movement, what some might judge our “Great Disappointment.” Today, like Adventists, the Church of God focuses on the Bible as central Christian authority and has no prophetic counterpart to

Ellen White. What it continues to have in common with Adventism is a healthy synergism about salvation, one needing careful definition since there are subtle seductions sitting around every corner.<sup>2</sup>

John Calvin insisted that the doctrine of divine election is profitable because it serves to elevate God's sovereignty and properly humble us fallen creatures. Our salvation does not depend on our own merits, but wholly on God's choice of us, even before our births.<sup>3</sup> I fully agree, at least with the "not on our own merits" part. Nothing that follows should be understood as suggesting otherwise. Even so, I am convinced that somehow the salvation which comes only by unmerited divine grace involves a necessary human "work." Given my tradition, I have always been comfortable with John Wesley who affirmed the universal gift of "prevenient grace," and with the Orthodox tradition of Christianity that assumes a necessary interrelationship, a divine-human cooperation in the salvation process. More recently, Clark Pinnock came to this view, witnessing that all that then followed for him theologically was the "result of reciprocity" (Callen, 2000, 100-106), his new salvation-synergism phrase.

### Negotiating A Complex Continuum

A divine-human reciprocity? A salvation synergism? All is by *God's* grace, including some necessary *human* work? If we are not to be seduced by the seductions surrounding such a paradox, or by a premature elimination of the paradox itself, we first must define our words and the synergism in view. By "seduced" I mean being drawn inappropriately, even unknowingly in a negative and theologically unacceptable direction. By "synergism" I mean the interaction of multiple agents that, in a distinctive integration, claim to bring a result greater than any one of them could produce in isolation. Like the "Synoptic Gospels," the first four New Testament books are "seen together" and interact wonderfully, synergistically. *In spite of* their differences, maybe even *because of* their differences, they join to tell the story of Jesus with a resulting fullness not possible by any

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<sup>2</sup>For an overview of the teaching of the Church of God movement (Anderson), see Barry L. Callen, *Contours of a Cause* (Anderson, IN: Anderson University School of Theology, 1995) and *Following Our Lord* (Anderson, IN: Warner Press, 2008).

<sup>3</sup>This is highlighted by Joseph Hill, a former professor of biblical studies at my alma mater, Geneva College, Joseph Hill, in his editing of selections of Calvin's work (*Grace and its Fruits*, Evangelical Press, England, 2000, 92).

one of them alone. The full story is in the cumulative impact of the four stories. Our minds prefer simplicity over complexity, which seems to invite confusion. Truth, however, may not always satisfy our preferences.

*Synergism* is a cooperative venture; its opposite, *monergism*, presumes a single account or actor. Monergisms are “clean,” simple, easily understandable, internally coherent, popular. Synergisms are more complex, paradoxical, with a range of interrelated perspectives that can easily push the picture out of balance—or, of course, bring it into proper balance. All monergisms view synergisms as seducing people away from treasured singularities. When the words “seduction” and “synergism” are related to the conditions that activate human salvation from sin, the monergist fears a violation of the single actor, God. The synergist, on the other hand, judges that the real seduction is the temptation of all monergists to oversimplify the issue by granting a restrictive and thus inappropriate singularity to the means of the saving action of God.

We are probing the relationship between divine grace and human reaction to it. We are asking where the real seduction lies, with the *God-only* monergist or the *God-and-human* synergist. We hear with interest Woodrow Widden’s affirming of synergism when he characterizes approvingly Ellen White’s theology of salvation. Her theology was carefully nuanced, complex, “wonderfully balanced,” a mixture of realism in this fallen world and optimism about the transforming grace coming from another world. She was “certainly a perfectionist, but she was not advocating perfectionism,” meaning that “sinners can gain victory over sinful attitudes and actions, but they retain their corrupt natures, which are subject to temptation until glorification.” Without being prematurely triumphalist, White “was most optimistic about what could be accomplished when the human will is *combined* with divine power.”<sup>4</sup> Note the divine-human synergism, with activated salvation the result of this reciprocity.

We are asking questions about the proper relationship between divine initiative and grace, on the one hand, and human faith, repentance, and “good works” on the other. Synergism views some working combination of these factors and searches for the correct combination that actually yields (activates) salvation. Over the centuries of church history, Christians have been all over the theological map in their claims about the most

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<sup>4</sup>Woodrow W. Whidden II, *Ellen White on Salvation* (Berrien Springs, MI: Adventist Institute for Theological Advancement), 155-156. Emphasis added.

appropriate interrelationship of the salvation-producing factors. Various possibilities have been judged heretical; others have spawned influential theological traditions of sharply differing views that nonetheless persist side-by-side in the mainstream life of the church. Synergism in the mediating middle. The extremes to the left and right agree on at least one thing, that synergism is the seductive dilution of their purer positions. More synergistic views are clear that the extremes to the left and right lose the necessary balance and complexity of the full truth.

My task is to jump into this caldron of theological viewpoints, this myriad of proposed monogeristic and synergistic patterns, and find the proper (biblical) balance, while avoiding the ever-present seductions. The challenge is to avoid patterns that violate biblical revelation, however attractive they may be on other grounds. Given the focus of this conference, one key focus will be the Protestant Reformation. From that crucial period in Christian church history we will be able to look backward and forward in theological time, viewing and assessing available patterns. First, however, we must consider the doctrine of God. How one understands God determines one's general perspective on most other theological matters, including the *conditionality* of salvation, salvation that nonetheless comes from wholly unmerited divine grace.

### Being Open to God's "Openness"

Perceiving properly the God who is before, behind, and above all else is a delicate theological task to be accomplished cautiously and only partially at best.<sup>5</sup> I sense in my theistic thinking the presence of a necessary synergism, with related perceptual pitfalls on every hand. The synergism involves a dynamic and ongoing process of knowing and not knowing, especially with reference to God.

With the apt title *Reformed and Always Reforming*, Roger E. Olson has surveyed the "new horizons" in today's evangelical Christian thinking about God. I applaud the clarity of his review and the wisdom of his guarded but "open" judgments. He believes it possible "to be more evangelical by being less conservative," and affirms as wholesome and productive the work of a range of "post-conservative evangelical scholars" who now are "exercising the freedom so hard won by the [sixteenth-cen-

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<sup>5</sup>I have traced the centuries of Christian questing for the best understanding God in my *Discerning the Divine: God in Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004).

ture] Reformers to rethink old doctrines in light of God's Word."<sup>6</sup> A primary example of this fresh rethinking regards the doctrine of God, thought by many "relational" or "open" theologians to have been side-tracked from the proper biblical synergism by a theism too heavily influenced by Greek philosophic thought and the more recent Enlightenment mentality.

The Qur'anic depiction of God clearly features great might, authority, and transcendence. Allah has power over everything (Q5:120). Although the Bible says similar things at points, "divine power over all things" comes to be viewed quite differently *in light of the incarnation in Jesus*. Total power then seems less like "power over" and more like "empowering," with God *having* but not *parading* transcendent and unilateral authority. To the contrary, God functions in humble Self-sacrifice as co-laborer, even collaborator with humans. As Michael Lodahl concludes, "this logic of the incarnation. . . is forcefully and repeatedly repudiated by the Qur'an."<sup>7</sup> The Qur'an is monergistic; the Bible is synergistic with its incarnational story of the sovereign Father choosing out of love to Self-give in the humiliation of the Son.

Various post-conservative "evangelical" approaches to revisioning the understanding of God center around the synergistic concept of *relationality*. They affirm the Bible's incarnational leaning toward the co-laborer and collaborator images. F. LeRon Shults focuses on a "robust Trinity," God as personal being-in-relation, God "no longer to be understood primarily as controlling power but as empowering relationship that creates room for creatures to develop as creatures within the overarching creative sovereignty of God."<sup>8</sup> Stanley Grenz also focused on the doctrine of the Trinity, viewing God as essentially relational in nature, other-oriented, loving.<sup>9</sup> Miroslav Volf draws on Jürgen Moltmann's root metaphor for God, father or parent, viewing essence of God's nature as primarily relational love.

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<sup>6</sup>Roger E. Olson, *Reformed and Always Reforming: The Postconservative Approach to Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 7, 211.

<sup>7</sup>Michael Lodahl, *Claiming Abraham: Reading the Bible and the Qur'an Side by Side* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2010), 202.

<sup>8</sup>Olson, *op. cit.*, 229-230.

<sup>9</sup>Stanley Grenz, *The Named God and the Question of Being: A Trinitarian Theo-Ontology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006).

The intent of these theologians is to honor the best revelation of God we believe we have, the biblical presentation of the divine incarnation in Jesus Christ. The resulting synergism is a biblical portrayal of God as both thoroughly majestic sovereignty *and* fully relational love intended to be implemented in a covenant partnership. Henri Nouwen saw this synergism in the famous Rembrandt painting “Return of the Prodigal Son.” The two hands of the father resting on the repentant prodigal are quite different, yet are both those of the father: “The Father is not simply a great patriarch. He is mother as well as father. He touches the son with a masculine hand and a feminine hand. He holds, and she caresses. He confirms, and she consoles. He is, indeed, God in whom both manhood and womanhood, fatherhood and motherhood are fully present.”<sup>10</sup> While there is sensitivity, beauty, and rich truth in Nouwen’s artistic, synergistic view, there also are the usual seductive pitfalls.

Henry H. Knight, for instance, agrees that there is the danger of opening all the way to “process” theology, viewing God as deeply interdependent with the creation by including the creation within the divine becoming. A process theistic model is judged as guilty as the defects of “classical” theism since it loses the synergistic balance—i.e., it fails to affirm that God is lovingly relational and *also* prior to, distinct from, and ontologically different from the creation. God is transcendent over creation “while upholding both divine and human agency within it.”<sup>11</sup> Clark Pinnock sees the “process God” as *too passive* to fit the fullness, the richer synergism of the biblical testimony. God can and sometimes does influence this world by more than loving persuasion. Even so, Pinnock insists that “God elected to create a world reflective of his own spontaneously free and triune self. . . . God can predetermine, and foreknow, whatever he wants to about the future. This does not change the fact that he also leaves much of it open and allows other issues to be resolved *by the decisions of free agents*.”<sup>12</sup>

“Open” evangelicals like Pinnock see God’s highest glory manifested in God’s voluntary “self-limitation,” resulting in God’s “vulnerabil-

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<sup>10</sup>Henri J. M. Nouwen, *The Return of the Prodigal Son* (N.Y.: Doubleday, Image Books, 1994), 99.

<sup>11</sup>Henry H. Knight III, *A Future for Truth: Evangelical Theology in a Post-modern World* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1997), 168.

<sup>12</sup>Clark H. Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover: A Theology of God’s Openness* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 147. Emphasis added.

ity” to a free creation, a creation free only because of God’s grace-gift of freedom to human creatures. Some “open” evangelicals, sensitive to the criticism of associating words like “limitation” and “vulnerability” to God, now are offering helpful clarifications. Thomas Jay Oord centers Christian theology around divine love, keynotes it with the *kenosis* passage of Phil. 2:5-8, and resists the concept of God’s self-giving being viewed as a *voluntary self-limitation*. His offered corrective is that “self-giving love is an *essential* attribute of God’s eternal nature,” an “*involuntary* divine self-limitation.” While nothing outside of God’s own being and nature ever limits God involuntarily (after all, God is fully and unqualifiedly sovereign), it is God’s essential nature that determines what is real or not, what will or will not be. “Essential kenosis,” according to Oord, *necessarily* provides humans with a significant freedom, the possibility of an interactive relationship, and thus final responsibility, clearing God “from any credible charge of culpability for causing or failing to prevent genuine evil. The God whose loving nature necessarily gives freedom/agency to creatures cannot withhold, withdraw or override the gifts God gives.”<sup>13</sup> The central point is that God is by nature and choice open to reciprocity, covenant partnership, a soteriological synergism. The whole Bible is built around old and new covenants provided by a sovereign God.

## The Protestant Reformation

The European Christian community in the sixteenth century was experiencing a particularly conflicted, pivotal, and creative period of its history. The Swiss reformers compensated for the lack of theological systematizing on the part of Martin Luther. They followed his general reforming trajectories, with clear stress on the absolute sovereignty of God as a pivot point for Christian thought. John Calvin, for instance, insisted on Scripture as the sole supreme authority for Christian faith and practice. Since he thought that human understanding is deeply compromised by the fall into sin, he taught that this great biblical authority is grasped rightly only as it is illumined by the Holy Spirit. The needed illumination is a special gift to the elect, given to them by God at their regeneration. Thoroughly Augustinian, this view stresses God’s meticulous

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<sup>13</sup>Thomas Jay Oord, *The Nature of Love: A Theology* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2010), 126.



providence and divine foreknowledge and foreordination, so that all redounds to God's glory. Regeneration is viewed as largely monergistic, exclusively a divine act of unmerited grace. The quickening of the spiritually dead is something only God can do, with no assistance possible or needed from those dead in their sins.

According to Calvin, God ordains from eternity those whom he will embrace in love and those upon whom he will unleash his deserved wrath. God will redeem *all* who repent and believe. God, however, has foreordained that some of the fallen will never repent and believe. If such a choice of salvation candidates appears unjust, and it certainly does to many, Calvin argued that *all* sinners deserve damnation, so the election of *some* to salvation demonstrates an amazing and wholly undeserved divine love. But why not extend this saving grace to all people? Calvin apparently judged this a perverse question, an attempt to force on God a human sense of what constitutes justice. Eventually, Calvin's thought was built into a tight system of theological logic that features the "TULIP" sequence of Total depravity, Unconditional election, Limited atonement, Irresistible grace, and the Perseverance of the elect. Here is a classic monogermism that views synergistic deviations from it to be sinful seductions.

Jacob Arminius came to represent one such "seduction." His thinking soon brought a deep split in the Reformed tradition of John Calvin, speaking against core aspects of Calvinist theology and getting himself labeled "Pelagian," seductively synergistic—even though he insisted on no salvation that is not at God's initiative and by grace alone through faith alone. What troubled Arminius about Calvin was the unilateral divine election of individuals that pre-assigned them to heaven or hell. For Arminius, viewing God's relationship to fallen humanity more synergistically than that was biblically possible and did *not* deviate from viewing salvation as a sheer gift of a gracious God. So, he clipped the TULIP by rejecting *unconditional* election and *irresistible* grace. Calvin would have seen this clipping as a dangerous seduction; Arminius saw it as the biblical wisdom of a more balanced synergism.

Arminius was reflecting a stance that also emerged from the Roman Catholic Church and its counter-reformation Council of Trent (1545-1563), namely that

. . . justification is to be derived from the prevenient grace of God, through Jesus Christ . . . whereby, without any merits existing on their parts, they are called . . . so they, who by sins

were alienated from God, may be disposed through His quickening and assisting grace to convert themselves to their own justification by freely assenting to and co-operating with that said grace.

Here is a Catholic synergism that affirms simultaneously a truly fallen humanity, the prevenient grace of God, a salvation not available on the basis of any human merit, and yet a salvation available only as one *willingly cooperates* with such grace.

The later Wesleyan revival in England made a similar synergistic observation. John Wesley, like Arminius, agreed with the main body of the teachings of John Calvin. Also, like Arminius, he differed with Calvin's teaching of the complete unconditionality of salvation. Like the Roman Catholic Church, the key to making possible some form of synergistic conditionality was seen as God's "prevenient grace." Wesley thought that such undeserved grace enabled the doctrine of original sin and salvation by grace alone to *co-exist*, maintaining both God's genuine sovereignty over salvation and meaningful human freedom.<sup>14</sup> The constructive relationship of the Calvinist-leaning George Whitefield and Arminian-leaning John Wesley provides an early example of a possible wholistic synergism, a unity among believers who are not quite in agreement, but who nonetheless are committed together to the gospel's mission in the world.

Many church bodies in the Wesleyan tradition affirm such a synergism, seeing the various monergisms as positions seduced by premature elimination of necessary factors in the biblically-revealed salvation process. For instance, the Church of the Nazarene includes among its articles of faith this very synergistic statement on prevenient grace:

We believe that the human race's creation in God-likeness included the ability to choose between right and wrong, and that thus human beings were made morally responsible; that through the fall of Adam they became depraved so that they cannot now turn and prepare themselves by their own natural strength and works to faith and calling upon God. But we also believe that the grace of God through Jesus Christ is freely bestowed upon all people, enabling all who will to turn from sin to righteousness, believe on Jesus Christ for pardon and

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<sup>14</sup>See John Wesley's sermon titled "On Working Out Our Own Salvation."

cleansing from sin, and follow good works pleasing and acceptable in His sight.

Through my research for and writing of the intellectual biography of Clark H. Pinnock in 2000,<sup>15</sup> I became newly sensitized to the contemporary emphases of “open” and “process” theists. While these emphases speak directly and sometimes helpfully to the grace-faith tension, our focus here is the grace-faith tension itself. The controversial elements of open and process thinkers would distract from this focus—and distraction is one of many seductions to be avoided—at least for now.

### Current “Evangelical” Imbalances

Maintaining theological equilibrium is an art not easily mastered. Two examples of imbalance from contemporary “evangelicalism” are troublesome. Both tend to highlight divine sovereignty to the detriment of human responsibility. The first is excessive emphasis on divine sovereignty; the second is excessive emphasis on divine gifting.

From a biblical point of view, God’s absolute sovereignty is hardly in question. The thought of John Calvin, however, focuses on divine sovereignty almost to the exclusion of human responsibility. John Piper lauds Calvin’s passion for the majesty of God and wrote on the five-hundredth anniversary of the birth of Calvin “to fan the flame of your passion for the centrality and supremacy of God. . . God’s never beginning, never ending, never becoming, never improving, simply and absolutely there—to be dealt with on his terms or not at all,” the God who “created all that is, sustains everything in being, and directs the course of all events.” Piper laments that this majestic and holy God has virtually disappeared from the modern evangelical world.<sup>16</sup> I resonate to an extent with his concern,<sup>17</sup> but hesitate over the imbalance that fully affirming his view tends to introduce (a missing synergism, almost a Qur’an-like critique of the Bible’s incarnational emphasis).

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<sup>15</sup>Barry L. Callen, *Clark H. Pinnock: Journey Toward Renewal* (Nappanee, IN: Evangel Publishing House, 2000).

<sup>16</sup>John Piper, *John Calvin and His Passion for the Majesty of God* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2009), 12-14.

<sup>17</sup> So does Timothy George who sees a renewed recognition of Calvin’s focus “a healthy corrective to the prevailing neo-Pelagianism of contemporary American Christianity” (Broadman Press, *Theology of the Reformers*, 1988, 248).

The second imbalance is with the faith/works continuum. In my view, much of contemporary “evangelical” Christianity has so stressed that salvation is by faith *alone* through grace *alone* that it has undercut the conscious choice to exercise faith and the serious action required of believers for needed growth in the Christian life. Of course, it is a mistake to associate *action* in the service of faith with attempts to gain *merit* from God, that is, to work for one’s salvation. Salvation is by faith alone, but mature faith is *never alone*. As John Wesley insisted, saving faith necessarily *feeds* on the means of grace divinely provided for its own existence and maturation, and it *flowers* with the fruit of the Spirit and works of service. His careful balance is that baptism and the Lord’s supper are central means of grace and are necessary, “if not to the *being*, at least to the *well-being* of a Church.”<sup>18</sup> The priority of divine grace comes first, but not then to the exclusion of the human response that accepts and implements the “feeding” and “flowering” of that grace.

Whether resisting Calvinistic election or Moravian stillness, two seductions away from a centrist synergism, John Wesley opposed any pernicious *passivity* of the believer. Instead, he championed active cooperation of the believer with the initiatives of God.<sup>19</sup> All good things are gifts of God, yes, but the proper posture of our waiting on and receiving the gifts is *active participation* in the divine channels through which they normally come and grow. Spiritual disciplines and the “sacraments” are not ways of *earning* what we can never afford; rather, they are ways of *opening doors* to what God wishes to freely give. We must not be seduced by arrogance—we can do it ourselves, or by passivity—God will get it done without us. It finally is a covenant enterprise with two partners, unequal though they are.

There is a required synergism of waiting and working, actively seeking and humbly receiving. Ellen White insisted that justification and perfection are so related that the believer cannot have one without the other. Believers are reckoned perfect in Christ Jesus, certainly not because of their flawless performance of the will of God, but through the meritorious accounting of Christ. Woodrow Whidden makes clear that White never

<sup>18</sup>John Wesley, “An Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion,” *Works* (Oxford ed.), XI, 78.

<sup>19</sup>John Wesley, “The Means of Grace,” *John Wesley’s Sermons: An Anthology*, ed. Albert C. Outler and Richard P. Heitzenrater (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991), 159.

understood obedience as generating saving merit for the believer, although “the experience of justification is retained only on the basis of faithful loyalty to Christ, which is expressed in constant obedience and repentance. . . . Sinners are saved in *experience* by faith, in *merit* by the grace of Christ accounted to us, and obedience is the essential *evidence* of faith’s acceptance of Christ’s precious merits.”<sup>20</sup> Note the theological balance, the synergism that carefully sidesteps the surrounding and alluring seductions.

### Caught Between Truths

Admittedly, there is tension between actively opening spiritual doors and avoiding the pitfall of “works righteousness,” between being viewed in Christ as “perfect” without having attained the ability to function perfectly. Such tension, however, is hardly surprising. Paradox is a tenacious and delicate reality in all Christian theology. We necessarily proceed knowing that we are “caught between truths”—and we must not yield to anti-paradox seductions in the name of full rational clarity.<sup>21</sup> A central complexity is crucial, a certain mystery essential. God is the great three-in-one, while humans are both the crown and crisis of creation. Jesus is both God and man, the Bible is divine and yet so human, all helping the church to exist between heaven and avoid the pitfalls surrounding such core synergisms.

Avoiding pitfalls requires constant diligence. In the soteriological thought of John Wesley, for example, salvation is understood to be both instantaneous and gradual, and it involves divine and human agencies in a way that neither diminish God’s love and power nor deny human sin and finitude. Nevertheless, as Henry Knight observes, “this has not kept interpreters of Wesley from arguing over which was more central in his thought and practice; even less has it prevented his theological descendants from promoting one at the expense of the other.”<sup>22</sup> Maintaining

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<sup>20</sup>Woodrow W. Whidden II, *Ellen White on Salvation* (Berrien Springs, MI: Adventist Institute for Theological Advancement), 152.

<sup>21</sup>Barry L. Callen, *Caught Between Truths: The Central Paradoxes of Christian Faith* (Lexington, KY: Emeth Press, 2007).

<sup>22</sup>Henry H. Knight III, “The Transformation of the Human Heart: The Place of Conversion in Wesley’s Theology,” in Kenneth Collins and John Tyson, eds., *Conversion in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001), 54-55, 43.

essential equilibrium is sometimes as difficult in theology as walking over a gorge on a high wire with cross winds from shifting directions.

One of the core synergisms basic to the Christian life is the *conditionality* of *unconditional* faith. At work in John Wesley, and in Jacob Arminius before him, was the central notion that God chooses to save humanity “along the lines of divine prevenience *and* humanity’s cooperant *responsible grace*.”<sup>23</sup> In 1778 Wesley decided to call his Methodist publication *The Arminian Magazine*. Being caught between truths required the affirming of a soteriological synergism, a delicate doubleness that may not be “clean” to the purely rational eye, but is theologically crucial nonetheless. Like Arminius, Wesley believed that his soteriology was only a “hair’s breadth” separated from that of John Calvin—but it was a critically important breadth. It involved a carefully crafted salvation synergism. Wesley might have asked of his Calvinist colleagues, as Roger Olson more recently did ask of his—“don’t hate me because I’m Arminian.”<sup>24</sup> After all, we are all caught between the same truths, on the same gospel team, all looking for the best balance, the most biblically-sensitive salvation synergism.

In the biblical record, and very much in the Protestant Reformation tradition, the knowledge of God is not an unaided possibility for fallen humanity. It is not possible apart from the divine gifts of revelation and the enabling grace to receive and respond to revelation. We do not know God until God addresses us fallen humans through a gracious awakening of our knowing and believing potential. Karl Barth was so clear on this. Before him, Martin Luther said: “God will not have thee thus ascend, but He comes to thee and has made a ladder, a way and a bridge to thee.”<sup>25</sup> Luther was reversing the mystical salvation pattern. The ladder imagery was seen by him as the means of divine *descent* rather than of human *ascent*. God descends to us graciously, not from any need to do so apart from a great and loving desire to redemptively address our human need.

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<sup>23</sup>W. Stephen Gunter, “John Wesley, A Faithful Representative of Jacobus Arminius,” in *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 42-2, Fall, 2007, 69. See also Randy Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley’s Practical Theology* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1994).

<sup>24</sup>Roger Olson, in *Christianity Today*, September 6, 1999, 87-94.

<sup>25</sup>As cited by Donald G. Bloesch, *Spirituality Old and New* (Downers Grove, ILL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 79.

As C. S. Lewis once put it, “In God there is no hunger that needs to be filled, only plenteousness that desires to give.”<sup>26</sup>

It is here that the core grace-faith paradox appears and synergism becomes necessary. The truly sovereign and unconditioned God freely chooses to act graciously on our behalf and, in the process, chooses to become—to some degree—*dependent* on how we humans respond in faith to the grace extended our way. God appears not to want mechanical slaves, but responsive sons and daughters who faithfully receive the grace freely given and then become what they themselves come to deeply desire. That deep desire, nurtured by God’s continuing ministry through the Spirit, is to be active participants in a fellowship of love, covenant partners with God for kingdom purposes in this fallen world, and redeemed children of God who will be wonderfully with God in the next world.

The Calvinistic-leaning TULIP is *Total depravity, Unconditional election, Limited atonement, Irresistible grace, and the Perseverance of the elect*. The Arminian-leaning ROSE views God as *Relational, Open, Suffering, and Everywhere Active*.<sup>27</sup> The goal is the best balance of these contrasting floral rubrics, seeking the synergism that grasps simultaneously the several tones, dimensions, nuances, and emphases of divine revelation. Rather than defending absolute doctrinal boundaries as though they were a first-order language of revelation, I prefer keeping doctrinal boundaries relatively undefined and always under examination, judging such formulations to be human and therefore fragile second-order language.

### **New Words from the Mouth of Jesus**

E. Stanley Jones once reflected on those classic words of Jesus from the cross: “It is finished!” What was finished? It was, concluded Jones, the purpose of his coming, the redemption of humanity. But, taken alone, such finishing sounds too divinely monergistic for the Bible’s broader presentation of it. Therefore, Jones goes on to imagine additional words from the Saviour. They were words of synergism, the divine plan of our human participation. Said Jesus, via Jones, “I have redeemed the race. It

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<sup>26</sup>C. S. Lewis, *The Four Loves* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1960), 175.

<sup>27</sup>See Barry L. Callen, “From TULIP to ROSE: Clark H. Pinnock on the Open and Risking God,” in *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 36:1 (spring 2001), 160-186.

is now for them to accept it. . . . I cannot force it upon them, for forced goodness is not goodness.”<sup>28</sup>

I join Jones, daring to suggest new words in the mouth of Jesus because I am convinced that such words express best the God seen both in sovereign creation and in suffering redemption. In Jesus, the truly sovereign God was with us, for us, impacted by us, and now is calling for our responsible and freely-chosen response to this redemptive work of the cross. It is the same synergism heard in the title of that classic 1972 book of Jürgen Moltmann—*The Crucified God*. The God who is truly *sovereign* above all is also, because of the loving essence of the divine nature, the truly *suffering* God for the sake of lost humans far below. *Sovereign* and *suffering*, the synergistic balance, the reality above strict logic, the complex and wonderful revelation of God in Jesus Christ!

Elsewhere, I have called synergistic thought like that of Jones a “mutuality model of conversion.” It features the biblically-revealed God “reaching lovingly to all persons and enabling them with the ability to respond in ways that can activate the salvation that is God’s intention—and an ability that also includes the possibility that some will choose to reject salvation, which is God’s willingly chosen risk. . . . God provides all that is necessary. We respond as God’s grace enables us, but also by our own genuine choice. God’s provision and our response are the two essential and inseparable elements of a mutuality model of conversion.”<sup>29</sup>

Even with the synergism, the mutuality of the salvation process, we mere humans must remember that there always remains only one bottom line. To God *alone* be the glory! Even so, there remains the salvation synergism. Says N. T. Wright about the Lord’s Prayer, “This prayer starts by addressing God intimately and lovingly, as ‘Father’ [an interactive mutuality]—and by bowing before his greatness and majesty [a transcendent singularity].” Concludes Wright, “If you can hold those two together, you’re already on the way to understanding what Christianity is all about.”<sup>30</sup> There it is again—the ongoing challenge of holding seemingly contrasting things *together*!

<sup>28</sup>E. Stanley Jones, *The Song of Ascents: A Spiritual Autobiography* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1968), 22.

<sup>29</sup> Barry L. Callen, “A Mutuality Model of Conversion,” in Kenneth Collins and John Tyson, *Conversion in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2001), 145, 159.

<sup>30</sup> N. T. Wright, *The Lord & His Prayer* (Eerdmans Publishing, 1996).



# **HOLY HERESY? A. B. SIMPSON, SANCTIFICATION, AND APPOLINARIANISM**

**by**

**Bernie A. Van De Walle**

Albert Benjamin Simpson, noted preacher, publisher, and founder of the Christian and Missionary Alliance, lived and thrived in the theology and spirituality of the late nineteenth century Holiness Movement. He was both its benefactor and beneficiary. His teaching regarding sanctification in particular was widely disseminated through international, national, and regional conferences, through the students of his Missionary Training Institute, and through the periodicals and books that seemed to flow ceaselessly from his pen.

His complex doctrine of sanctification is founded upon the believer's gaining of the mind of Christ. Apart from this acquisition, the pursuit of holiness is futile. It is the mind of Christ, resident in the believer, that empowers humanity to effectively complete its divine mandate and be all that God has created it to be.

When one investigates what Simpson meant by the "mind of Christ," however, one may begin to legitimately ask whether Simpson's understanding treads upon the ground of an historic heresy. When describing this "mind of Christ" that the believer is to gain, Simpson is clear to note that this mind is singular and is solely divine. As such, Simpson's Christology may be Apollinarian, that Christological position directly anathematized at the First Council of Constantinople in 381 CE. Of particular practical consequence is that, if Simpson's Christology is heretical, especially in relation to the nature of the mind of Christ, then his soteriology is also heretical and an inadequate model. This bears prac-

tical significance because Simpson's soteriology and his doctrine of sanctification are peculiar neither to himself nor to the Christian and Missionary Alliance. They are shared by many, especially those associated with the historic Holiness Movement. This essay, however, will show that, while Simpson may have held an Apollinarian Christology, he may be saved from heresy by an uncommon anthropology that understands the proper spirit of all humanity to be essentially divine.

### Defining Apollinarian Christology

Apollinaris the Younger was renowned for his dedication to the church and serious scholarship. This fourth-century figure was a student of Theodotus of Laodicea,<sup>1</sup> a "friend and coadjutor" of Athanasius,<sup>2</sup> and, for a period, a teacher of Jerome.<sup>3</sup> This "first great defender of Orthodoxy"<sup>4</sup> possessed an unusually sharp mind and was a profound theologian.<sup>5</sup> He is considered to have been the one to have introduced the term *hypostasis*—a "self-determining reality"—to Christological discussion.<sup>6</sup> His stellar reputation as both a devoted churchman and a superior intellect provided the heretical movement that would follow him its admission to and early popularity in the church.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, Second Edition (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), 289.

<sup>2</sup>Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 289.

<sup>3</sup>*Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, First Edition (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), s.v. "Apollinarianism," by V. L. Walter, 67.

<sup>4</sup>George Dionysus Dragas, "The Anti-Apollinarian Christology of St. Gregory of Nyssa: A First Analysis," *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* (Brookline, MA) 42, 3-4 (1997): 299.

<sup>5</sup>"... no one else ever produced so pithy, balanced, fertile, religious and scriptural a statement of the Catholic doctrine of God." G. L. Prestige, *Fathers and Heretics: Six Studies in Dogmatic Faith with Prologue and Epilogue* (London: SPCK, 1954), 102.

<sup>6</sup>Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 293. Kenneth Wesche asserted, "Apollinaris was the only fourth century Christian thinker, other than Theodore of Mopsuestia, to take the Trinitarian usage of *hypostasis* and apply it to Christology." Kenneth Paul Wesche, "The Union of God and Man in Jesus Christ in the Thought of Gregory of Nazianzus," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 28, 2 (1984): 84.

<sup>7</sup>One author asserts that Apollinaris was truly heretical, but his heresy was not intentional and occurred only much later in his life. Prestige, *Fathers and Heretics*, 94, 100.

While it may date back as early as 352 CE, it is not until the Council of Alexandria in 362 “that [Apollinarian] teaching had become a public issue.”<sup>8</sup> It was another decade before it became a serious matter. Unlike those heresies that arise from either ignorance or carelessness, Apollinarianism is said to be the result of “the most subtle and thorough-going attempt to work out a theory of Christ’s Person in the fourth century.”<sup>9</sup> Even in his error, Apollinaris shows his depth of understanding “of the Christological problem:”<sup>10</sup> that is, how are we to understand that Jesus Christ is, at one and the same time, both fully human and fully divine and yet one person? For his part, Apollinaris sought to defend the unity of the person of Christ, opposing any Christology that would propose that the Incarnation resulted in two Sons, two selves, or any other dualism. He insisted, instead, that in the Incarnation the person of Jesus Christ was clearly and utterly one.

Apollinaris understood humanity to be a trichotomy of being: a body, a sensate soul, and a rational spirit. He asserted that when Christ took on human form he took on the body and the sensate soul but did not take on a human rational spirit or mind. It is in this denial of Christ’s possession of a human mind or spirit that Apollinaris’ heresy is found; the mind of Christ was both singular and solely divine. There were not two minds in the person or Christ; one human and one divine. There was one mind, one spirit, and it was wholly and only divine.

Apollinaris rejected the idea that the person of Christ possessed a human mind for two separate but related reasons. The first was the essential mutability of the human mind. He believed that the synthesis or the cooperation of a human mind with a divine mind within one person presented a logical impossibility. That is, something that is essentially mutable and given to vacillation—the human mind—cannot be truly joined to something that is essentially immutable and constant—the divine mind. The two were mutually exclusive. The latter simply could not work with the former. Eventually, such an arrangement would result in a difference of purpose or action. There could be no such division in the person of Christ.

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<sup>8</sup>Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 290.

<sup>9</sup>Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 289.

<sup>10</sup>Kenneth Paul Wesche, “‘Mind’ and ‘Self’ in the Christology of Saint Gregory the Theologian: Saint Gregory’s Contribution to Christology and Christian Anthropology,” *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 39, 1 (Spring 1994): 36.

The second reason for the rejection of a human mind or spirit was that it was necessarily bound to sin. Given human weakness and the mutability of the human mind, sooner or later, a non-divine free-will would err. Should Jesus have possessed a human mind, he would possess something “changeable and the prey of filthy thoughts but being Himself divine [he possessed a divine mind], changeless, heavenly.”<sup>11</sup> Certainly, the Incarnate Son of God could not tolerate a mind that not only had the possibility but the eventuality of sin.

Not surprisingly, Apollinaris’ own view was a logical extension of the Alexandrian school of which he was a part and “which, simply, stressed the divinity of Christ.”<sup>12</sup> Apollinaris’ view clearly asserted the conjoining, the union, of the divine and the human in the Incarnation, but refused to do so in any way that might compromise the fullness of the divine nature. In so doing, his opposition would assert, he essentially sacrificed the humanity of Christ on the altar of his divinity.<sup>13</sup>

While Apollinaris’ doctrine of the Incarnation is complex, that particular aspect which has gained the most attention and has been declared heretical is found in his “single affirmation that the divine spirit of God the Son was substituted in the Redeemer for a human mind. When Apollinaris said that God took flesh, or, as he very often expressed it, God took a body, he meant exactly what he said and no more.”<sup>14</sup> That is, with the Incarnation, God took on a human body with its attendant sensory abilities and various properties, but he did not take on a human mind. While it is more nuanced and more complicated than simply this, “the rejection of a human mind in Jesus was [Apollinarianism’s] salient feature.”<sup>15</sup>

While the supposed advantages of an Apollinarian Christology are the assurance of the divine singularity of purpose in the person of Christ and the consequent surety of his sinlessness and, therefore, his suitability to serve as savior, the shortcomings of such a Christology are significant. The ultimate critique against Apollinaris’ teaching is that it was, essen-

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<sup>11</sup>Quoting Apollinaris from *Ad Diocæs*, 2. Hans Lietzmann, *Apollinaris von Laodicea und seine Schule* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1904), 256; Charles E. Raven, *Apollinarianism: An Essay on the Christology of the Early Church* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1923), 184.

<sup>12</sup>Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 289.

<sup>13</sup>Raven, *Apollinarianism*, 184.

<sup>14</sup>Prestige, *Fathers and Heretics*, 109.

<sup>15</sup>Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 289.

tially, docetic—the savior was not a real man; he only appeared to be so. Historian J. N. D. Kelly noted that if the Word “lacked the most characteristic element in man’s make-up, a rational mind and will, His alleged manhood was not in the strict sense human, but must have been something monstrous; it is absurd to call Him a man at all, since He was not a man according to the accepted definition.”<sup>16</sup>

The Cappodocians, many centuries before Kelly, echoed his critique. Since it is the mind which is “the most essential part of man,”<sup>17</sup> how could Christ be considered truly or fully human if he lacked this most distinctive aspect of human being? Certainly, he cannot. For the Cappodocians, Apollinarianism proved to be especially problematic because they asserted that only that which was taken up by the Saviour could be redeemed. If Christ, therefore, did not have a human mind, could he truly have redeemed humanity in its fullness, especially if the aspect that is not taken up is the most essential or distinct aspect of humanity? The answer throughout church history has been a clear and unequivocal “No.”

### Defining Simpson’s Christology

There is, of course, no doubt that Simpson would have considered his own Christology orthodox.<sup>18</sup> The difficulties with accepting self-definition, however, are either that one rarely realizes one’s own heterodoxy or one is rarely willing to admit the inadequacy of one’s own definitions.<sup>19</sup> If, therefore, we are to make a decision regarding Simpson’s Christology, we must move beyond his own opinion of such to an actual investigation of his assertions in the area.

There is no doubt that Simpson, at the very least, asserted that Jesus Christ was the theandric one. Jesus Christ was the real intersection of the human and divine. Christ, he said, neither simply appeared to be human nor did he simply appear to be divine. He was, in essence, in Him-

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<sup>16</sup>Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 296.

<sup>17</sup>Wesche, “The Union of God and Man in Jesus Christ,” 88; Kenneth Paul Wesche, “‘Mind’ and ‘Self,’” 36.

<sup>18</sup>Simpson even asserted that there is no more important question than the question Christ Himself asked in Caesarea Phillipi, “What think ye of Christ?” This, he believed, is the greatest question of earth and heaven.” Albert B. Simpson, *Evangelistic Addresses* (New York: Christian Alliance Publishing, 1926), 78.

<sup>19</sup>On at least one occasion, Simpson not only denies Apollinarianism, but denies its orthodoxy. Albert B. Simpson, *John, Christ in the Bible* (New York: Alliance Press, 1904), 43f.

self, the intersection of both. In keeping with historic Christian witness in this area, Simpson noted that it is Christ's theandric nature, and neither his human nature nor his divine nature alone, that qualifies him to act as the mediator between God and humanity. The question of orthodoxy, however, is not answered solely on whether one asserts that Christ is theandric. Other questions must be answered, including the extent to which he is understood to be divine and human. It is in this area that Apollinarianism was defective and, so, it is to this area that we will turn in our investigation of Simpson's Christology.

On a number of occasions, in line with the historic confession of the church, Simpson asserted Jesus' divinity. He did so both explicitly and implicitly. Explicitly, he made a number of statements regarding Christ's divinity, including referring to "the transcendent glory of His Deity,"<sup>20</sup> to "His supreme divinity,"<sup>21</sup> and to Christ himself as "the one God."<sup>22</sup> Simpson also noted that one cannot assert knowledge of God apart from knowledge of Christ, in that God is seen most clearly in the person of Christ Himself.<sup>23</sup>

Implicitly, too, Simpson asserted the divinity of Christ. This occurs through his identification of certain divine attributes with Christ. He wrote that Jesus, "the Word[,] possesses all the attributes that God possesses."<sup>24</sup> More specifically, he identified Christ as the source of life, spiritual and otherwise.<sup>25</sup> Other examples include Simpson's assertion that, following Christ's resurrection, he possessed, in some sense, omnipres-

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<sup>20</sup>Albert B. Simpson, *The Christ Life* (New York: Christian Alliance Publishing, 1925), 111.

<sup>21</sup>Albert B. Simpson, *Christ in the Tabernacle* (Camp Hill: Christian Publications, 1985), 13.

<sup>22</sup>Albert B. Simpson, "Veins of Truth in the Mines of God: The Deity of Jesus," *Living Truths* 5, 4 (April 1905): 200. cf. Albert B. Simpson, *The Christ of the Forty Days* (New York: Christian Alliance Publishing, 1890), 44, 45; Simpson, *Christ in the Tabernacle*, 94.

<sup>23</sup>"Apart from him we cannot understand or know God;" Albert B. Simpson, *The Highest Christian Life: Exposition of the Letter to the Ephesians* (South Nyack: Christian Alliance Publishing, 1898), 55.

<sup>24</sup>Albert B. Simpson, *John*, 37.

<sup>25</sup>Albert B. Simpson, *The Lord for the Body: With Questions and Answers on Divine Healing* (New York: Christian Alliance Publishing, 1925), 115; Simpson, *The Christ Life*, 14, 22; Albert B. Simpson, *A Larger Christian Life* (Harrisburg: Christian Publications, 1979), 42.

ence.<sup>26</sup> Simpson also notes Christ's omnipotence<sup>27</sup> and even granted Jesus' omniscience,<sup>28</sup> an attribute that he carries as one who has the very mind of God. Christ was always divine and bore these attributes, even if they were enveloped or shrouded by his humanity.<sup>29</sup>

While Simpson asserted Christ's divinity, he also asserted his real humanity. He believed, as with Jesus' divinity, that his humanity was necessary to his mediatorial role<sup>30</sup> and that he continues to be human in the present.<sup>31</sup> Not only did Simpson assert Christ's humanity, but he asserted his full or perfect humanity. By this, he meant two separate things. In the first place, he meant that in the person of Jesus Christ we see the archetype of human nature,<sup>32</sup> the "heavenly pattern,"<sup>33</sup> a "perfect humanity,"<sup>34</sup> and the "ideal man, the pattern of what a man should be. . . ."<sup>35</sup> In Christ, we see humanity as it ought to be—the perfect example.

In the second place, Simpson meant that, in the Incarnation, Jesus took on the whole of what it means to be human.<sup>36</sup> He was the "partaker of our complete humanity in the fullest sense,"<sup>37</sup> in the "widest sense,"<sup>38</sup> yet, of course, was without sin.<sup>39</sup> In doing so, Simpson spoke of humanity as constituted by a number of aspects or components. The categories that he used, however, were not consistent. At times, Simpson used

<sup>26</sup>Simpson, *The Christ of the Forty Days*, 12, 36.

<sup>27</sup>Albert B. Simpson, *Genesis and Exodus*, vol. 1, Christ in the Bible (New York: Word, Work, and World Publishing Co., 1888), 79.

<sup>28</sup>Simpson, *The Christ of the Forty Days*, 36; Albert B. Simpson, "Veins of Truth in the Mines of God: The Deity of Jesus," chap. in *Living Truths*, 5:6 (June 1905): 332f; Simpson, *Genesis and Exodus*, 79.

<sup>29</sup>Albert B. Simpson, *Echoes of the New Creation: Messages of the Cross, the Resurrection and the Coming Glory* (New York: Alliance Press, 1903), 67.

<sup>30</sup>Simpson, *Christ in the Tabernacle*, 66.

<sup>31</sup>Albert B. Simpson, *Life More Abundantly* (New York: Christian Alliance Publishing, 1912), 31.

<sup>32</sup>Simpson, *The Highest Christian Life*, 61.

<sup>33</sup>Simpson, *The Highest Christian Life*, 44.

<sup>34</sup>Simpson, *Christ in the Tabernacle*, 13.

<sup>35</sup>Albert B. Simpson, *The Holy Spirit, or Power from on High: An Unfolding of the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit in the Old and New Testaments*, vol. 2. (Nyack: Christian Alliance Publishing, 1924), 94.

<sup>36</sup>Simpson, *The Christ Life*, 111; Simpson, *Life More Abundantly*, 28.

<sup>37</sup>Simpson, *Genesis and Exodus*, 79.

<sup>38</sup>Simpson, *John*, 43.

<sup>39</sup>Simpson, *Evangelistic Addresses*, 86.

dichotomist language, identifying humanity as constituted of two aspects; a body and a soul. When he used this kind of language, it was not his intent to exhaustively define the various aspects of a human being. Rather, he used the phrase “body and soul” as a merism referring to humanity in its totality. He was not making the case that these two particular aspects form the whole of humanity. When it is Simpson’s intent to do so, he preferred, instead, to describe humanity trichotomistically, composed of a body, a soul, and a spirit. Each of these referred to something specific that together constituted humanity in its entirety.<sup>40</sup>

By “body,” Simpson referred to humanity’s physical aspect, the actual flesh and bones of a human being. By “soul,” Simpson did not refer to the whole of non-physical being as he inferred when he spoke dichotomistically. The terms “soul” and “spirit,” he argued, are not merely synonymous.<sup>41</sup> Each means something specific. By the “soul,” or the “psychical man,”<sup>42</sup> Simpson meant that physical part of humanity that learns and knows the world around it. The “soul” is the home of the intellectual and emotional aspects of humanity.<sup>43</sup> Jesus was such a “psychical man.” Furthermore, he noted, that in his humanity, in his soul, Jesus had a growing and maturing knowledge of the world around him. That is, while Jesus was, from the time of his conception, always fully divine, in his humanity, given that he had a soul, he was initially limited in knowledge, even in regard to his own identity and mission.<sup>44</sup>

In asserting the full humanity of Jesus, Simpson clearly noted that Jesus not only took on human flesh and had a human soul, but also possessed a spirit. By “spirit,” Simpson did not merely note that there is something to a human being beyond simply a physical body. By the term “spirit,” Simpson denoted something particular and distinct from “soul,” as previously defined. For Simpson, the spirit bears two abilities not possessed by the soul, one intellectual and the other relational. Simpson identifies the spiritual aspect of humanity as “the higher and divine life which

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<sup>40</sup>He noted that such is the division prescribed by Scripture. Albert B. Simpson, *Wholly Sanctified* (New York: Christian Alliance Publishing, 1893), 25.

<sup>41</sup>Simpson, *Wholly Sanctified*, 25.

<sup>42</sup>Simpson, *Wholly Sanctified*, 26.

<sup>43</sup>Simpson, *The Holy Spirit*, vol. 2, 29.

<sup>44</sup>Albert B. Simpson, *Isaiah*, Christ in the Bible (Harrisburg: Christian Publications, n.d), 163; Albert B. Simpson, *Matthew, Mark, and Luke*, Christ in the Bible (New York: Christian Alliance Publishing, 1889), 197.



links us directly to God, and enables us *to know* and *to come into relationship* with divine things”<sup>45</sup> [emphasis mine]. First, the human spirit is that which had innate consciousness not only of the very existence of the spiritual realm but, more particularly, of God himself. While the soul possesses real and honorable knowledge,<sup>46</sup> it is incapable of grasping “the great thoughts of God.”<sup>47</sup> The spirit is uniquely equipped not only to recognize but to understand spiritual matters. The spirit alone is that aspect of a human being which is able to know the loftier things of God, those things beyond the ability and capacity of the non-spiritual human psychological understanding. In fact, it is the spirit that enables humanity to know those things which it was created to know.

Second, the “spirit” is that facet of a human being that is able to relate to God. It is the spirit that allows humanity to actually engage God—a spiritual being—in significant relationship. It is on the level of spiritual being that the human-divine intersection occurs. The spirit enables humanity to relate to God, the very purpose for which it was created. This is because, in Simpson’s mind, the spirit is not merely an elevated aspect of a human being; rather, the human spirit is divine in its primordial nature.<sup>48</sup> While he quickly qualified the meaning of his assertion to the cognizance of spiritual matters, he stated that the spirit of humanity is of a divine nature and of a divine source distinct from that of the human body and soul.

### The Necessity of Jesus’ Divine Spirit

The evidence that may lead one to conclude that Simpson’s Christology is Apollinarian is found primarily when he addresses two different issues. The first is found within his Christology proper and the second in his soteriology, especially when he discusses the work of sanctification and its goal of humanity gaining of the “very same” mind of Christ.

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<sup>45</sup>Simpson, *The Holy Spirit*, vol. 2, 29.

<sup>46</sup>Albert B. Simpson, “The Commencement and Laying of the Cornerstone of the Wilson Memorial Academy,” *The Christian and Missionary Alliance*, July 4, 1908, 231.

<sup>47</sup>Simpson, *The Holy Spirit*, vol. 2, 111, 112; “The mere powers of the human intellect cannot find God.” Simpson, *Highest Christian Life*, 37.

<sup>48</sup>Albert B. Simpson, *The Holy Spirit, or Power from on High: An Unfolding of the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit in the Old and New Testaments*, vol. 1 (Nyack: Christian Alliance Publishing, 1924), 28, 29; Simpson, *Evangelistic Addresses*, 15.

While the direct Christological assertions are scarce, they exist. Simpson, like Apollinaris, noted, first of all, that Christ was a trichotomous being,<sup>49</sup> that he possessed a body, soul, and spirit. Yet, it is not clear that Simpson asserted that Christ possessed a human spirit or that this spirit was human in any way. He is clear that he did, however, possess a divine spirit/mind. Simpson referred to the “mind of Christ” as “infinite”<sup>50</sup> on one occasion and as “glorious”<sup>51</sup> on another. If this were the extent of Simpson’s assertion, the charge of Apollinarianism would die of malnutrition. Yet, such is not the case. The more compelling case comes from Simpson’s soteriology.

In his soteriology, as stated earlier, Simpson emphasized the necessity of the believer acquiring the mind of Christ. It is essential to the pursuit of sanctification. This mind of Christ is, in fact, what Simpson otherwise described as the spirit of Christ. It is that which grasps the loftier truths of God and enables community with him. It is in gaining the “mind of Christ” that humanity gains (or regains) the proper organ for these two related pursuits. It is only through the acquisition and engagement of the mind of Christ that humanity can understand divine revelation and, therefore, respond appropriately to it. It is only through the gaining of the mind of Christ that humanity can know God and it is only through the possession and employment of the mind of Christ that humanity can commune with God, especially to that degree for which they were created.

The reason that Simpson repeatedly gave for the effectiveness of this mind of Christ in these areas is that it is a divine mind. Only a divine mind has the capacity and capability necessary to understand the things of God and to commune with him. By gaining the mind of Christ, Simpson noted, he was not referring to just agreement or conformity to the mind of Christ. It is not just that humanity is to think and reason in a godly or Christ-like fashion. His understanding is much more literal. It is, rather,

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<sup>49</sup>While his terminology is not consistent, Simpson’s assertion of Christ’s trichotomous nature is clear. “The Lord Jesus Christ in his incarnate life was a perfect man with a ‘true’ body and a ‘reasonable soul,’ and if His inner life was normal it involved the possession of a spiritual nature and a soul or mind.” Simpson, *Life More Abundantly*, 28.

<sup>50</sup>Albert B. Simpson, “The Message of Easter,” *Living Truths* 6, 4 (April 1906): 201.

<sup>51</sup>Albert B. Simpson, *The Names of Jesus* (New York: Christian Alliance Publishing, 1892), 151.

Christ's very own mind, his very own capacities and capabilities that humanity is to gain. It is not simply the resuscitation, resurrection, or glorification of a human mind/spirit that is in view here. It is, rather, the actual and mystical infusion of Christ's very own mind/spirit that is in order. Furthermore, Simpson was clear that with the importation of this divine mind of Christ the human spirit, if it continues to exist at all, is practically eliminated. It is "decapitated" from its place as the head over the rest of the human constitution. Simpson provided no clear reason as to why this elimination is necessary. He simply asserted, as though it were common sense, that it is.

Ultimately, however, Simpson's point is clear. There is no room in the human constitution for two minds/spirits. It is simply that to have the mind of Christ necessarily means the removal of the human mind/spirit. All that can exist in any human, according to Simpson, is one or the other. It is an either/or proposition, not both/and. The mind of Christ was clearly divine and, therefore, not human.

## Critiques

The question naturally arises, then, about whether Simpson's Christology is heretical. Is it not a modern Apollinarianism? Is it not, as some may put it, a form of docetism? If the mind of Christ is a solely divine mind, does Simpson's Christ not merely appear to be fully human? One will search Simpson's writings in vain for comments that explicitly assert the duality of the mind/spirit of Christ. Its singularity, however, is strongly implied. Simpson never spoke about the minds or the spirits of Christ. Rather, he spoke about it in the singular only. It is always the mind of Christ, without equivocation and without qualification.

When it comes to the issue of this mind's/spirit's nature, Simpson was much more explicit. Clearly and frequently, he asserted that the mind of Christ is fully divine. The mind of Christ bore, by nature and perfectly, those capabilities and capacities necessary for the knowledge of and for relationship with God. While Simpson granted that Christ possessed a human intellect and human emotions, he clearly identified these as properties of Christ's human "soul" and not of Christ's "spirit." Consequently, there is, in Simpson, a seeming lack of real hypostatic union, as traditionally defined, especially as it relates to the mind/spirit of Christ. What seems to exist, instead, is the cohabitation of the human and divine in the person of Jesus Christ—a human body and soul, accommodating a divine

mind. The mind of the divine Christ is infused into the otherwise human Jesus without real conjunction. According to the classic categories, it would seem, Simpson's Christology is lacking. Other than protests regarding his Christological orthodoxy, there is nothing within Simpson's writings that would lead one to conclude otherwise. If such a categorization is correct, then Simpson's soteriology suffers the same fatal shortcomings as Apollinarianism. That is, if in the Incarnation Christ did not take on the wholeness of the human constitution, that aspect that is most distinctly human has not been redeemed.

Historically, Apollinarianism has been criticized as much for its anthropology as it was for its Christology. That is, some have stated that Apollinaris erred when he asserted that humanity was a trichotomy of body, soul, and spirit rather than a dichotomy of body and soul. Some have suggested that it was primarily its association with Apollinarian heresy that led to trichotomism's falling out of theological fashion.

## Conclusion

Unlike many of his day, Simpson had an unusually high opinion of the potential for human existence. In a previous work, I have shown how, in his doctrine of sanctification, Simpson's doctrine of sanctification closely resembles the Eastern doctrine of *theosis*. For Simpson, the divine work of sanctification includes and, indeed, depends upon the endivinization of humanity, that is, the deep, penetrating, and mystical life of Christ Himself within the believer from which the believer draws his very life. Simpson referred to this life variously as the highest Christian life, the divine life, and the Christ life, among others. For Simpson, this endivinized life of constant dependence upon and communion with Christ was not to be the occasional privilege of a mere few. Rather, this divine life was the very *telos* of human existence, its *raison d'être*. It was the very purpose for which humanity was created, the intimate, incarnate residence of the divine within—not merely with—humanity.

The product of sanctification, however, is not the only occasion when Simpson believed humanity was endivinized. According to Simpson, this divine life was not only something which was humanity's *telos* and the goal of salvation; it was also humanity's elemental condition. According to Simpson, there was something of endivinization in the created constitution of humanity. This something, he believed, was its primordial spirit. He noted from the creation account of Genesis 2 that the

rest of the human condition—the body and soul—was derived from and was part of the created order. The human spirit, however, was not only given to humanity by God himself in a work of creation distinct from that which resulted in the body and soul, but it was itself received immediately from God. Consequently, the human spirit was, in its very nature, something not only of divine origin but, at least to some degree, something of divine nature. It was of a different nature than the rest of the human constitution. The body and soul were natural; the spirit was supernatural, even divine.

The Fall, however, had a devastating, if not fatal effect upon this spirit. While humanity was created a trichotomous being, the Fall effectively “blighted”<sup>52</sup> the human spirit—leaving only the body and soul operational, and even these not properly so. Consequently, in addition to losing the guiding influence of the spirit over the rest of the human constitution, the destruction of the spirit meant that humanity was no longer able to know or to commune with God. While the Fall left humanity in want of relationship with God, this condition was the direct result of its “want of spiritual organs.”<sup>53</sup> If humanity was to know God, as it was created to do, it would need to have a new spirit placed within it, a spirit like the one it had prior to the Fall. The saving work of Jesus Christ sought to respond to this want. It did not merely seek humanity’s justification and regeneration; its goal was its endivinization, if not its re-endivinization.

As such, Simpson’s soteriology is clearly theotic. It is, on the one hand, transformative. It changes humanity from something that it was not into something else. It endivinizes a humanity that was not (immediately) previously so. Yet, if one grants Simpson’s anthropology, that of a humanity originally constituted in part by a divine spirit, it is also restorative. It seeks to return to humanity its created nature and, consequently, move it toward its divinely intended possibilities and the *telos* inherent in such an existence. Such an equipping was necessary if humanity was to be able to fulfill God’s intention for it—to love him and to enjoy him forever. Spiritual equipment of a lower level, as noted previously, is inadequate to fulfill this mandate—humanity’s *raison d’être*. A divine spirit is necessary for the right living of a human life; it is neither merely a blessed addendum

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<sup>52</sup>Albert B. Simpson, “*Kirjath-Sepher*, or The Mind of Christ,” *The Christian Alliance and Missionary Weekly*, December 15, 1893, 371.

<sup>53</sup>Simpson, *The Holy Spirit*, vol. 2, 112.<sup>1</sup> Joel B. Green, *Seized by Truth*.

nor an option. The especially disastrous effects of the Fall lie in the relative ruin of this spirit, the consequent loss of its capacities and capabilities, and humanity's inability to be what it was created to be. If the goal of salvation is to, at least, restore humanity to its elemental state and to the depth of relation with God for which it was intended, then this would necessarily involve providing humanity with a divine spirit.

The question remains. Is Simpson Apollinarian? Like Apollinaris, Simpson's anthropology is trichotomous; humanity is constituted of a physical body, a sensate soul, and a spirit, each aspect related to but distinct from one another. For some, Simpson's trichotomism necessarily leads him down the Apollinarian path. Furthermore, he asserted the onemindedness of Christ, that is, that Christ possessed one mind, not two, one divine and one human. While Simpson made no explicit case for this, it was, at least, assumed by him. Finally, Simpson asserted the sole divine nature of that one mind of Christ. It was not human and it was not a *tertium quid*. On these three essential aspects of an Apollinarian Christology, it seems, Simpson stands guilty. Yet, it would seem, at least in the case of Simpson, that there is more to be considered.

While the question of heresy is certainly related to the charge of Apollinarianism, it is another question. The charge of heresy leveled against Apollinarianism does not stand or fall solely on Christological grounds. The question of anthropology is very much involved. The charge of heresy and its practical implications are based, at least in part, on the question of representation. If Christ is not fully human—human in all dimensions, no more and no less—he cannot represent humanity. Classic Christian soteriology demands that the mediator be of those seeking redemption. The ancients argued that this was necessary because that which was not taken up cannot be redeemed. If Christ, therefore, was not fully human, he cannot redeem humanity.

Unlike most, Simpson does not assume that humanity is essentially constituted of a “merely” human mind/spirit. Even Apollinaris seemed to assume the humanity of the essential human mind/spirit. Certainly, his opponents did. For Simpson, however, the human being is, essentially, constituted of a divine mind. To possess such a mind is not alien to a human being. According to Simpson, both in the age to come and by primordial nature, humanity's mind/spirit is not, in a sense, human. It is divine. The mind/spirit currently possessed by humanity, with all of its limitations, is not an aspect of essential humanity. Rather, it is a conse-

quence of the Fall. It is, in one sense, a less-than-human mind/spirit. Christ, then, in his possession of a divine mind, while different from the rest of current humanity, is not non-human. If one grants Simpson's anthropology, then, his Apollinarian Christ does fully represent humanity—at least essential, pre-Fall humanity. This Christ, with the divine mind is the human, essentially, that the rest of the race is called to be. Such a high view of Christ is hardly a new or obtuse idea, even within the realm of orthodoxy. The charge of heresy and the charge of theological inadequacy against Simpson can only be sustained if Simpson's anthropology is shown to be heretical. That, however, is another question.

# **BEYOND THE BIBLE WARS: WHY INERRANCY IS NOT THE ISSUE FOR EVANGELICAL WESLEYANS**

by

**W. Stephen Gunter**

For some thirty years I have been saying this to students at the undergraduate, graduate, and post-graduate levels: “You cannot, with logical and theological consistency, be both a Wesleyan and a Fundamentalist.” There are several reasons why this is the case, but the primary reason for saying this so often is the way the Bible is understood and interpreted by Wesleyan Christians who seem not to understand that their assumptions and interpretive practices are foreign to the Wesleyan tradition.

My attempt here is to put in as succinct a form as possible a few historical, theological, and hermeneutical reasons why Wesleyans should not emulate Neo-Calvinian Fundamentalists with regard to interpreting the Bible. *Inerrancy* is not the issue for Wesleyans when it comes to the use of Scripture because Scripture within both the Anglo-Catholic and Wesleyan traditions serves the faithful, not because it is a repository of propositions which together provide an epistemological basis for belief in God, but rather because Scripture serves to lead believers and seeking non-believers in the “theo-drama” wherein we become recipients of and participants in God’s salvation. Rather than faith being mere rational assent to propositional truths, saving faith is participation in the Triune life of God, a participation that is facilitated and nourished by Holy Scripture.

It is important for me to say that I have nothing but the highest regard for the concern that guides Neo-Calvinian Evangelicals, or those



of even more Fundamentalist persuasion, with regard to Scripture. That concern is the safeguarding of truth. And as we shall see, the use of the word “truth” is as much a part of the problem as it is potentially a part of any hermeneutical solution. As Joel Green has pointed out, within the self-described “evangelical” arm of the Protestant church, “. . . biblical authority has come to reside particularly in the propositional content of the Bible.”<sup>1</sup> This inclination to reduce biblical authority to narrow concerns about veracity has its roots in the thought of the nineteenth-century Princeton theologian B. B. Warfield, who set out the parameters of divine authority that gave rise to American Protestant fundamentalism. He wrote:

Inspiration is that extraordinary, supernatural influence (or, passively the result of it) exerted by the Holy Ghost on the writers of our Sacred Books, by which their words were rendered also the words of God, and, therefore, perfectly infallible.<sup>2</sup>

The key clause in this Warfield definition is, “Their words were rendered also the words of God, and, therefore, perfectly infallible.” Accordingly, as Jeremy Begbie has pointed out, “The Bible [according to Warfield and subsequent propositional infallibilists] is not simply a record of, or witness to revelation, it *is* revelation.”<sup>3</sup> The thrust of propositional infallibility is that the Bible is composed of the actual words of God “in which God speaks directly to each of our souls.”<sup>4</sup> In his nineteenth-century context, it is easy enough to discern why Warfield’s inclinations were to define truth and truthfulness in terms of purely rationalistic categories. The influence of the scientific inductive method from the natural sciences was pushing hard against the previously more hegemonic domain of unquestioned theological truths. And, to be sure, in the early twenty first century, these pressures on the possibilities for normative truth claims have not lessened in their intensity.

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<sup>1</sup>Joel B. Green, *Seized by Truth. Reading the Bible as Scripture* (Nashville: *Reading the Bible as Scripture* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007), 146.

<sup>2</sup>B. B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*. S. Graig, editor (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Press, 1948), 420.

<sup>3</sup>Jeremy Begbie, “Who is this God?—Biblical Inspiration Revisited,” in *Tyndale Bulletin* (43:2, November, 1992) 262.

<sup>4</sup>Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, 125.

This is especially the case in the post modern, and as some would have it, our emerging post-Christian era. Simply put, the status of truth has devolved rapidly in the last hundred years, and in many scholarly neighborhoods truth has become a cipher for one's preferred, culturally conditioned, socially constructed version of reality devised as a position of power from which one tries to exercise control over the thought of others. This social construction requires the deconstruction of truth into having little more than personal meaning—my truth, your truth, his truth, her truth, their truth, our truth. Of course, the idea of any meta-narrative is out of the question for these folk. This is bad news for words like “gospel.” This has become the case not only for words and concepts, but also for texts—the Bible included. Since all truth is now assumed to be local and constructed according to culture and context, not even to the biblical text might one have the audacity to ascribe broad authoritative status. Accompanying the loss of textual authority is also the loss of any status for moral authority—actually any “authority” at all beyond personal preference.<sup>5</sup>

This issue of textual veracity is especially pertinent with regard to the Bible in the last 100+ plus years, and that is in almost every way a mess of our own making—especially in North American so-called “evangelical” scholarship where quite a few neo-Reformed scholars are still trying to hold on to inerrantism with one hand while grasping for hermeneutical integrity with the other. Several among them now are moving in the right direction, but at the moment it is a tightly stretched dialectic. On this point, the Neo-Reformed evangelicals are still wearing an uneasy yoke that we in the Anglo-Catholic and Wesleyan stream of history should not shoulder with regard to Scripture.

Let us explore briefly what I mean by this, following the thought of Kevin Vanhoozer. His scholarship I number among the most promising, including *Is There a Meaning in This Text?* (1998), *The Drama of Doctrine* (2005), and, for my purposes nicely and succinctly distilled, his essay “Truth, Scripture and Hermeneutics” in A. Köstenberger, *Whatever Happened to Truth?* Paraphrasing Karl Barth, Vanhoozer describes the theologian's conundrum like this:

As Christian theologians, we must speak of truth; [but] as denizens of the twenty-first century, post-Enlightenment, we

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. R. Albert Mohler in Andreas Köstenberger and R. A. Mohler, *Whatever Happened to Truth?* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2005), 53–75.

cannot speak of truth. . . . [because] Postmoderns typically think of interpretation as a political act, a means of colonizing and capturing texts and whole fields of discourse. Where have we come to? “I knew where I was—in trouble—when my doctoral students at Edinburgh University accused me of oppressing them with my truth claims.”<sup>6</sup>

### Modern Definitions of Truth

It seems that words like “truth” ought to be straightforward, something like the question every parent asks a child, “Are you telling me the truth?” In other words, do your words reflect an accurate representation of what happened? But what if my words are not an answer to a direct question as to what happened? What if my words are a narrative, or even a poetic account through which I am trying to convey the significance and meaning that I understand to be part of a larger story? If you parse the literal meaning of my words, they may be adequate to the events at one level, but not at another. They might also be true at both levels, an account of what happened as well as conveying the meaning attached to them. The meaning attached to the biblical accounts was part of a shared community of meaning that was understood by the first hearers. For almost eighteen hundred years, the Christian church understood Scripture in this way, or at least something similar to this way of understanding “literal.”<sup>7</sup>

It is well known that the Protestant Reformers, especially Luther and Calvin, adhered to a ‘literal’ reading of the text when they affirmed *sola scriptura*; and this is certainly the case with Zwingli when he affirmed Luther’s teaching of *claritas scripturae*. But for the modern reader our difficulty is actually the *lack of clarity* with regard to the supposed self-evident transparency of Scripture’s literal truth and meaning. For all their differences with Rome and their opposition to the abuses of the medieval Roman Catholic hierarchy, the early Protestants enjoyed a rather

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<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, 96-7.

<sup>7</sup>Here I am selectively following Wayne A. Meeks, *Christ is the Question* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 105–123. Unless otherwise noted, the page numbers in parentheses reference Professor Meeks. From the perspective of New Testament exegesis more narrowly construed, see the award-winning book by Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses. The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 2006).

homogenous world with regard to what they meant by literal and transparent. In the words of Wayne Meeks, it goes like this:

The literal sense of a text was its face value to a reader or hearer who was formed by the Christian experience and the Christian story by the church's liturgy, its creeds, its catechism, its hymns, its ethos. It was the plain meaning. . . . The literal meaning was the *insider's* meaning, but for the insider it seemed to reside in the text itself.<sup>8</sup>

Meeks' point is this. To the insider, the meaning was transparent because there was a shared field of meaning and reference between the text and the community.

This idea of a shared field of meaning can be illustrated in the contemporary setting with typical ecclesial shorthand references that do not need to be explained to insiders. In the Church of the Nazarene, one might say, "Kansas City has spoken." In the United Methodist Church, the shorthand reference is to Nashville. For an Anglican, the reference would likely be Canterbury. And all the outsiders, say, "Huh?!" The meaning inherent in the words is an unconscious transaction, and the meaning transcends the literal dictionary definitions of the words.

Hans Frei has pointed out that, by the early eighteenth century, the field of transactional meaning which defined what literal meant for the Reformers and their successors began to change very rapidly.<sup>9</sup> This change has significant implications for us because changes in ground level assumptions are still with us in the twenty-first century. With regard to my present concern, let me zero in on what I believe to be at the heart of our Bible Wars in North America, and in some ways our biggest hindrance at the popular level to moving the work of the Gospel forward in our society.

The set of issues surrounding biblical authority I find to be the single most disruptive factor when I teach at the congregational level, as well as among my theology students. There is no common frame of reference through which the Bible is read and interpreted. Where there is a degree of commonality, it is foreign to the Wesleyan tradition. The foreign commonality is basically the thoroughly Enlightenment-based under-

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<sup>8</sup>Meeks, 105.

<sup>9</sup>Hans W. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative. A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1974).

standing of the “authority of Scripture,” what Vanhoozer calls the *H-H Hypothesis* among evangelical Bible-believers. As we shall see, this H-H hypothesis is an amalgam of the interpretive frames of Charles Hodge and Carl Henry.

In nineteenth-century Princeton, as we have previously noted, B. B. Warfield, followed by Charles Hodge, laid the groundwork for what Vanhoozer calls all “conservative evangelical theology.” It is the insisting on the importance of *propositional* truth. The Bible is seen as the repository of revealed truth, and theology is the “science” of describing the truth of that repository. To the extent that Hodge understood theology as a science, he based it on his understanding of the inductive method that dominated the natural sciences of that era. The Bible was thought to contain revealed data, not only soteric insight, but scientific, historical, and geographic data as well. This is the case because they are God’s words, and they are true because God’s words are inextricably intertwined with real events in the world.

Within this so-called “biblical hermeneutic,” the science of theology is being done correctly when the theologian is interpreting the Bible accurately through a process of empirical observation and/or logical deduction. In Hodge’s own words: “The Bible is to the theologian what nature is to the man of science. It is his storehouse of facts.”<sup>10</sup> Carl F. H. Henry’s magisterial defense of propositional revelation in the second half of the twentieth century follows the same basic trajectory. He defines a proposition as “a verbal statement that is either true or false.”<sup>11</sup> The Scriptures, says Henry, contain a divinely-given body of information actually expressed or capable of being expressed in propositions. Those parts of the Bible that are not already in the form of statements may be paraphrased in propositional form.

Vanhoozer is not willing to make this propositional assertion, indicating that Henry is guilty of what literary critics call the “heresy of propositional paraphrase” when he asserts that the truth expressed in literary forms, such as poetry and parable, may be expressed in “declarative propositions.”<sup>12</sup> Even such speech acts as promising and com-

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<sup>10</sup>Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 6 Vols. (Waco: Word Books, 1976-1983), I:18.

<sup>11</sup>*God, Revelation and Authority*, III: 456.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, III:463.

manding can be “translated into propositions.”<sup>13</sup> These narrow, rationally defined epistemological assertions are necessary for Henry because “the primary concern of revelation is the communication of truth,”<sup>14</sup> and truth for Henry, like Hodge and Warfield before him, is a category inclusive of all categories—soteriological and scientific.

This is a heavy yoke for the neo-Reformed evangelicals in their doctrine of Scriptural authority. To be sure, this is what it is, a doctrine, even a dogma. Vanhoozer and company are well aware of this. His summary of the dilemma is concise: “In what we may call the Hodge-Henry (*H-H*) hypothesis, doctrine is the result of biblical induction and deduction, a capsule summary of the meaning of Scripture ‘taken as a set of propositional statements, each expressing a divine affirmation, valid always and everywhere.’ Propositionalist theology tends to see Scripture in terms of revelation, revelation in terms of conveying information, and theology in terms of divine information-processing.”<sup>15</sup>

### **The Protestant Confessions**

Vanhoozer and other recent neo-Reformed exegetes and theologians recognize that the H-H hypothesis leads to a rigid inerrantism and is heavily invested in a particular theory of language, meaning, and truth. Similar to Ernst Troeltsch’s historicist corollaries set out at the end of the nineteenth century, the H-H hypothesis sets out a thoroughly scientific set of parameters and proceeds to require the squeezing of all truth affirmations into those narrow boundaries. For Troeltsch it was a rather modest assertion, only ALL HISTORICAL TRUTH; but for Hodge and company it was ALL TRUTH. Language, according to the H-H hypothesis, is primarily concerned with stating truth, which in turn is a function of describing reality, representing the world, or recording a series of events or set of data. Under their tutelage, the biblical text is a mirror of nature, history, and even eternity, to the extent that it can state rational universal truths about God’s being. Little wonder that meta-narrative is categorically rejected in the post-modern era when it is attached to this type of positivistic hermeneutic.

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<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, III:477.

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

<sup>15</sup>*Whatever Happened to Truth?*, 101.

Vanhoozer is not comfortable with the hermeneutical yoke that has been bequeathed to him by his propositionalist brethren, and he is willing to express his doubts: “Emergent evangelicals are not the only ones to wonder whether this theory of language, meaning, and truth owes more to philosophy than to the Bible.”<sup>16</sup> He is acutely aware that “conservative evangelicals” [by which he means neo-Reformed evangelicals] are being found guilty of “shoring up their commitment to the biblical authority with a metaphysical theory of truth that is neither biblical in its origin nor plausible in contemporary context.” But within the confines of his confessional tradition, he still is worried by inerrantism: “Carl Henry was right to worry that some theories of interpretation serve to ‘neutralize’ inerrancy.” And holding to this, one can not avoid the question that follows: ‘Is inerrancy itself a hermeneutic?’, but ironically his answer is, ‘Yes and No.’”<sup>17</sup>

Positively, inerrancy assumes the ultimate unity of the Bible, a crucial hermeneutical premise, but only when we agree on the central point of this unity. Simply to assume the Bible’s truth is not yet to say what this means. Vanhoozer quotes Peter Enns with approval: “The issue . . . is not whether Scripture is ‘inerrant,’ but [the issue is] the nature of the Scripture that the inerrant God has given us.”<sup>18</sup> Vanhoozer asserts, “It is one thing to posit the Bible’s truthfulness in all that it affirms, quite another to say what the truth of the Bible is. Inerrancy alone, then, is not yet a full-fledged hermeneutic.”<sup>19</sup> To get a full-fledged hermeneutic, one must have what he calls *Theo-Drama*—“the words and deeds of God on the stage of world history that climax in Jesus Christ.”

Here Vanhoozer would take us into extensive discussions about literary genre. As interesting as they are, we must leave that conversation for the specialists. It is the axiomatic assumption of the Neo-Reformed perspective that is of interest for our discussion. To get at the heart of this, it is necessary to go back to the Westminster Confession of 1646. Book One of the Confession is composed of ten articles of affirmation, all about the nature of the Bible and the nature of biblical authority. Affirmation

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<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>17</sup>*God, Revelation and History*, IV:175.

<sup>18</sup>Peter Enns, “Apostolic Hermeneutics and an Evangelical Doctrine of Scripture,” in *Westminster Theological Journal* 65 (2003): 280.

<sup>19</sup>*Whatever Happened to Truth?*, 104.

four reads like this: *IV. The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed, and obeyed, depends not upon the testimony of any man, or Church; but wholly upon God (who is truth itself) the author thereof: and therefore it is to be received, because it is the Word of God.*

So, when Vanhoozer quotes Enns with approval, they are both appealing to the frame of reference enunciated in the Westminster Confession. But it would seem that Vanhoozer is trying to hold simultaneously to a narrow epistemic interpretive frame for the 1646 Confession while at the same time moving the authority toward a broader soteriological centering. The telling phrase for me in all that Vanhoozer says is in his assertion about locating Scripture's truth "in all that it affirms." When we distill the essence of what is written in the more than 400 pages about "theo-drama," we are left with the central truth that Scripture, especially the New Testament, affirms: "God was in Christ reconciling the world under God's self." The soteric reconciliation is at the heart of the theo-drama, and it is essentially this saving truth that the Bible consistently affirms and teaches.

With this the Westminster divines would have had no quarrel, but the water does not remain quite as translucent with Enn's last logical assertion: "The issue . . . is not whether Scripture is 'inerrant,' but [the issue is] the nature of the Scripture that the inerrant God has given us." This takes the exegete and theologian one step beyond the claims for the inerrant autographs which have eluded our grasp. It takes us right back into the arms of B. B. Warfield's claim that ties the words of Scripture to God's actual words. Is it helpful theologically or exegetically to modify God with a rationalistic claim for inerrancy?

In all fairness to Vanhoozer, when his scholarship is taken within its larger frames, that is, when the nature and authority of Scripture is seen within the theo-drama that Vanhoozer spells out, we find ourselves moving away from a narrowly defined epistemic frame of reference for the Bible (inerrancy), moving in the direction of a soteriologically informed frame of reference where God is consistently faithful with God's self in disclosing to all creation that which is necessary for redemption. It seems to me that this is exactly the right move, and it is precisely in this direction that Anglo-Catholics and Wesleyans have consistently taken the conversation on the authority of the Bible—at least when we have been cognizant of the assumptions that inform our traditions.



## The Anglican and Methodist Articles of Faith

With regard to the issue of fundamentalism, let me say unequivocally that I do not believe it is possible for one to be, with theological consistency a Fundamentalist and a Wesleyan at the same time. How I fondly wish that the more conservative and evangelistically minded among us understood with their head and heart why this is so. There are some historical vagaries intertwined with the Fundamentalist controversy of the early twentieth century and the rise of the Social Gospel that “forced” many to choose between being “conservative” (and gospel-centered) and “liberal” (and social amelioration centered).

Why can one not consistently be a Wesleyan and a Fundamentalist at the same time? It may be helpful for us to return to Wesley’s famous dictum: *homo unius libri*. Fundamentalism has also historically and theologically been concerned with “The Book,” but its preoccupation has been of a different nature. Aware or blissfully unaware of the historical and hermeneutical assumptions at play, Fundamentalists return continually to the Bible as a source of epistemological certainty and rational authority. While the heirs of Wesley are not disinterested in either of these, the primary concerns lie elsewhere.

Wesley’s own use of the expression “a person of one book” is instructive for us. In 1765 Wesley wrote, “In June, 1730, I began to be *homo unius libri*, to study (comparatively) no book but the Bible.”<sup>20</sup> It is important to note that the purpose of this letter to Newton was a description of Wesley’s own *via salutis*, as is confirmed in his *Plain Account of Christian Perfection*: “That this is the very point [Christian perfection] at which I aimed all along from the year 1725 [the year of his ‘first conversion’ and his beginning to keep a *Diary* (April 5)]; and more determinably from the year 1730, when I began to be *homo unius libri*, ‘a man of one book,’ regarding none, comparatively, but the Bible.”

Wesley’s consistent authoritative center is, “God himself has condescended to teach the way: for this very end he came from heaven. He hath written it down in a book. O give me that book! At any price give me the book of God! I have it. Here is knowledge enough for me. Let me be *homo unius libri*.”<sup>21</sup> This soteriological use of the Bible as the source book for understanding the way to heaven and the life of holiness is dif-

<sup>20</sup>*Letters* (Telford), IV, 299: “To John Newton,” May 14, 1765.

<sup>21</sup>“A Plain Account of Christian Perfection,” ¶ 10.

ferent than the epistemological use of Scripture to verify factuality of rational propositions. And this difference should have important implications for what the spiritual heirs of Wesley believe and teach with regard to the Bible and its authority.

In order to see how this soteriological frame of reference worked itself out in formulating the faith of American Methodists, we go back to the Christmas Conference of 1784 and the condensation of the *Thirty Nine Articles* of the Church of England that Wesley prepared for the American Methodists. The early American Methodists were not thrilled about the authority of the “old man from England” on many points, but when it came to the Articles of Faith, they were willing to listen.<sup>22</sup> In recent years, many Methodists have become enamored with Mr. Wesley’s Anglican roots, especially his high-church liturgical expression, and have wanted to return to the liturgy, unfortunately quite often without taking Wesley’s soteriological appropriation of Anglican theological method along with them. In so doing, we have often left Wesley and Wesleyan Methodism behind.

In the early Latin versions of the Anglican *Thirty Nine Articles*, it is crucial to note, the original wording of Article One was “*Of Faith* in the Holy Trinity” [emphasis mine], not simply “On the Holy Trinity.” The Anglican divines chose to privilege faith in the Triune God as the first affirmation of faith. The theological logic has implication for all the articles, namely, that which is affirmed as an article of belief comes within the circumscription of active faith. So article two, “*De Verbi Dei*. . . ,” [“On/Concerning the Word of God”], should be construed as concerning faith in the Word of God. Every article of faith is affirmed within this theological affirmation of belief.

Unlike most other Protestant creeds (especially the Westminster Confession in the English context, which places Book One with its ten affirmations on the Bible *first*), the Anglican Articles affirm first the faith in the Trinity. After this comes affirmation of the nature of Christ, the descent into Hell, Christ’s resurrection, and the Holy Spirit, all prior to

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<sup>22</sup>Cf. Paul M. Bassett, “The Theological Identity of the North American Holiness Movement: Its Understanding of the Nature and Role of the Bible,” in Dayton, Donald, and R. K. Johnston, *The Variety of American Evangelicalism* (Downer’s Grove: InterVarsity, 1991), 72-108.

the first mention of the Bible.<sup>23</sup> And when we do get to the article on Scripture, it is not about rational authority per se, for it reads, “On the Sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures for Salvation.” Actually, the implication of this doctrinal article in its total grammatical context is “Of faith in the sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures for Salvation.” The word sufficiency rather than the word authority is used, and that sufficiency is for salvation rather than to certify the rational certainty of facts or data.

This is a different emphasis and nuance than can be found in nearly any confession or creed of early Protestantism, especially those of the Reformed tradition that are foundational for Fundamentalism, especially as they have been interpreted by many Neo-Reformed Evangelicals for the last hundred years. As Paul Bassett has rightly pointed out, “By contrast, in most of the continental confessions, especially those of the Reformed tradition, the article on Scripture stands first, or, even prior to that, a preamble asserts the priority of the authority of the Bible.”<sup>24</sup> As we have seen, this is very much the case for many Calvinian evangelicals, whose interpretive grid for the Westminster Confession has been unduly influenced by the positivist hermeneutic of Hodge and Henry.

While it may be that the early Protestant creeds and confessions did this in order to stress the need to leave behind the Roman Catholic prioritizing of tradition over scripture, it is also true that this resulted in an emphasis that implies that one must do more than rationally accept the authority of the Bible in order to come to a saving relationship with God. One needs to affirm a specific positivistic conception of truth and affirm that the Bible reflects this positivism—at best the imposition of a modern interpretive frame on the ancient texts. It is doubtful that John Calvin himself followed this line. Many interpreters assert that Calvin was centrally soteriological in his assertion of biblical authority, preferring to talk about Scripture as the source of our knowledge of God.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>Cf. Oliver O’Donovan, *On the Thirty Nine Articles. A Conversation with Tudor Christianity* (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1986), 18: “The Church of Ireland Articles of 1615 and the Westminster Confession of 1647, though they deal more fully than the Tudor Articles with the doctrines of God and Christ, nevertheless do not place them first. Following the pattern set by the Swiss Confessions of 1536 and 1566, they begin with . . . the doctrine of revelation and Holy Scripture.”

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>25</sup>See especially Wilhelm Niesel, “The Knowledge of God,” in *The Theology of Calvin* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 22-39. First German edn. (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1938).

There is not a hint of propositionalism in the Anglican Articles, the source of the Methodist Articles, and this is of great importance for Wesleyan Christians in the twenty-first century. Wesley understood well the faith-centered and soteriological intent of the Articles, and this understanding informed the manner in which he “condensed” them. For example, among others, he omits the article that he does not deem soteriologically significant, the descent into hell. When he comes to the article on Scripture, he does not follow the Puritan emphasis that had come to insist in the eighteenth century on rational authority on all matters. Wesley retains the original wording of Article V, “Of the Sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures for Salvation.” In doing so, he avoided the trap that has subsequently ensnared virtually all expressions of “evangelical” Christianity, particularly in North America, one that has especially defined the theological parameters of Fundamentalism.

Hopefully, I have succeeded in indicating in a minimal way why the spiritual children of Wesley cannot consistently be Fundamentalists and Wesleyans at the same time. For Anglicans and Wesleyans who do not fear the word “evangelical,” the authority of Scripture has a *soteric* rather than a rationalistically defined *epistemic* center. On this point, Wesleyans are more Anglo-Catholic (and early church and Eastern and Orthodox) than Puritan-Reformed!

Wesleyans can, however, be evangelicals! I would, in fact, argue that it is those of us who appreciate fully Wesley’s appropriation of the Anglican soteriological use of Scripture who are most free to be evangel-centered. For it is in the context of faith in God, with the body of Christ in personal and public worship, that religious experience takes on its distinctive character. It is here that faith in God comes alive through the *testimonium Spiritus sancti internum*, the internal witness of the Holy Spirit. Without the Spirit of God bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, without the Living Word testifying to the saving sufficiency of the spoken and written Word, even the written Word may be little more than the dead letter of the law.

While methodologically Wesleyans affirm *sola scriptura*, theologically it is always in the ecclesial context of Trinitarian affirmations, and evangelically it is *always* this Trinitarian God graciously initiating a saving relationship through Christ, witnessed to by the Holy Spirit. It is precisely this that must remain central in a fully formed Wesleyan “evangelical” theology.

It is *soteriological sufficiency* and not *factual inerrancy* that lies at the heart of Scripture's authority for Wesleyans. One can be an Evangelical and affirm the absolute soteriological sufficiency of Scripture for our salvation; however, one cannot consistently be a Wesleyan and hold to the epistemic-centered emphasis on factual accuracy for all things recorded in Scripture. Inerrancy is not the issue for Wesleyans. We should leave behind the fractious "Bible Wars" that disrupt our evangelical churches.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>Joel Green, in the concluding chapter of *Seized by Truth*, reaches conclusions rather similar to mine, although he gets there by quite a different line of thought.

# WESLEYAN THEOLOGY AND THE DISJOINTING OF THE PROTESTANT SCRIPTURE PRINCIPLE

by

Wolfgang Vondey

Wesleyan theology is well known for its high regard of Scripture. John Wesley and his contemporaries upheld the authority of the biblical revelation usually on the classical principles of divine inspiration, the tradition of the church, and the internal witness of the Holy Spirit in the believer.<sup>1</sup> Wesleyan theologians of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries such as W. B. Pope, Miner Raymond, John Miley, and H. Orton Wiley resisted the fundamentalist tendency to condense this three-fold basis to a single source, namely, the infallibility of Scripture.<sup>2</sup> Nonetheless, the influence of the scholastic and Calvinist perspectives of the Princeton School and modern-day fundamentalism has directed parts of

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<sup>1</sup>See Scott J. Jones, "The Rule of Scripture," in *Wesley and the Quadrilateral: Renewing the Conversation*, ed. W. Stephen Gunter and Scott J. Jones (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997), 39-61, 147-50; Mack B. Stokes, "Wesley on Scripture," in *Basic United Methodist Beliefs*, ed. James V. Heidinger II (Wilmore, KY: Good News Books, 1986), 12-18; Timothy L. Smith, "John Wesley and the Wholeness of Scripture," *Interpretation* 39, no. 3 (1985), 246-62; Duncan S. Ferguson, "John Wesley on Scripture: The Hermeneutics of Pietism," *Methodist History* 22, no. 4 (1984): 234-45; Daryl McCarthy, "Early Wesleyan Views of Scripture," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 16, no. 2 (1981), 95-105.

<sup>2</sup>Paul Bassett, "The Fundamentalist Leavening of the Holiness Movement: 1914-1940," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 13 (Spring 1978): 68f.

Wesleyan circles to forms of epistemology, biblical hermeneutics, and a formal rationalism unfamiliar to Wesley's intentions.<sup>3</sup>

Much has been said about the roots of Wesley's view of Scripture in the Pietistic tradition and Reformation Protestantism which influenced in particular the devotional use of Scripture in the early Wesleyan movement.<sup>4</sup> However, not much has been said about the precise development of the classical Protestant emphasis on the authority of Scripture. The supposed indebtedness of Wesley and contemporary Methodist theology to its principles is often uncritically accepted. The situation is complicated by what has been described as a crisis of the notion of revelation in the late modern world exemplified in the manifold divisions over the doctrine of Scripture.<sup>5</sup> A discussion of this crisis was in full steam during the latter half of the twentieth century on the European continent, but has since lost momentum.

The full range of concerns of the birthplace of the Reformation only recently reached the North American context, where the complex discussion has surfaced as a revival of the Protestant Scripture principle. At heart, the Scripture principle is a dogmatic axiom that represents not only a particular theological and hermeneutical perspective but also the faith and praxis of the community that embraces its application. In its original form of *sola Scriptura*, the Scripture principle remains one of the chief axioms of Protestantism. In its contemporary form the Protestant Scripture principle has been critically reviewed by all major ecumenical tradi-

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<sup>3</sup>R. Larry Shelton, "John Wesley's Approach to Scripture in Historical Perspective," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 6, no. 1 (1981): 3-50.

<sup>4</sup>William Vermillion, "The Devotional Use of Scripture in the Wesleyan Movement," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 16, no. 1 (1981): 51-67; Steven Harper, "A Response to 'The Devotional Use of Scripture in the Wesleyan Movement,'" *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 16, no. 2 (1981): 7-10.

<sup>5</sup>See, for example, Terry L. Johnson, *The Case for Traditional Protestantism: The Solas of the Reformation* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2004); Clark H. Pinnock and Barry L. Callen, *The Scripture Principle: Reclaiming the Authority of the Bible*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003); Keith A. Mathison, *The Shape of Sola Scriptura* (Moscow, ID: Canon, 2001); Don Kistler, ed., *Sola Scriptura! The Protestant Position on the Bible* (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 2000), Hans Heinrich Schmid and Joachim Mehlhausen, eds., *Sola Scriptura: Das reformatorische Schriftprinzip in der säkularen Welt* (Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1991); Paul P. Kuenning, "Sola Scriptura and the Ecumenical Endeavor," *Dialog* 29, no. 3 (1990): 202-6.

tions.<sup>6</sup> It thus offers a concise entrance to a larger ecumenical discussion of the role of revelation in the development of Christian doctrine. From that perspective, I suggest that contemporary Protestant theology is not consistent with the original intentions of the Reformers and the emphasis placed on Scripture as the ultimate authority in matters of faith and praxis still upheld by Wesley and his contemporaries.

Beyond Wesleyan and traditional Protestant concerns, the doctrine of revelation has received renewed attention throughout the twentieth century.<sup>7</sup> A prolific amount of literature bears witness that the significance and meaning of Scripture in the context of revelation has entered a new and critical phase.<sup>8</sup> Much of the literature focuses its concerns on two interrelated areas: the relationship of Scripture and revelation and the

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<sup>6</sup>See Don Thorsen, "Sola Scriptura and the Wesleyan Quadrilateral," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 41, no. 2 (2006): 7-27; Craig D. Allert, "What Are We Trying to Conserve?: Evangelicalism and Sola Scriptura," *Evangelical Quarterly* 76, no. 4 (2004): 327-48; Burkhard Neumann, "Sola Scriptura: Das reformatorische Schriftprinzip und seine Anfrage an die katholische Theologie," *Catholica* 52, no. 4 (1998): 277-96; Robert A. Sunkenis, *Not by Scripture Alone: A Catholic Critique of the Protestant Doctrine of Sola Scriptura* (Santa Barbara: Queenship Publications, 1997); Randall H. Balmer, "Sola Scriptura: The Protestant Reformation and the Eastern Orthodox Church," *Trinity Journal* 3 (1982): 51-56.

<sup>7</sup>See Avery Dulles, *Models of Revelation* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1983); Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, vol. 1, *Seeing the Form*, trans. E. Leiva-Merikakis, ed. Joseph Fessio and John Riches (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1982); Yves Congar, *The Revelation of God*, trans. A. Manson and L. C. Sheppard (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968); Edward Schillebeeckx, *Revelation and Theology* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1967); Karl Rahner and Joseph Ratzinger, *Revelation and Tradition*, trans. W. J. O'Hara (New York: Herder and Herder, 1966); John Baillie, *The Idea of Revelation in Recent Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1956); H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Meaning of Revelation* (New York: Macmillan, 1941).

<sup>8</sup>See Pinnock and Callen, *The Scripture Principle*, 15-24; Ulrich Luz, "Was heißt Sola Scriptura heute? Ein Hilferuf für das protestantische Schriftprinzip," *Evangelical Theology* 57, no. 1 (1997): 28-35; Colin E. Gunton, *A Brief Theology of Revelation. The 1993 Warfield Lectures* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1995), 1-19, 64-82; Carl E. Braaten, "Can We Still Hold the Principle of 'Sola Scriptura'?" *Dialog* 20, no. 3 (1981): 189-94; Ted Peters, "Sola Scriptura and the Second Naivete," *Dialog* 16, no. 4 (1977): 268-80; Wolfhart Pannenberg, "The Crisis of the Scripture Principle," in *Basic Questions in Theology: Collected Essays*, vol. 1, trans. George H. Kehm (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1970), 1-14; Gerhard Ebeling, *The Word of God and Tradition: Historical Studies Interpreting the Divisions of Christianity*, trans. S. H. Hooke (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1968), 102-47.



relationship of Scripture and tradition.<sup>9</sup> Twentieth-century theology has posited between each of these constituents an either-or relationship, intensified not only by the rise of critical methods and the renewed focus on history as the premier context for biblical interpretation but also by the increasing absence of the Bible from everyday life.

In this essay I approach this complex situation from the perspective of the Protestant theology of Scripture, and with focus on the dimensions of revelation and tradition. I am thus seeking to illuminate the crisis of revelation from that phenomenological perspective rather than from a conceptual approach to the idea of revelation as such. My observations suggest that the Scripture principle has been misdirected from its original intentions and is thus ill-fit to support the Wesleyan quadrilateral. More precisely, the notion of revelation is held hostage by an artificial disjointing of the formal and material principle of biblical authority that is foreign to the intentions of the Protestant Reformers and their immediate successors. It is thus necessary to begin by tracing the historical development of the Scripture principle from its advance as *sola Scriptura* by Martin Luther. This is followed by an analysis of the alteration of the Scripture principle during nineteenth-century Protestantism. I conclude with an analysis of the implications of the alteration of the Scripture principle for the contemporary Wesleyan theological agenda and observations on the broader contours of the present crisis of the Scripture principle.

### ***Sola Scriptura* and the Origins of the Scripture Principle**

The origins of the Scripture principle are generally attributed to the Protestant Reformation generally, and to Martin Luther in particular. Although Luther was not the first Reformer to acknowledge the authority of the biblical texts, he elevated the status of Scripture to a theological principle, later summarized in the motto *sola Scriptura* or "Scripture alone," which represented a general consensus among the Protestant reformers.<sup>10</sup> The promotion of this principle indicated a wide-ranging

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<sup>9</sup>To this may be added the relationship of Old and New Testament and the composition and compilation of the biblical canon. See Carl Heinz Ratschow, ed., *Sola Scriptura? Ringvorlesung der theologischen Fakultät der Philipps-Universität* (Marburg: N. G. Elwert, 1977), 1-21.

<sup>10</sup>See Yves Congar, *Tradition and Traditions: An Historical and a Theological Essay*, trans. Michael Naseby (New York: MacMillan, 1960), 107-18, 138-55; Heinrich Lennertz, "Scriptura Sola?" *Gregorianum* 40, no. 1 (1959): 38-53; Friedrich Kropatscheck, *Das Schriftprinzip der lutherischen Kirche: Geschichtliche und dogmatische Untersuchungen*, vol. 1, *Die Vorgeschichte: Das Erbe des Mittelalters* (Leipzig: Georg Böhme, 1904).

concern with the theological or dogmatic function of revelation in the church and in history that overshadowed questions about the proper interpretation of the biblical texts.<sup>11</sup> Luther advocated that the Bible should be read, in the first place, and that this reading should be accompanied by a proper understanding of the biblical texts. Equally important, however, is Luther's identification of this task with the quest to discover the authentic sources of revelation.<sup>12</sup> Simply put, Luther was concerned both with what the Bible said and what it represented. Yet, in praxis, these aspirations were not always readily reconcilable.

Luther's understanding of Scripture is complex, and for the purposes of my argument I will focus only on the significance that his understanding of Scripture bears for the idea of revelation and its importance for the formulation of doctrine.<sup>13</sup> From this perspective, the role of Scripture is most clearly described in Luther's idea of the Word of God. By "Word," Luther referred to a complex relationship of Jesus Christ, the biblical texts, and the proclamation of the gospel, all of which can be designated as "Word" without contradiction and form, but one Word of God in different dimensions.<sup>14</sup> In this context, *sola Scriptura* implied that the Bible is always revelation before it serves as principle. More precisely, Luther's understanding of revelation exhibits a logical distinction which proposes that Scripture, *because* it is the Word of God and therefore the "first principle of the Christian life,"<sup>15</sup> represents the "sole rule and norm of all doctrine."<sup>16</sup> Put differently, Luther distinguished between the biblical texts

<sup>11</sup>See Heiko A. Oberman, *The Dawn of the Reformation: Essays in Late Medieval and Early Reformation Thought* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1986), 47-49, 193-94, 270-88; Jaroslav Pelikan, *Obedient Rebels: Catholic Substance and Protestant Principle in Luther's Reformation* (London: SCM, 1964), 20-22; Brian A. Gerrish, "Biblical Authority and the Continental Reformation," *SJT* 10, no. 4 (1957): 337-60.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Oberman, *The Dawn of the Reformation*, 47, 194.

<sup>13</sup> See H. Østergaard-Nielsen, *Scriptura sacra et viva vox: Eine Lutherstudie* (Munich: Kaiser, 1957); Ragnar Bring, *Luthers Anschauung von der Bibel*, *Luthertum* 3 (Berlin: Lutherisches Verlagshaus, 1951); Johann Michael Reu, *Luther and the Scriptures* (Columbus: Wartburg, 1944); Heinrich Bornkamm, *Das Wort Gottes bei Luther* (Munich: Kaiser, 1933); Franz Rosenzweig, *Die Schrift und Luther* (Berlin: Lambert Schneider, 1926).

<sup>14</sup>Cf. Jaroslav Pelikan, *Luther the Expositor: Introduction to the Reformers Exegetical Writings* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1959), 70.

<sup>15</sup>WA 7, 98, 4.

<sup>16</sup>*Formula of Concord*, Rule and Norm, 9.

(*Scriptura*) and the authority attributed to Scripture by the church (*sola*). Only with the addition of “sola” could Scripture serve as a principle of Christian doctrine.

The addition of “sola” painted a sharp contrast between the established Roman understanding and Luther’s own concept of the sources of doctrine.<sup>17</sup> On the one hand, Luther rejected the dominant two-source theory that accepted both the biblical revelation and an extra-biblical, oral authority as reliable resources for the theological task.<sup>18</sup> On the other hand, although Luther held to the long-standing single source theory, which located the unique authority of the Bible in the exegetical tradition of interpreted Scripture, *sola Scriptura* posited that the biblical texts received their authorization and interpretation from themselves before being applied to and interpreted by Christian doctrine.<sup>19</sup> In this sense, the Scripture principle was not intended to juxtapose Scripture and tradition as two antithetical institutions of revelation or to separate Scripture from the established exegetical tradition. Rather, *sola Scriptura* was designed to attribute authority to Scripture from an internal principle in order to integrate it from that perspective into the theological agenda.

The uncontested internal principle of Scripture for Luther was the revelation of Jesus Christ, who stands as the incarnate Word of God at the center of the biblical Word that is proclaimed in the churches. The principle of *sola Scriptura* is overwhelmed by its own witness to Christ.<sup>20</sup> In the plain and literal sense, a dominant form of interpretation since the

<sup>17</sup>See Heiko A. Obermann, *Forerunners of the Reformation: The Shape of Late Medieval Thought* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966), 53-66; Alister McGrath, *The Intellectual Origins of the European Reformation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 140-51. See also David W. Lotz, “Luther and *Sola Scriptura*,” in *And Every Tongue Confess: Essays in Honor of Norman Nagel on the Occasion of His Sixty-fifth Birthday*, ed. Gerlad S. Krispin and Jon D. Vieker (Dearborn: Nagel Festschrift Committee, 1990), 250-63; Lewis W. Spitz, Sr., “Luther’s *Sola Scriptura*,” *Concordia Theological Monthly* 31, no. 12 (1960): 740-45.

<sup>18</sup>Oberman, *The Dawn of the Reformation*, 280.

<sup>19</sup>WA 7, 97, 23. Cf. Walter Mostert, “*Scriptura sacra sui ipsius interpres*: Bemerkungen zum Verständnis der Heiligen Schrift durch Luther,” *Luther-jahrbuch* 46 (1979): 60-96.

<sup>20</sup>Cf. Lotz, “Luther and *Sola Scriptura*,” 257-61; Spitz, “Luther’s *Sola Scriptura*,” 742; A. Skevington Wood, “Luther’s Concept of Revelation,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 35 (1963): 149-59.

Renaissance,<sup>21</sup> the written Word does not reveal itself but points to the self-disclosure of the hidden God in the person of Christ. For the Reformer, the Scripture principle was at heart a Christocentric principle which advocated the gospel of Christ as the sole content of the biblical revelation and thus as the center of Christian doctrine. Scripture occupies a major place in the divine self-disclosure since it plainly and clearly presents Christ to the believer.

Luther's idea of the plainness and perspicuity of the Bible was tied to the idea of Scripture as "Christ's spiritual body"<sup>22</sup> which is made present by the Holy Spirit in the preaching of the Word of God and its reception by faith.<sup>23</sup> In Christ and the Spirit, God remains in unrestricted authority over Scripture.<sup>24</sup> The Bible as the Word of God consists of this unity-in-tension of Spirit and letter before it is made subject to interpretation by the church. The authority, certainty, and perspicuity of the biblical texts are attributed to God's Spirit who enters the dynamic of the Word of God, and in this manner allows Scripture to emerge as the fountainhead for the theological task.<sup>25</sup> Luther upheld the authority of the text, but submitted it to the liturgy of the Word as a "living voice"<sup>26</sup> in the Christian life that is not only read but seen, heard, and experienced. Luther's Scripture principle did not reject the judgment of the theological tradition, but demanded that all doctrine conformed to the witness of the Spirit in Scripture.<sup>27</sup> In the praxis of the Reformation, Scripture functioned as the

<sup>21</sup>See Jerry H. Bentley, *Humanists and Holy Writ: New Testament Scholarship in the Renaissance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983).

<sup>22</sup>WA 7, 315, 24.

<sup>23</sup>Cf. Christian Gremmels, "Der Heilige Geist als Ausleger der Schrift," in Ratschow, *Sola Scriptura*, 153-77; Regin Prenter, *Spiritus Creator: Luther's Concept of the Holy Spirit*, trans. John M. Jensen (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1953), 101-30; Bornkamm, *Das Wort Gottes bei Luther*, 9-18; Bring, *Luthers Anschauung*, 13-19.

<sup>24</sup>Wood, "Luther's Concept of Revelation," 156-58; Paul Schempp, *Luthers Stellung zur heiligen Schrift*, *Forschungen zur Geschichte und Lehre des Protestantismus* 3 (Munich: Kaiser, 1929), 79-83.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. G. Gloege, "Schriftprinzip," *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart: Handwörterbuch für Theologie und Religionswissenschaft*, vol. 5, 3rd ed. (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1986), 1540-43.

<sup>26</sup> WA 10, 1, 17; 12, 259; 18, 136. Cf. William A. Graham, *Beyond the Written Word: Oral Aspects of Scripture in the History of Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 141-54.

<sup>27</sup> See the *Formula of Concord*, Rule and Norm, 1 and 9.

chief principle for the promulgation of Christian doctrine, albeit not primarily as text but as the living reality of the Word of God.

Nevertheless, the authority granted to the Word of God as the highest principle of doctrine did not mean that the Reformers embraced a radical biblicism. Particularly in response to more radical reformers, Luther rejected the idea of a restoration of the entire Christian life to the doctrines and practices of Scripture. Revelation was a basis for proclamation, conversion, and worship, but not for the reinstatement of the biblical world.<sup>28</sup> Jaroslav Pelikan highlights the importance of this distinction for an understanding of the role of Scripture in Luther's thought.

[I]t is inaccurate to designate his work as that of restoring the Bible to the church. It would be more accurate perhaps to interpret it as the task of restoring the gospel to the Bible. For he did not seek to reprimatinate New Testament Christianity. When he thought that Zwingli was trying to do something like that in his mode of celebrating the Lord's Supper, Luther repudiated this mode as irrelevant.<sup>29</sup>

Relevant to Luther was the postulation of the Word of God as the center of the authority of Scripture and thus as the living principle for the doctrines of the church. The idea of *sola Scriptura* represented for Luther, and for much of early Protestant dogmatics, the indisputable standard of theology, but not the underlying principle of the Reformation.<sup>30</sup> The peasant wars and the iconoclasm of the Reformation, although often justified by an appeal to the Scripture principle, were not its proper focus and intention.<sup>31</sup> The goal of *sola Scriptura* was not to create a "religion of the book"<sup>32</sup> but to shape a theological tradition that was consistent with the biblical witness of the Spirit to the gospel of Christ. These intentions,

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<sup>28</sup>See Lowell C. Green, "Luther on Revelation: Foundation for Proclamation and Worship," *Consensus* 9, no. 2 (1983): 3-11.

<sup>29</sup>Pelikan, *Obedient Rebels*, 22.

<sup>30</sup>Cf. Ebeling, *The Word of God and Tradition*, 117; Bengt Häggglund, *Die Heilige Schrift und ihre Deutung in der Theologie Johann Gerhards: Eine Untersuchung über das altlutherische Schriftverständnis* (Lund: CWK Gleerup, 1951), 136-84.

<sup>31</sup>Cf. Stephan H. Pfürtnr, "Das Reformatorische 'Sola Scriptura'—Theologischer Auslegungsgrund des Thomas von Aquin," in Ratschow, *Sola Scriptura*, 48-80, here p. 49.

<sup>32</sup>Cf. Congar, *Tradition and Traditions*, 153.

however, were soon contradicted by the development of doctrine in modern Protestantism.

### **The Alteration of the Scripture Principle**

The Formula of Concord is one of the earliest indications of departure from Luther's original intentions. Significantly, it posited next to an affirmation of the authority of Scripture the adherence to the Augsburg Confession and Luther's Small and Large Catechisms. Whereas Luther saw Scripture as the principle ground of doctrine, because it revealed the hidden God in the person of Christ and elevated the Word of God to the fountainhead of the theological task, the Lutheran formula segregated the text of Scripture to function as a heuristic model of theological method that included other authoritative sources.<sup>33</sup> The general rationalization of theology during the Enlightenment began to derive the authority of Scripture no longer from the idea of the Word of God or from the testimony of the Holy Spirit but from various scientific reasons based on an increasingly rationalistic concept of revelation.<sup>34</sup> As a result, the texts of Scripture became part of demonstrable scientific knowledge and the performance of the hermeneutical and theological enterprise. The authority of the canonical texts was legitimized by rational means, and the Scripture principle in its original form began to be rearranged.<sup>35</sup> The revival of Aristotelian metaphysics, and its distinction between form and matter, provided the most significant tool in the theological pursuit of the essence of biblical revelation.

The quest to define the essence of revelation in the light of Scripture lent itself to an adoption of the distinction between *form* and *matter* for an understanding of the nature and authority of the biblical texts.<sup>36</sup> From this perspective, the divine authority of Scripture is located not in the "content" of revelation, the collection of the biblical texts, but in their inner "form," a term not always clearly and consistently defined.<sup>37</sup> The form

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<sup>33</sup>Cf. Wilton Donald Ernst, "The Place of the Scriptures in the Lutheran Churches in America from the End of the First World War to the Middle of the Twentieth Century," (D. S.Th. Diss., Temple University, 1962), 47-88.

<sup>34</sup>See Johann Reinhard, *Die Prinzipienlehre der lutherischen Dogmatik von 1700 bis 1750* (Leipzig: Deichert, 1906), 43-49, 88-92.

<sup>35</sup> Hägglund, *Die Heilige Schrift*, 144-45.

<sup>36</sup> See Hägglund, *Die Heilige Schrift*, 77-81, 105-18.

<sup>37</sup>Hägglund, *Die Heilige Schrift*, 105-7. On the shift away from content, see also Pinnock and Callen, *The Scripture Principle*, 45-51; Avery Dulles, *Revelation Theology: A History* (New York: Herder, 1969), chapter 3.

was elevated to the internal basis of revelation and became the rational explanation of Luther's designation of Scripture as the Word of God. This tendency is most pronounced initially in the work of Johann Gerhard,<sup>38</sup> whose influential systematic account of orthodox Lutheran doctrine provided a major impetus for the resurgence of Neo-Aristotelian categories in the elaboration and defense of the Scripture principle. Gerhard demanded strict harmony between form and matter and rejected the elevation of revelation above the historical, human, or written dimensions of Scripture.<sup>39</sup> The distinction between form and matter as such led to the erroneous conclusion that the doctrine of revelation could be seen from the perspective of such a division and, consequently, that one could speak of a formal and material principle of Christian doctrine.

Most influential in perpetuating the fundamental distinction between a material and formal principle of theology was J. W. Baier's *Compendium of Positive Theology*. This essential textbook of systematic theology for generations of Lutheran pastors since the end of the seventeenth century advocated a strict division:

The object of revealed theology is two-fold: Material and formal. The material object is the content . . . of revelation, which is known in revealed theology. And this applies not so much to the subject of the operation and the cause and means of the following goal, but also to the goal itself, in so far as it is known by the aptitude of theology. The formal object, or principle and ground of knowing, from where also the knowledge of things come, things which are put forward in revealed theology, is divine revelation.<sup>40</sup>

The impact of this distinction reached its climax in the debates of the nineteenth century about the role of Scripture in the Protestant religion.

In 1875, Albrecht Ritschl provided an influential summary of the development during his century, which emphasized the tension between rationalism and positivism as a chief catalyst for the alteration of Luther's

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<sup>38</sup>See Hägglund, *Die Heilige Schrift*, 9-16; Congar, *Tradition and Traditions*, 154-55.

<sup>39</sup>Hägglund, *Die Heilige Schrift*, 109.

<sup>40</sup>Johann Wilhelm Baier, *Compendium of Positive Theology*, trans. C. F. W. Walther (St. Louis:Concordia, 1877; original 1691), 1, 25.

*sola Scriptura*.<sup>41</sup> Ritschl highlights the work of Johann Philipp Gabler, who argued that the only material foundation of the Christian religion could be a doctrine that would serve as the source of all other teachings.<sup>42</sup> He concluded that it was impossible to offer such a highest material principle as long as doctrine was to keep its positive character and not become a religion built on mere rational principles. As a consequence, Luther's doctrine of justification could be seen as the chief teaching of the Christian faith, but not as the overarching principle of theology.<sup>43</sup> Gabler insisted that the theological task was guided by a formal principle, and not by a matter of content.<sup>44</sup> This emphasis opened the way for an elevation of the two-fold distinction to an integral principle of Protestant thought.<sup>45</sup> The motto, *sola Scriptura*, was now placed in a much broader historical context and confessional environment. And the distinction between formal and material allowed the biblical revelation to remain in a place of formal authority for the theological task, albeit at the cost of disassociating this authority from any particular scriptural content.

Subsequent theological discussion attempted to reconcile the identity of Scripture as a formal principle of doctrine with the material content of Scripture, yet with no substantial efforts to forsake the fundamental distinction itself. In light of this tendency, Scripture could function as a formal principle for Christian doctrine without dictating a particular matter of concern. In turn, theology could be allowed to critically assess the content of the biblical texts without thereby threatening the formal authority of revelation. However, as Ritschl concluded, in contrast to Luther's intentions, the Scripture principle served the historical evaluation of the Reformation and the resulting confessions; it delineated a formula for contemporary Protestantism and not a principle of understanding

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<sup>41</sup>Albrecht Ritschl, "Ueber die beiden Principien des Protestantismus: Antwort auf eine 25 Jahre alte Frage," *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 1 (1876): 397-413.

<sup>42</sup>Johann Philipp Gabler, review of *Summa theologiae Christianae*, by Christoph Friedrich von Ammon, *Journal für auserlesene theologische Literatur* 5 (1810): 587-600.

<sup>43</sup>Gabler, review of *Summa theologiae Christianae*, 594-96.

<sup>44</sup>Gabler, review of *Summa theologiae Christianae*, 599.

<sup>45</sup>Ritschl, "Ueber die beiden Principien," 409. Cf. Gerhard Sauter, "'Scriptural Faithfulness' is not a 'Scripture Principle,'" in *Revelation and Story: Narrative Theology and the Centrality of Story*, ed. Gerhard Sauter and John Barton (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), 7-28, at 8.



for the theological agenda.<sup>46</sup> The idea of the Scripture principle is maintained only on formal grounds. More precisely, Scripture was no longer seen as the indisputable methodological basis for the formulation of doctrine in general, but as the formal principle of the Protestant worldview, which in turn must be supplemented by a material counterpart from within the system of Protestant doctrines. In this way, the doctrine of justification was elevated beyond Luther's intentions to the material principle of the theological enterprise, which, understood as a compendium of propositional, dogmatic truths, demanded adherence to the authority of Scripture only on formal grounds.

Ritschl's essay points to the fundamental impasse of reconciling a formal with a material principle of revelation in contemporary thought. Either both principles are given equal authority, which would elevate doctrine to the same status as Scripture, or one principle supersedes the other, which would undermine the authority of the theological enterprise that is responsible for the designation of the principles in the first place.<sup>47</sup> In each case, the original intentions of *sola Scriptura* are eliminated. The only logical alternative is a separation of the formal element from the material. Although Ritschl emphasized his rejection of this alternative, his essay provided the fundamental basis for the adoption and explication of Scripture as the formal principle of Protestantism.<sup>48</sup> The crisis of revelation is manifested most tangibly in this crisis of the Scripture principle.

A chief result of this development was that the biblical texts were disjointed from the idea of revelation and cast into the open field of modern science. On the one hand, theology became one science among others, concerned only with a particular aspect of revelation as the formal criterion for the formulation of doctrine. On the other hand, the collection of the biblical texts was opened up to the scrutiny of scientific methodology. The idea of the formal and material dimensions of revelation became *de facto* two irreconcilable principles of Protestantism. These developments catapulted the dissolution of the doctrine of Scripture and its conse-

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<sup>46</sup>Ritschl, "Ueber die beiden Principien," 405-11. Cf. Ebeling, *The Word of God and Tradition*, 117.

<sup>47</sup>Ritschl, "Ueber die beiden Principien," 411.

<sup>48</sup>Cf. Carl-Heinz Ratschow, "Einleitende Analyse der Themafrage," in Ratschow, *Sola Scriptura*, 4; Paul Gennrich, *Der Kampf um die Schrift in der Deutsch-Evangelischen Kirche des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts* (Berlin: Reuther & Reichard, 1898), 1-9.

quences beyond the realm of Protestant doctrine into the global arena of post-Reformation Christendom.

### **The Contemporary Crisis of the Scripture Principle**

The post-Reformation world has only recently begun to assess the full consequences of the crisis of biblical authority and the dissolution of the Scripture principle. In a number of publications during the 1960s, Wolfhart Pannenberg illustrated the implications of a crisis of the Scripture principle for the broader theological context today.<sup>49</sup> Convinced “that the dissolution of the Scripture principle is very closely connected to the failure of theology in its universal task,”<sup>50</sup> Pannenberg warned that the horizons of revelation and the theological task had been permanently separated. Although he did not directly speak to the historical division of form and matter, Pannenberg’s publications reflect the broad impact of that separation on the modern view of theology. On a foundational level, the distinction separated the content of the biblical writings from the essential concerns of the biblical revelation and the authority attributed to both. While for Luther the two were intimately connected in the revelation of Jesus Christ, contemporary theology emphasizes the distinction between the texts themselves and the person and history of Jesus that stand “behind” the text as the formal principle.

The nineteenth-century quest for the historical Jesus based itself on the history of Jesus, but in such a way that the connection between Jesus and the apostolic proclamation of Christ became obscured. The kerygmatic theology of our century countered this approach by declaring that the historical attempt to go behind the text was theologically irrelevant, and that the texts are theologically binding only in their witnessing character.<sup>51</sup>

While the dissolution of the Scripture principle may be attributed to the rise of biblical criticism, the cultural shift to secular modernity, the emphasis on religious experience, the rejection of ecclesial dogmas, or the

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<sup>49</sup>For a bibliography, see Wolfhart Pannenberg, “The Crisis of the Scripture Principle,” in *Basic Questions in Theology*, vol. 1, trans. George H. Kehm (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983), 1-14.

<sup>50</sup>Pannenberg, “The Crisis of the Scripture Principle,” 4.

<sup>51</sup>Pannenberg, “The Crisis of the Scripture Principle,” 7.

questioning of the supernatural character of the Bible,<sup>52</sup> the underlying factor responsible for the crisis of revelation remains the artificial separation of the function of Scripture into two autonomous realms.

The distinction of two self-governing principles of doctrine has dissolved any “material” agreement that hitherto had been assumed among the biblical writings. Moreover, it created a distance between the substance of the primitive Christian faith and the content of contemporary theology. *Sola Scriptura* became the slogan for a religion of the “Book” that took “the scriptures” as the objectified form of the faith removed from concerns about content—dimensions that can now be related only at the cost of ignoring the differences between the primitive Christian community and the present situation.<sup>53</sup> During much of the twentieth century, attempts to fuse the horizons emphasized the centrality of history for a rational ordering of revelation and its adaptation to the Christian community.<sup>54</sup> History thus became the primary hermeneutical lens of Protestantism. While the *sola Scriptura* of the Reformers attributed authority to Scripture from a self-evident, internal principle that was then attributed to the task of Christian doctrine, the alteration of the Scripture principle has led to a denial of the final and comprehensive reliability of the biblical witness for contemporary thought. Instead, theology itself becomes the stage for the performance of Scripture, and apart from doctrine, revelation has neither depth nor vitality.

The idea of the performance of Scripture mirrors the notion of the formal principle of biblical authority. As Kevin Vanhoozer points out in his detailed proposal of the performance of Scripture, “some have rushed to the conclusion, therefore, that it is this certain way of using the Bible, and not the Bible itself, that is authoritative.”<sup>55</sup> Ultimate significance is given to the performative aspect of doctrine as the material principle of

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<sup>52</sup>See Pinnock and Callen, *The Scripture Principle*, 15-19; Braaten, “Can We Still Hold the Principle of ‘Sola Scriptura’?” 189-194.

<sup>53</sup>See Robert Moore-Jumonville, *The Hermeneutics of Historical Distance: Mapping the Terrain of American Biblical Criticism, 1880—1914* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2002), 1-27; Pannenberg, “The Crisis of the Scripture Principle,” 7-11; Congar, *Tradition and Traditions*, 153-55.

<sup>54</sup>See Eginhard Peter Meiering, “Sola Scriptura und die historische Kritik,” in Schmid and Mehlhausen, *Sola Scriptura*, 44-60.

<sup>55</sup>Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 153.

the Christian life and not to Scripture, which represents only the formal principle for the direction of the theological performance. Since the biblical texts are not self-performing, they demand an external principle for the proper ordering of this performance. The doctrines of the church are consequently reintroduced, as the material principle, into the biblical witness, where they function as “a canon within a canon”<sup>56</sup> that ultimately determines the purpose of the biblical writings. The result has been, among other things, a positing of the New Testament against the Old Testament, the kerygma against other biblical genres, the sayings of Jesus against other words of Scripture, a central biblical message against the totality of the canon, or a “normative supermotive” against the diverse range of the biblical writings.<sup>57</sup> The stories, letters, prophecies, visions, and songs of the Bible have been disconnected from each other and from the idea of the Word of God, which functions as the formal principle of the authority of the Scriptures that remain essentially void of content. A misplaced notion of the performance of Scripture has introduced a competitiveness into the biblical witness that is foreign to the character of the biblical imagination.

The Protestant consensus on the authority of Scripture has been replaced by a wide range of differing opinions. In their recent comprehensive treatment of the Scripture principle, Clark Pinnock and Barry Callen portray the current situation as “a great divide . . . not so much between Catholics and Protestants, but between classical Christians of every kind and liberals who seem bent on shifting the church from her scriptural foundations.”<sup>58</sup> The contours of this divide are formed neither by a complete denial of biblical authority nor by the diversity of its definitions.<sup>59</sup> Consequently, recent attempts to redefine biblical authority, its object and scope, do not address the heart of the problem and have essentially failed.<sup>60</sup> Instead, at the bottom of the crisis of revelation lies the funda-

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<sup>56</sup>Cf. Ebeling, “The Word of God and Tradition,” 118; Patrick R. Keifert, “An Ecumenical Horizon for ‘Canon within a Canon,’” *Concordia Theological Monthly* 14, no. 3 (1987): 185-93.

<sup>57</sup>Krister Stendahl, “One Canon Is Enough,” in *Meanings: The Bible as Document and as Guide* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 55-68.

<sup>58</sup>Pinnock and Callen, *The Scripture Principle*, 248.

<sup>59</sup>Braaten, “Can We Still Hold the Principle?,” 192-93.

<sup>60</sup>See Pinnock and Callen, *The Scripture Principle*, 20-21; Braaten, “Can We Still Hold the Principle?” 193.

mental distinction between form and matter. This distinction has created an impasse which isolates revelation as a mere formal component from the object and content of the theological agenda.

The repercussions of this isolation have been emphasized by a virtual standstill of a distinctively Wesleyan hermeneutics of Scripture.<sup>61</sup> The chief problem, as in other Protestant traditions, is an attention overly occupied with Scripture as text and not as revelation.<sup>62</sup> As mere text, even Wesley found it difficult to emphasize Scripture as the sole rule and norm of Christian faith, teaching, and practice, while at the same time integrating it in a complex relationship of reason, tradition, and experience.<sup>63</sup> The Wesleyan quadrilateral resists a separation of Scripture in terms of form and content, at least from Wesley's perspective, since none of its components can engage Scripture based on only one of its artificially divided foundations. In the contemporary world, however, the separation of form and content takes on various appearances, ranging from the notion that revelation does not contribute anything to the body of rational knowledge to the idea that revelation constitutes merely an inner experience. The former removes the concept of revelation to an abstract idea; the latter makes it an isolated internal stimulus. In both cases, the truths of revelation are removed from the context of the biblical narratives and emptied of their cognitive content.<sup>64</sup> As a result, revelation manifests the authority of Scripture, but does not communicate any information for the development of doctrine. The chief consequence is an essential isolation of revelation from the theological task altogether. This isolation is at the heart of not only formulating a distinctively Wesleyan hermeneutic but also of reformulating the Wesleyan quadrilateral in a post-modern critical environment in which revelation is held hostage by an artificial separation of the form and content of biblical authority. Any solution to this crisis must begin not by reconciling the idea of formal and material principles but by abandoning the distinction altogether.

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<sup>61</sup>Frank Anthony Spina, "Wesleyan Faith Seeking Biblical Understanding," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 30, no. 2 (1995): 26-49.

<sup>62</sup>Cf. Robert W. Wall, "Toward a Wesleyan Hermeneutics of Scripture," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 30, no. 2 (1995): 50-67.

<sup>63</sup>Cf. William J. Abraham, "Keeping up with Jones on John Wesley's Conception and Use of Scripture," 32, no. 2 (1997): 5-13.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. Pinnock and Callen, *The Scripture Principle*, 46-49; Richard J. Coleman, *Issues of Theological Conflict: Evangelicals and Liberals*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), chapter 3.

# **PRACTICING SCRIPTURE, UNSEALING THE BOOK**

by

**E. Byron Anderson**

What do we think we are saying and doing when we as a worshipping community hear the words “This is the gospel of Christ” and respond “Praise to Christ our Lord” or “Praise to you, O Christ,” or when we hear “The Word of God for the people of God” and respond “Thanks be to God”? A short answer is that we are “practicing Scripture,” helping Scripture come to be in the midst of the Christian community. Such an answer is not without its problems, especially if we objectify Scripture in such a way as to separate it from the primary context in which emerged and in which it continues. But, following the lead of John and Charles Wesley—though not their conclusions, it becomes clear that, as object, Scripture is nothing more than “a set of black marks on white pages,”<sup>1</sup> letters and words waiting to be read and sounded in the community and, as such, with no power in and of itself. Until Scripture is practiced, performed, and proclaimed it lives in the realm of potentiality, unactualized (as Scripture can never be “self-actualized”), just as a musical score is not the same as the music it intends until the musician takes up her violin and begins the first note.

What, then, does it mean to “practice” Scripture? To answer this, as well as my opening question, I begin with a brief exploration of the distinction between potentiality and actuality. Second, I look at the ways in which this distinction appears in the work of John and Charles Wesley as

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<sup>1</sup>Nicholas Lash, *Theology on the Way to Emmaus* (London: SCM, 1986), 37.

they approach the place of Scripture in their understanding of the means of grace. Third, I explore what it means to suggest that Scripture comes to be and is actualized in liturgical practice. Finally, I will explore how the different liturgical words and practices we use to receive Scripture provide interpretive frameworks for its actualization in Christian worship.

### **Potentiality and Actuality**

Scripture, like any book or musical score, exists in state of potentiality until it is practiced and performed. Commentators open the book and see problems of redaction, transmission, and translation. As they undertake their work, they help us see the history of interpretation of a text and guide us through accepted and questioned readings. But nothing in the work they do requires that they accept this book as Scripture. Nor does their work result in the book becoming Scripture for a community of belief. Preachers open the book and, unless they are using it to their own ends, see a range of possible interpretations and applications that may or may not be brought forward in the liturgical event of proclamation and preaching. Even the individual reader, whether in private devotion or public worship, experiences the potential of these “black marks on white pages.” It is not until one takes up the book and reads, silently or aloud, that these marks come to life as words and Word.

American pragmatist philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce helps us understand the distinction between *potentiality* and *actuality*. In his “doctrine of signs,” Peirce distinguishes three characteristics or qualities of a sign, which he labels firstness, secondness, and thirdness. Firstness, for Peirce, is the character or quality of possibility for meaning. At this level, Scripture is an abstraction—the possibility or some notion of a sacred book or text. Secondness has the character or quality of an event and, therefore, of actuality. Not only do we have a book in our hands, but we have words on our mouths and in our ears. Thirdness relates to the quality of convention—the patterns or rules that emerge from repeated performance and interpretation. While it, too, is a kind of abstraction, thirdness is necessary for and even precedes firstness. Thirdness provides the interpretive context in which we approach the potential of the book, the social and theological conventions through which we can think “sacred book.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>See Graham Hughes’ *Worship as Meaning: A Liturgical Theology for Late Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge, 2003), especially his discussion of Peirce’s “doctrine of signs,” 134-147, for an accessible introduction to Peirce’s semiotic theory and its application to liturgical theology.

For Peirce, the meaning we make of something, whether sacred text or not, requires the interaction of these three categories. Yet, they do not interact on their own; they require the work of an interpreter. However much Protestants want to argue for the unmediated authority of Scripture, interpreted “without reference to other authorities” ecclesial, philosophical, or scholarly,<sup>3</sup> Scripture is always mediated—in its translation, printing, reading, and proclamation. Without such mediation Scripture can never be actualized; it remains in a state of potentiality. Its meaning as Scripture “emerges in active behavior” as individuals and communities respond to its active embodiment in some interpretive environment.<sup>4</sup> Unless and until the book is opened, read, interpreted, and received, until the book is practiced, it can mean little and do nothing.

Even more, how we embody the opening, proclamation, and interpretation of Scripture provides a range of “signifying activities,” activities which themselves operate within traditions of discourse and which through “repetitive practice establishes patterns of action that allow standardized significations.”<sup>5</sup> Christian and other religious communities ritualize the proclamation and reception of Scripture in liturgy with particular gestures and actions, acclamations and responses, all of which lead Scripture from potentiality to actuality as Scripture. Although these actions and acclamations are always occurring “in the moment” of a particular liturgical event and are, in this sense, unrepeatable, they also provide forms of signification that represent larger types of behavior or gestures. The actions with and around Scripture particular to *this* day also represent our practices of Scripture on other days. In Peircean terms, meaning is revealed in the actions that result in response to the particular patterns of signification. Where the conventions represented by thirdness led to the potentiality of firstness, the actuality of secondness, as it is repeated over time, leads us back to thirdness.

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<sup>3</sup>Ted Campbell, *The Gospel in Christian Traditions* (New York: Oxford, 2009), 76.

<sup>4</sup>Naomi Cumming, *The Sonic Self: Musical Subjectivity and Signification* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001), 48. Though her use of Peircean semiotics is focused on meaning-making in musical performance, she helps us understand the way in which performance is required for “black marks on a white page” to come to actuality and, therefore, to meaning. Communication/meaning is always mediated through organized, performed and mediated signs.

<sup>5</sup>Cumming, 29.



From the perspective of Christian Scripture, the conventions of the Christian canon do not actualize Scripture but make it a potentiality. It is only in our practice that Scripture becomes actuality and, in our repeated practice the conventions of canonicity are reaffirmed.

### **“Empty sounds and letters dead”**

John Wesley was hardly a pragmatist in the Peircean sense, but his understanding of the power of Scripture, as of all the means of grace, seems congruent with this pragmatic distinction between potentiality and actuality. Given the historic emphasis on *sola scriptura* in the Anglican and Methodist Articles of Religion, and the Methodist emphasis on Scripture as the primary source for theological and doctrinal consideration, this congruence might seem surprising. We should rather expect Scripture to be actualized by some inherent power. But this is clearly not the case. As Wesley argued in his sermon “The Means of Grace,”

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 . . . all outward things, unless [God] work in them and by them, are mere weak and beggarly elements. . . . 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, or the bread and wine received in the Lord’s Supper; 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.<sup>6</sup>

We find in Wesley, as we find in Peirce’s semiotic theory as well as other signifying systems, that Scripture requires an interpreter—someone or something that will actualize it—before it can accomplish its work. Without that interpreter Scripture lacks actuality. Where Wesley differs from Peirce is in his understanding of who that interpreter is. For Wesley, it is not human performance that actualizes the potentiality of Scripture, but God’s action through the Holy Spirit. In Peircean terms, Wesley describes a semiotic pattern in which we are given a sign (the book or canon of Scripture), an interpretant (the Spirit unsealing the book), and its

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<sup>6</sup>John Wesley, “The Means of Grace” in Albert Outler, ed., *The Works of John Wesley*, Vol. 1, *Sermons* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1983), 382.

signification (the Word of God, a means of grace). Wesley thus sets Scripture somewhat equally among the other means of grace, including eucharist, prayer and fasting. Its power is neither more nor less than the power of these other ordinary means: They have power neither in themselves nor through those who offer them. Their power lies only with God acting in and through the Holy Spirit. Charles Wesley seemed to concur:

Whether the Word be preached or read, / No saving benefit I  
gain  
From empty sounds or letters dead; / Unprofitable all and  
vain,  
Unless by faith thy word I hear / And see its heavenly  
character.<sup>7</sup>

As Laurence Stookey observes, “For Charles Wesley Scripture has clear authority; but it is not in the book as such. The same Spirit who inspired the authors must apply the truth of their words to our hearts, to be received by faith. Scripture does not reveal; it is God who reveals through Scripture. . . .” The letter of Scripture, like any of the means of grace, therefore, is “dead unless the Spirit enlivens it” and we receive it in faith.<sup>8</sup> We find a similar emphasis on Scripture as a means of grace activated and actualized only by the power of the Holy Spirit in his hymn text “Come, Holy Ghost, our hearts inspire.”

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<sup>7</sup>Laurence Hull Stookey, “Charles Wesley, Mentor and Contributor to Liturgical Renewal” in *Charles Wesley: Poet and Theologian*, 141-142. “Whether the Word be preached or read” from *The Poetical Works of John and Charles Wesley*, ed. George Osborne, vol. 13 (London: 1872), 123-124.

<sup>8</sup>Scott J. Jones, *John Wesley’s Conception and Use of Scripture* (Nashville: Abingdon/Kingswood, 1995), 104. On this point, the Wesleys were probably closer to Calvin than they were willing to acknowledge. So Calvin, *Institutes* IV.xiv.9: “The sacraments duly perform their office only when accompanied by the Spirit, the internal Master, whose energy alone penetrates the heart, stirs up the affections, and procures access for the sacraments into our souls. If he is wanting, the sacraments can avail us no more than the sun shining on the eyeballs of the blind, or sounds uttered in the ears of the deaf. Wherefore, in distributing between the Spirit and the sacraments, I ascribe the whole energy to him, and leave only a ministry to them; this ministry, without the agency of the Spirit, is empty and frivolous, but when he acts within, and exerts his power, it is replete with energy.” <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/institutes.vi.xv.html> (accessed 13 February 2009).

*Come, Holy Ghost, our hearts inspire, / let us thine influence  
 prove;  
 Source of the old prophetic fire, / fountain of life and love.  
 Come, Holy Ghost (for moved by thee / The prophets wrote  
 and spoke),  
 Unlock the truth, thyself the key, / Unseal the sacred book.  
 Expand thy wings, celestial Dove, / Brood o'er our nature's  
 night;  
 On our disordered spirits move, / And let there now be  
 light.  
 God through himself we then shall know, / If thou within us  
 shine;  
 And sound, with all thy saints below, / The depths of love  
 divine.<sup>9</sup>*

It is the Spirit who “unseals the Book,” the Spirit who “realizes the sign,” the Spirit who makes Scripture a “fit channel to convey God’s love.” At a practical liturgical level, the text suggests that liturgical epiclesis—invocation of the Holy Spirit, which we often think of only in relationship to the sacrament of the table—is necessary to the efficaciousness, even the actualization, of Scripture as Scripture. Just as our invocation of the Holy Spirit at the Lord’s table enables bread and wine to become a sacred meal,

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<sup>9</sup>1780, no. 85, UMH 603. UMH substitutes “God, through the Spirit” for “God through himself” in st. 4. A comparison of this text with his eucharistic text “Come, Holy Ghost, thine influence shed” shows a remarkable parallel in Wesley’s understanding of the actualizing power of the Spirit in both scripture and sacrament.

*Come, Holy Ghost, thine influence shed, / And realize the sign;  
 Thy life infuse into the bread, / Thy power into the wine.  
 Fit channels let the tokens prove / And made, by heavenly art,  
 Fit channels to convey thy love / To every faithful heart.  
 (Hymns on the Lord’s Supper, 72.)*

Though these hymns were published separately, and are often isolated from one another within contemporary Methodist hymnals, the two texts point to the way in which the efficaciousness of both scripture and sacrament as means of grace depend on the working of the Holy Spirit for their actualization. At a performative level, it is interesting to note that the two texts share the same meter, making it possible for us to sing them to the same tune. Were we to do so, we could create a musical as well as a theological relationship between the liturgy of the word and the liturgy of the table.

so too our invocation of the Holy Spirit before the reading and proclamation of Scripture enables words and book to become Word in the midst of the liturgical assembly.<sup>10</sup> “Empty sounds and letters,” which have the potential to be God’s Word, are actualized as God’s Word. As Lutheran theologian André Birmelé suggests, “Through the power of the Holy Spirit the text of Scripture becomes Gospel, a dynamic Word that produces what it affirms and promises. It makes us participate in Christ.”<sup>11</sup>

While this demonstrates the Wesleyan commonplace that God’s actions require our cooperation and collaboration for their fulfillment, it also suggests a shift (for the Wesleys a problematic shift) back to the human actor in this process. Such human action may be conveniently impelled by the Holy Spirit, as the Wesleys would remind us, but it is human action nonetheless. This said, the Wesleys’ protestant distrust of ritual action and their critique of the ways in which people are inclined to trust in such action made it difficult for them to see the ways in which the human action of invoking the Holy Spirit contributed to the actualization of the means of grace. The Holy Spirit empowers Scripture, but it is actualized in its liturgical performance in and with the community of faith. The presence of Christ in Scripture, Birmelé argues, “is not localized in a letter or even a verse. It is in the ‘celebration’ of Scripture, its reading and proclamation, that the Gospel becomes real; therefore, Christ is really present.”<sup>12</sup>

### **The Liturgical Place of Scripture**

The gospel becomes real. Scripture is actualized and comes to be in liturgical performance. The liturgy is its home. This may be hard to see in an age when Scripture is readily available in a variety of translations and paraphrases, whether as printed text or electronic image (thus no longer

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<sup>10</sup>Orthodox liturgical theologian Alexander Schmemmann makes a similar connection as he describes the prayer before the gospel reading in the Byzantine rite. The prayer before the gospel “which is now read silently, occupies the same place in the sacrament of the word that the *epiclesis*, the supplication for the Father to send down his Holy Spirit, occupies in the eucharistic prayer.” Alexander Schmemmann, *The Eucharist: Sacrament of the Kingdom*, trans. Paul Kachur (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1988), 76.

<sup>11</sup>André Birmelé, “The relationship between Scripture and Sacrament in Lutheran Theology” in Philippe Bordeyne and Bruce Morrill, ed., *Sacraments: Revelation and the Humanity of God* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2008), 72.

<sup>12</sup>Birmelé, 74.

“black marks on a white page” but pixels of many possible colors on a digital screen), when Scripture is portable and individualized, and when there seems to be no end to the variety of study editions and commentaries. In such a personalized and individualized context, the assertion that Scripture requires a community of practice and a liturgical ritual context for its “performance” and its interpretation seems unfathomable. Thus, the claim that Scripture finds its natural home in the liturgy warrants some exploration.

Certainly on the Protestant side of the conversation, attention has tended to focus on what Scripture either permits or forbids in liturgical practice, or it has focused on imaginative readings of prophetic visions as somehow providing an outline of “true” Christian worship. The reality, of course, is that Scripture tells us very little about actual or even imagined Christian liturgical practice.<sup>13</sup> That such concerns for scriptural warrant still occupy our attention and that such concern so often fails is because we fail to see, as Louis-Marie Chauvet suggests, “The liturgy is not apparent in the text itself . . . because it is its pre-text.”<sup>14</sup> Scripture is not the home of liturgy, but liturgy the home of Scripture. “Never does the Bible come as much into its own truth,” Chauvet writes, “than when it is proclaimed in the *ekklesia*, the place where the liturgy lays out the constitutive dimensions of the Bible.”<sup>15</sup>

If Christian liturgy “lays out the constitutive dimensions of the Bible,” then the liturgy is not only where Scripture most fully lives, but also where it comes to be as Scripture. That is, “the liturgical assembly (the *ekklesia* in its primary sense) is the place where the Bible becomes the Bible.”<sup>16</sup> As Aidan Kavanagh argues, “it is the assembling for worship which renders the writing and canonizing of Scripture inevitable.”<sup>17</sup> Similarly, as Paul Bradshaw demonstrates in his work on the historical development of the eucharist, it is in and because of the assembling for wor-

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<sup>13</sup>As Paul Bradshaw makes so very clear in his *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Oxford, 2002): 47-72.

<sup>14</sup>Louis-Marie Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, trans. Patrick Madigan, SJ, and Madeleine Beaumont (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1995), 194.

<sup>15</sup>Louis-Marie Chauvet, “What makes the liturgy biblical?—Texts,” *Studia Liturgica* 22.2 (1992): 128.

<sup>16</sup>Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 212.

<sup>17</sup>Aidan Kavanagh, “Scripture and Worship in Synagogue and Church,” *Michigan Quarterly Review*, 22.3 (Summer 1983), 481.

ship that we also see the gradual emergence of a liturgical Eucharistic canon in which a meal becomes eucharist.<sup>18</sup>

The history of the canonization of Scripture, as well as the history of the church's commemoration of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ in what we call the church year, demonstrate how this is so. After Peter finishes his homily on Joel in Acts 2, we are reminded that the church continued in the apostles' teaching, the prayers, and the breaking of the bread. When Justin offers his defense of the Christian faith to the imperial powers, he tells how each Lord's Day the Christian community gathers to hear the memoirs of the apostles and the writing of the prophets, to be exhorted to their imitation, to give thanks, and to share bread and wine. All of this is to say that the ongoing worship life of the Christian community played, and continues to play, a decisive role in the development and understanding of Scripture and sacrament. As Neville Clark claims, "The native cradle of Scripture is the worshiping life of the People of God. . . . Its controlling use is its liturgical use."<sup>19</sup>

Scripture is born out of the liturgical activity of the church, survives (or not) because of its liturgical use, and receives its public authority in and through its public celebration.<sup>20</sup> Without the liturgy, we have only a book; without the liturgy, we have only a meal. Although the development of contemporary lectionaries might suggest otherwise, Christian people did not say, "'Let's choose some texts.' . . . It is rather that their encounter with these texts shaped their faith and that these texts therefore were authoritative for them."<sup>21</sup> Peter's Pentecost homily on Joel, Paul's reading of the story of Abraham, Luke's account of Jesus reading the scroll of Isaiah in the synagogue: each of these point to the ways in which the church received and celebrated "the Scriptures."

Not only do these accounts demonstrate ways in which the church was using Scripture, but they also demonstrate the ways in which the

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<sup>18</sup> See especially Paul Bradshaw, *Eucharistic Origins* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) and Bradshaw, *Origins of Christian Worship*, 118-143.

<sup>19</sup> Neville Clark, "Scripture in Liturgical Perspective," in Donald Gray, ed., *The Word in Season: The Use of the Bible in Liturgy* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 1988), 24.

<sup>20</sup> Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament*, 190.

<sup>21</sup> A. van de Beek, "Being Convinced: On the foundations of the Christian Canon" in A. van der Kooik and K. van der Toorn, eds., *Canonization and Decanonization* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 336.

church was authorizing Scripture for its continued use even as it began to apply a new hermeneutical frame for that use in the Christian assembly. As Douglas Koskela argues, the Protestant reformation detached “the Bible from its ecclesial practices that were intended to facilitate healthy interpretation.” In separating Scripture from its ecclesial context, the church effectively “de-authorized” Scripture as the book of the church and individualized its interpretation.<sup>22</sup> The liturgical reforms of the twentieth century have sought to redress this by returning the “richer fare” of the Scriptures, especially that of the Old Testament, to the weekly assembly. But the reform of the lectionary only succeeds in revising or reinforcing the conventions of Scripture. As Paul de Clerck writes, “lectionaries present the Bible as the Church receives it today, or in other words, as the Church chooses to read it.”<sup>23</sup> Even so, such revision does nothing to reform its actualization in the worshiping community.

That both Scripture and sacrament are brought to birth, find their home in, and are in a way authorized in the liturgy suggests both promise and problem. There is promise in that much of the church continues to perform and celebrate Scripture and sacrament week in and week out when the Christian community assembles for worship. There is promise in that through this performance and celebration Christian people encounter the life-giving Word of God. There is promise in that this life-giving Word, broken open in our hearing and our eating, continues to provoke our aesthetic, ethical, and intellectual imaginations.

But there are problems as well. When part of the church believes it expeditious to minimize the place of Scripture or sacrament, too often both, in the Christian assembly, they disappear from our hearing and seeing, from our imagining and living. When the church comes to believe that a preacher’s words or a priest’s sacrificial ministry are the center of Christian worship, we wonder if there will ever again be a “word from the Lord” or manna in the wilderness. When life-giving words and practices

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<sup>22</sup>Douglas M. Koskela, “The Authority of Scripture in its Ecclesial Context” in William Abraham, Jason Viskers, and Natalie Van Kirk, ed. *Canonical Theism: A Proposal for Theology and the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 210, 220.

<sup>23</sup>Paul de Clerck, “‘In the beginning was the Word’: Presidential Address,” *Studia Liturgica* 22.1 (1992): 15. As Nicholas Lash helpfully adds, “there are texts that we no longer bother to read, or which we feel ourselves unable to make sense of. But so long as we continue to seek to perform *these* texts, we are continuing to endorse that which we take the texts to have originally meant” (Lash, 44).

are used to degrade, wound, or enslave, rather than lift up, heal, and set free, we wonder why anyone could ever imagine this word as “life-giving” and this cup as “saving.” Those who minimize the place of Scripture and sacrament in Christian worship in effect continue a process of de-authorizing and de-canonizing these central Christian practices.

Perhaps more to our point, as Carol Noren has argued, if Christ is the “central content of Scripture,” then “setting aside the written word of God [is] the same thing as setting aside Christ and the word incarnate in him.”<sup>24</sup> Those who make preacher or priest central, or who wound rather than heal, fail to discern the ecclesial body. Those who separate Scripture from sacrament and sacrament from Scripture and both from their liturgical home also separate them from the very ecclesial practices that are intended to render them intelligible and rightly interpreted. All contribute to our distancing from and forgetfulness of the living Word. It is in the liturgical assembly that the memory of Christ is kept alive, “memory through the Scripture, read and interpreted as speaking about him or being his own living word; memory through the sacraments . . . recognized as being his own salvific gestures; memory through the ethical testimony of mutual sharing, lived as an expression of his own service to humankind.”<sup>25</sup>

For Chauvet it is not our personal faith by which we attest to the Scriptures as the word of God. We make such attestation in their proclamation and enactment in the worshiping community. It is not our piety or devotion that makes Scripture and sacrament what they are. It is, in the Wesleys’ terms, the work of the Holy Spirit. And, it is their connection to the person they celebrate in story and action and God’s use of these things that suggests good news. As Geoffrey Wainwright suggests, “The constant reading of the Scriptures in worship bears testimony to the fact that Christianity considers itself a historical religion centered upon the revelation of God in Jesus Christ.”<sup>26</sup> But it does more than bear testimony: “The Christian liturgy is the privileged place for the enactment and continuation, in words and gestures, of the revelation of redemption.”<sup>27</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Carol Noren, “The Word of God in Worship: Preaching in Relationship to Liturgy,” in Cheslyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainwright, Edward Yarnold SJ, and Paul Bradshaw, eds. *The Study of Liturgy*, rev. ed. (New York: Oxford, 1992), 33.

<sup>25</sup> Louis-Marie Chauvet, *The Sacraments: The Word of God at the Mercy of the Body* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2001), 28.

<sup>26</sup> Geoffrey Wainwright, *Doxology: The Praise of God in Worship, Doctrine, and Life* (New York: Oxford, 1980), 165.

<sup>27</sup> Geoffrey Wainwright, “‘Bible et Liturgie’: Danielou’s Work Revisited,” *Studia Liturgica* 22.2 (1992): 161.



It is not simply that we *name* a book or meal sacred, or that we somehow pass on, as a kind of personal artifact, the family Bible or a tradition of eating together. No, as anthropologist Jonathan Z. Smith argues, “the history of canon is not primarily one of transmission, but of reception.”<sup>28</sup> Obviously Scripture and meal cannot survive, much less be received and authorized if they have not been transmitted to us. And they cannot be fully transmitted to us except as they are at home in the liturgy, as they are “liturgified,” which is itself a process of reception. We might say that it is not until Scripture and sacrament are “animated” or embodied by and through the human person in community that they most fully come to life. The Word cannot be heard unless proclaimed and preached, bread and wine cannot be received as eucharist without prayer, breaking and sharing. It is in the public ecclesial performance of Scripture and meal, in our liturgical celebrations, that we receive and attest to both Scripture and sacrament as means of grace, as mediations of the Word of God “raised from its death by the living voice of the reader, then by that of the homilist who unfolds its ‘timeliness,’ ”<sup>29</sup> then in the community’s self-offering in thanksgiving, and its mutual sharing of bread and wine.

Here we should address some reservations. As Kevin Vanhoozer asks, “How can the biblical text exercise authority *over* the church if its meaning depends on its use *in* and *by* the church?”<sup>30</sup> His answer to this question is two-fold, suggesting the meaningfulness of Scripture prior to its use by the church, as well as the need for the church’s appropriation of Scripture as authoritative text:

To the extent that Scripture has been taken up into the economy of triune communicative action, it has meaning *before* it is used by the interpretive community or socialized into the church’s life. At the same time, Scripture is incomplete in the sense that, as an authoritative script, it calls for appropriation on the part of the believing community—in a word, performance.<sup>31</sup>

On the one hand, Vanhoozer’s notion of Scripture as having meaning before it is used locates such meaning in “thirdness” as described earlier.

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<sup>28</sup>Jonathan Z. Smith, “Canons, Catalogues and Classics,” in *Canonization and Decanonization*, 299.

<sup>29</sup>Chauvet, *The Sacraments*, 47.

<sup>30</sup>Kevin Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 99.

<sup>31</sup> Vanhoozer, 101.

Scriptural meaning precedes use in the social and theological conditions of its canonicity. At the same time, such meaning is *potential* meaning rather than actualized meaning. As Luke 4 reports Jesus saying to his synagogue congregation, the word was not fulfilled when Jesus unrolled the scroll but in their hearing.

John Webster is less willing to grant the worshiping assembly any role in making Scripture come to be as Scripture. In his book *Holy Scripture: A Dogmatic Sketch*, he sets out a series of objections to approaches that focus on church practice for the authority of Scripture, arguing that the church can only acknowledge “what Scripture is” but not make it so.<sup>32</sup> Echoing the Wesleys’ concerns about trusting in the means of grace as human actions, Webster argues that any suggestion that the church makes Scripture what it is demonstrates that “the centre of gravity of a theology of Scripture has shifted away from God’s activity toward uses of the church.”<sup>33</sup> Webster, like Vanhoozer, emphasizes Scripture’s place in the “economy of triune communicative action.” The church cannot make Scripture become Scripture, Webster argues, because “the church is not competent to confer authority on Holy Scripture before it is a hearing church, or competent to give itself the mandate to be apostolic.”<sup>34</sup> The church’s task, therefore, is not the actualization of Scripture as Scripture, but “faithful hearing of the gospel of salvation announced by the risen Christ in the Spirit’s power through the service of Holy Scripture.”<sup>35</sup> While I affirm Webster’s emphasis on the church as the “hearing church,” he seems unwilling to acknowledge the church’s role as “hearing church” in the formation of the scriptural canon itself. When he writes that “worship, proclamation, and reading do not make use of the canon, as if it were a catalogue of resources through which the church could browse and from which it could select what it considered fitting or tasteful for some particular occasion,”<sup>36</sup> he would be more accurate to argue that the church *should not* make such use of the canon in such fashion.

The reality is that the church has done so both to its benefit and detriment through much of its history. Worship, proclamation, and read-

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<sup>32</sup>John Webster, *Holy Scripture: A Dogmatic Sketch* (Cambridge: Cambridge, 2003), 63.

<sup>33</sup>Webster, 43.

<sup>34</sup>Webster, 53.

<sup>35</sup>Webster, 44.

<sup>36</sup>Webster, 65.

ing make use of the canon *and* are “shaped by the canon and what it sets before the church”<sup>37</sup> even as liturgical celebration plays a role in the way in which the canon is practiced by the church. Finally, though I think we differ on what it means to locate Scripture in the context of the church, Webster is correct when he argues that “to lift the authority of Scripture out of the context of the church would be to formalize that authority by abstracting Scripture from its revelatory and therefore ecclesial setting.”<sup>38</sup> It is only in that setting, and especially in its liturgical setting, that we can attest to and enact Scripture as the Word of God.

### Practicing Scripture

My point is this: in the “liturgification” of Scripture, Scripture is actualized *as Scripture*. William Graham puts it this way: “A text is only Scripture insofar as it exists in relation to a community of faith—persons who ‘hear’ it in the fullest sense of the word, who listen to its words, love and cherish them, and live by, with, and for them.”<sup>39</sup> Yet it is more than listening, loving, and cherishing the words in the community of faith. As my opening questions suggest, it is the ways in which we listen, the ways in which we cherish and honor the words, the ways in which we “welcome” the Word that enables Scripture to be Scripture. I think, for example, of the gospel procession as enacted by a group of Catholic Pacific Islanders at the 2009 congress of *Societas Liturgica*. In a stately yet rhythmic dance, accompanied by a joyful song welcoming the gospel, in a material form clearly intended for public reading rather than personal study, the gospel book was presented to the community. By the end of the procession, it was clear to all present that this was no longer *a* book but *the* book, no longer words but the Word in our midst. In Gordon Lathrop’s words, “The texts are not simply read, as in a lecture hall or even a theater. They are received with reverence, yet they are criticized and transformed. They become the environment for encounter with God and God’s grace. They become the language for current singing.”<sup>40</sup>

<sup>37</sup>Webster, 65.

<sup>38</sup>Webster, 55.

<sup>39</sup>William A. Graham, “Scripture as Spoken Word” in Miriam Levering, ed. *Rethinking Scripture: Essays from a Comparative Perspective* (Albany: SUNY, 1989), 152.

<sup>40</sup>Gordon Lathrop, *Holy Things: A Liturgical Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1993), 20.

Yet the questions remain: Can the church really “liturgify” Scripture? How does our liturgical practice of Scripture actualize it as Scripture and grant it its authority? Paul de Clerck helps provide some initial and basic answers to this second question. First, the liturgy provides a context for the possibility of Scripture: “The liturgy proposes the proclaiming and hearing of the word. The liturgy creates an illocutionary setting involving at least a minister, a book, and some hearers: together they make up, modest though it may be, a reading assembly.”<sup>41</sup> Second, the liturgy puts into action, actualizing in proclamation and interpretation, a relationship between “the Scriptures fixed yesterday and accepted today, and between the word heard yesterday and proclaimed once again today.”<sup>42</sup>

The liturgy proposes, puts into action, and practices, Scripture as Scripture. And, different liturgical practices propose different things about Scripture. That is, liturgical practices with Scripture can either confirm or deny at the level of practice a community’s convictions about the place of Scripture in its life, supporting Richard McCall’s claim that “words and gestures and matter form, in liturgical enactment, a single symbol, a language, that is apprehended only in the enactment itself.”<sup>43</sup> I want to focus on four actions that often precede or surround that reading and which contribute to the liturgical actualization of Scripture: posture, procession, prayer, and acclamation.

**Posture.** Do we stand or do we sit for the reading of Scripture in the assembly? In some traditions, Christians stand for some readings (from the Gospels) but not for others (from the Old Testament and Epistles). Some traditions have different practices for the readings in the context of the daily offices and for those provided in the context of the eucharist. Explanations for why we stand for the gospel reading—as a means of honoring the presence of Christ, his words, and the proclamation of his saving work—may make us wonder why we should not stand for all readings from the gospels, regardless of the specific liturgical occasion. At the same time, it has become common to hear some biblical scholars and seminarians ask why we do not stand for all of the readings,

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<sup>41</sup>de Clerck, “In the beginning was the Word,” 2-3.

<sup>42</sup>de Clerck, “In the beginning was the Word,” 5.

<sup>43</sup>Richard McCall, *Do This: Liturgy as Performance* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 2007), 90.

if we truly believe that *all* of Scripture is the Word of God. In what ways has our honoring of the gospel reading “devalued” the other readings? Because the other readings are less important, it is not uncommon in some communities to treat them as optional or for them to be deleted altogether. As Alexander Schmemmann says of the presupposed daily lectionary for New Testament readings in the Orthodox liturgy, which shapes what Orthodox Christians hear on Sundays, we can say of many of our communities in regard to the Old Testament and Epistles: “only a comparatively small part of the New Testament reaches the ears and consciousness of the faithful” and there is little interest in becoming acquainted with it.<sup>44</sup>

**Procession.** In many church traditions, especially those traditions protestants tend to think of as “high church,” the reading of Scripture, especially the reading from the Gospels, is accompanied by a procession, often into the midst of the assembly. In the Byzantine liturgy, this procession is called the “little” entrance, a parallel to “great” entrance of the Eucharistic gifts, and makes visible the relationship between the presence of Christ in Scripture and the presence of Christ in the bread and cup. Some traditions describe the gospel procession in terms that remind us that God’s Word does not come to us “from on high” but into our midst and dwells among us. Others suggest that this procession reminds us that, as Christ has come among us, so we are sent into the midst of the world in service and mission. Each of these explanations provides a framework in which Scripture is actualized in each community. And yet, while each explanation has its own particular biblical references, it is the action itself that provides the interpretive framework for Scripture in that community. As I asked in regard to posture, what does this procession tell us about the differences between the readings? Does the absence of such a procession tell us that Scripture is to be heard from a distance (and height) and that such distance is what gives it authority? Does the fact that the reader remains at lectern or ambo for the Old Testament and Epistle readings suggest that these readings remain at a distance from us? What does it tell us that lay readers do not process with the gospel but only deacons or presbyters?

**Prayer.** “Lord, open our hearts and minds by the power of your Holy Spirit, that as the Scriptures are read and your Word proclaimed, we

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<sup>44</sup>Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*, 74.

may hear with joy what you say to us today.”<sup>45</sup> The United Methodist service of Word and Table places this “prayer for illumination” at the beginning of the service of the Word. The prayer both marks the transition from the gathering rite into the service of the Word and serves as an enacting of the Wesleyan understanding of the need for the Holy Spirit to actualize Scripture in the midst of the assembly. A similar prayer, now spoken silently by the celebrant, occurs in the Byzantine rite prior to the gospel reading (but not before the other readings). As I suggested earlier in my discussion of the Wesleys, our invocation of the Holy Spirit before the reading and proclamation of Scripture enables words and book to become Word in the midst of the liturgical assembly. We should note the ways in which these prayers also invite the assembly’s transformation. For United Methodists the movement from Word to Table is also the movement, empowered by the Holy Spirit, from “hearing with joy” to “being for the world the Body of Christ.” These prayers and hymns lead us to understand that the words we are about to hear are not our own words and, contrary to protestant arguments about the perspicuity of Scripture, that our understanding of these words requires assistance from the One whose words these are. Contrast this with the practice in the many communities in which such prayers are never used, but in which we frequently hear the preacher pray that his/her words be “acceptable in the sight of the Lord” prior to the sermon.

**Acclamation.** The liturgical practice of acclamations before and after Scripture readings brings us back to my opening questions. What does it mean for us to say “This is the gospel of Christ” and respond “Praise to Christ our Lord” or “Praise to you, O Christ,” or when we hear “The Word of God for the people of God” and respond “Thanks be to God”? I can still recall a liturgy that I had prepared for a small ecumenical group and at which I was presiding. It was a liturgy prepared with the hope of being able to welcome persons from several different Christian traditions, including one Orthodox member of the group who had agreed that he could and would read the Old Testament lesson. A brief silence, which followed an opening prayer and preceded the first reading, came to an end when the reader spoke: “Wisdom, let us attend!” For this Orthodox

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<sup>45</sup>*The United Methodist Hymnal* (Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House, 1989), 6. The same prayer also appears in the *Presbyterian Book of Common Worship* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1993), 60.

reader, such an instruction/acclamation was quite normal. It appears, in some form, in the Byzantine liturgy before each of the readings. Though ancient, its novelty in my ears helped sharpen how I listened to Scripture that morning. That these words appear before each of the readings in the Byzantine liturgy tells us something about the theological character of Scripture in that assembly: all of the readings are God's wisdom for us.<sup>46</sup>

In many congregations, each Scripture reading is concluded with "The Word of the Lord. *Thanks be to God.*" Although there are days when the reading is so strong in its prophetic critique that we may wonder how we can give thanks for it, this simple response identifies the reading as God's Word and, as such, whether consoling or critical, we are called to receive it as such. A similar sense is conveyed in the blessing that concludes the reading of Torah in the synagogue: "Blessed is the Lord our God, Ruler of the universe, who has given us a Torah of truth, implanting within us eternal life. Blessed is the Lord, Giver of Torah."<sup>47</sup> Some congregations have adopted language from the Revelation to John with which, like the churches John addresses, we are invited to "Hear (or 'Listen to') what the Spirit is saying to the church."<sup>48</sup> Such response seems particularly consistent with the Wesleys' emphasis on the role of the Holy Spirit in opening and interpreting the Scriptures to us. Using such a response after all of the readings, especially after the Old Testament reading, helps the Christian community recover a sense of the unity of the testaments and reminds us, as the New Testament writers themselves reminded us, that all Scripture is able to "instruct [us] for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 3.15).

## Conclusion

There are other gestures and actions, words and songs that accompany the proclamation of Scripture in the liturgical assembly. In many

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<sup>46</sup>Schmemmann makes no note of this acclamation in his commentary on the Sacrament of the Word.

<sup>47</sup>*Gates of Prayer: The New Union Prayerbook* (New York: Central Conference of American Rabbis, 1975), 419.

<sup>48</sup>Revelation 3.22 (NRSV). The Presbyterian *Book of Common Worship* places this sentence as an option immediately following a prayer for illumination and before the first reading. The United Church of Canada's *Celebrate God's Presence* offers it as the first of several options to be used after each of the readings [see *Celebrate God's Presence* (Etobicoke, Ontario: United Church Publishing House, 2000), 46.]

instances, they are relatively small things, in others more lavish. They are shaped by our cultural traditions as well as our theological understandings. But, large or small, they are the means by which the liturgical assembly “practices Scripture,” acknowledging its potential and bringing that potential to actuality. Invoking the Holy Spirit and seeking Christ’s presence, the church acknowledges that these words, seemingly “empty sounds and dead letters,” are brought to life, their meaning “unsealed.” In gestures and actions, words and songs, the liturgical assembly brings the potentiality offered by canon and lectionary to actuality as Scripture, effectively making that book and its words into the Word of God in this particular place and for this particular community. Through such practices, the Bible comes into its own truth. That is, through such practices the church renders “one whose words and deeds, discourse and suffering, ‘rendered’ the truth of God in human history.”<sup>49</sup> Through these gestures and actions, words and songs, the church preserves and transmits Scripture, but more, through them Scripture *becomes* Scripture in the midst of the church.

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<sup>49</sup>Lash, *Theology on the Way to Emmaus*, 42.



# JOHN'S JOHN: A WESLEYAN THEOLOGICAL READING OF 1 JOHN<sup>1</sup>

by

Robert E. Wall

## Part One: Wesley as a Biblical Interpreter<sup>2</sup>

John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, called himself *homo unius libri*, “a man of one book.” In fact, John Wesley was an Oxford-educated man of many books, who even assembled, edited and then published a well-stocked *Christian Library* for the saints of the Methodist movement. What he meant by this self-appellation, of course, is that the Bible was always the one book close at hand, an indispensable auxiliary of the Spirit’s formative work throughout his life and gospel ministry. As such, his core beliefs about the Bible belong to the Protestant Reformation, whose principle of *sola scriptura*, Scripture alone, decisively underscores the Bible’s importance for its faithful readers. Wesley believed this with

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<sup>1</sup>Editor’s note: This article publishes a series of three public lectures that were delivered by Robert W. Wall at Seattle Pacific University from 2008-2010—an annual obligation of those who hold the university’s Paul T. Walls Chair in Wesleyan studies. For the most part, the rhetorical style of these lectures is that of what scholars of ancient rhetoric refer to as an “edifying speech” intended for students and clergy rather than for other scholars. Part one is an exploration of John Wesley as a biblical interpreter, part two is an exegetical study of 1 John that focuses on its pivotal passage, 2:28—3:10, before concluding with a Wesleyan theological reading of that passage.

<sup>2</sup>An edited and expanded version of this first part, complete with a critical apparatus and bibliography, is included in *The Cambridge Companion to John Wesley* (R. Maddox and J. Vickers, eds., Cambridge, 2010), 113-128.

an unwavering passion and it remains a non-negotiable property of the people called Methodist.

But, in fact, Wesley never wrote an essay or preached a sermon on the doctrine of Scripture. In part, this omission reflects a former day when the Bible's authority was widely assumed and the skepticism so commonplace in today's intellectual marketplace had not yet taken hold. In fact, biblical commentaries topped the list of books borrowed from the public libraries throughout Wesley's England, and purchase of inexpensive Bible study aids quadrupled the sales of any other kind of publication.<sup>3</sup> Wesley himself contributed to this market by publishing his best-selling *Explanatory Notes on the NT* and then on the OT during the 1760s. I suspect that books about the Bible would have been routinely read by Oprah's book club in Wesley's England.

Professor Jane Shaw (Oxford) has even made the case that the real starting point of England's reception of the Enlightenment during its long 18<sup>th</sup> century was not centered in the philosopher's academic discourse but in discussions among ordinary believers who gathered together in the tea and ale houses throughout London and Bristol to debate their religious experiences, whether or not local testimonies of dramatic conversions or healing miracles were credible according to the Bible and the rules of sound reasoning.

The biblical criticism of early modern England was not yet interested in problematizing the Bible, but rather in discerning genuine from embellished texts, orthodox from spurious interpretations according to the standards established by the ancient church and more recently by the Protestant Reformation.<sup>4</sup> This conclusion may come as a surprise to those students who have read recent histories of Europe's Enlightenment, which typically register insight within a narrowly anti-religious and mostly anachronistic band-width. Sharply put, Wesley's world was pervasively religious one where even unschooled readers could detect with relative ease obscure allusions to Scripture.

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<sup>3</sup>T. R. Preston, "Biblical Criticism, Literature, and the Eighteenth-Century Reader," in *Books and their Readers in Eighteenth-Century England* (I. Rivers, ed., Continuum, 2001) pp. 98-99.

<sup>4</sup>For example, the pioneering work of Jeremiah Jones on the formation of the biblical canon, published in the 1720s, used newly developed interpretive strategies to uphold the ancient church's verdict of the 26-book NT canon; *A New and Full Method of Settling the Canonical Authority of the New Testament* (London, 1726).

This profile of readers is important for understanding Wesley's work as a biblical interpreter, which was largely shaped by and cannot be understood apart from his deep sense of priestly vocation. He reports in the preface to his *Explanatory Notes* of receiving "a loud call from God" to compose comments on the biblical text there were "as short . . . and as plain as possible to assist the unlearned reader . . . to keep his eye fixed on the naked Bible." Only then could the Bible's words become "the language of the Holy Ghost." Wesley's Bible practices were not only responsive to a widespread cultural interest in Bible study, but also in a keen awareness of his particular audience and what they required of him as their spiritual director.

For this reason, Wesley rarely mentions the contemporary controversies of the educated elites. This is not because he thought them impious, but for fear that to "go deep into the many difficulties" of the Bible might distract his readers from hearing "the Master's word, to imbibe his Spirit, and to transcribe his life into our own."<sup>5</sup> While Wesley left us without a treatise on the doctrine of Scripture, he does leave us with many sermons that use the Bible extensively to pitch the gospel's point. William Abraham's witty line that "Wesley is not a good advertisement for reading (Scripture) on horseback" may well ring true today; nonetheless, those very sermons he sometimes composed while riding on horseback remain our best gateway into understanding Wesley's doctrine of Scripture and his strategies for interpreting its sacred words.

For example, one will easily sense the authority Wesley grants Scripture by listening to the distinctive phraseology of his sermons. Most include long strings of different Bible verses cobbled together, one glossing the other without commercial interruption, to "express Scripture's sense in Scripture's phrase," as he put it. Elsewhere, Wesley writes that "(t)he Bible is my standard of language as well as sentiment. I endeavor not only to think but *to speak* as the oracles of God."<sup>6</sup> In his daily journal, he sometimes expresses concern for a preacher's orthodoxy when hearing a sermon that did not contain much quoted Scripture. Understand that his concern is not a rhetorical one, but is theologically adduced. Quoting Scripture is a matter of trusting Scripture. If the very nature of Scripture is holy, when its words are read aloud in the company of God's Spirit they

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<sup>5</sup>*NT Notes*, Preface §9, *Works* (Jackson), 14:237-38.

<sup>6</sup>Letter to John Newton (1 April 1766), *Letters* (Telford), 5:8. Italics mine.

are able to disclose God without need of a preacher's adornment.

I now begin an investigation into Wesley's sermons with an eye set on how he interprets the Bible. This is a hard quest, full of uncertainty of one kind or another. Most contemporary Wesley scholars avoid the topic, perhaps because they are embarrassed by his outdated biblicism or they think his interpretations of Scripture are unimportant when compared to his doctrine of salvation or his heroic ministry as a pioneering evangelical revivalist and leader of the Methodist movement. While I might agree with their assessment, my interest in Wesley as a biblical interpreter is not prompted by his talent as a biblical exegete; in fact, his explanatory notes on the OT and NT mostly derive from the work of other scholars. My interest is prompted by other concerns, more theological and practical.

I find it noteworthy that Wesley was a leading churchman at a pivotal moment in the history of the Bible—in 18<sup>th</sup>-century England, when the study of Scripture collided head-on with an emerging scientific humanism that gave birth to the tools of modern biblical criticism. Already the seeds were planted that ultimately would harvest the separation of Scripture from the confessing church that formed it. Today we are worried witnesses to the devastating results of this unhappy divorce in the demise of the Bible's importance both culturally and ecclesiastically, and in the widespread biblical illiteracy even among earnest Christians. The church's prophetic witness in the world has been imperiled by the attenuation of Scripture's authority. It is against this contemporary backdrop that I read Wesley; and how Wesley uses Scripture in facing up to the challenges of his modernity exemplifies a manner of biblical interpretation that offers us a way forward.

**Wesley's Social Location.** Bible scholars are fond of saying that, like politics, "all interpretation is local." The dynamic interpenetration of ideas, cultural traditions, and social practices that shape those places where we live, work, and worship helps to form our understanding of God's gospel. No one should suppose that any one of us approaches the Bible in an unbiased bid to retrieve unbiased meanings. We *all* have theological bones to pick. What the honest reader recognizes is that even our most scrupulous study of Scripture engages in a kind of circularity: we bring our religious beliefs and personal preferences with us to the biblical text and we find support for those very beliefs and preferences once we get there. For this reason, *self-criticism may be more important than biblical criticism in interpretation*—the sort of humility, honesty and rever-

ence that engages a sacred text, not to problematize and personalize it but rather allow it to problematize us in bringing our beliefs and preferences into agreement with God's.

In any case, when we study Wesley as a biblical interpreter, we must first locate him in his own day, to take note of the social and religious currents of a long 18<sup>th</sup> century that shaped his approach to Scripture. By the time Wesley's church had stabilized into a tolerant Anglicanism, England had already received and had begun to struggle with new ways of thinking about human nature and divine revelation. We call this period "the Enlightenment," even though since Kant we have debated what this "Enlightenment" actually means and whether such a movement actually occurred. Most social historians now agree that the intellectual and religious shifts that began in England during the 17<sup>th</sup> century can reasonably be catalogued under two handy rubrics: it was an "age of reason" and it was an "age of optimism," even if of a certain kind.

Whether in the teahouses of London or the classrooms of Oxbridge, England's earliest reception of the Enlightenment concerned the nature and media of divine revelation. Central to this struggle was the rejection of *mere* religious tradition, insisting that any claim for revealed truth must be held accountable to human reason and experience. Wesley agreed and worked hard to construct firm supports for his theology. He admired the work of that greatest of English philosophers, John Locke, whose empiricism stipulated that any person could and should apply scientific reasoning to what we learn from experience. Our close observations of life are foundational for our understanding of human nature and divine revelation.

Wesley's own spiritual re-awakening at Aldersgate, the defining moment of his intellectual journey, did nothing to subvert his empiricism. In fact, his own religious experiences prompted him to extend Locke's epistemology to include the spiritual senses—i.e., our sensory experiences of God's grace forge within us a deeper understanding of the real world. Wesley extended Locke and Newton's material empiricism to include the spiritual world occupied by a transcendent God and marked out by the work and witness of God's Spirit. We learn God not only by the media of revelation but by our inward and manifest experiences of God, which confirm and are confirmed by the church's creed and canon.

Yes, Wesley received and studied creed and canon with gratitude and scrupulous attention. He was no dissenter or latitudinarian. He embraced the Reformation's emphasis on the individual believer's freedom to inter-

pret the Bible. And he was well-schooled in Renaissance humanism and its keen interest in the Bible's original sources. Wesley came from the Enlightenment projects, and he embraced the critical methods of his day, including a lifelong interest in textual criticism and the importance of reading sacred texts in their linguistic and historical contexts. While he firmly rejected the skepticism of David Hume, he famously claimed that "to renounce reason is to renounce religion . . . and that all irrational religion is false religion."

Even so, opponents of Wesley still sometimes accuse him of abandoning reason for experience. They do so without understanding his epistemology of theology, which is firmly anchored by the hard evidence of transformed hearts and changed lives. Grace is cheap if all it does is save us without changing us. In this sense, Wesley shared with many others of his day a "practical divinity" that rejected the nominalism of religious ritual and routines if not embodied in a lived faith.

The concerns of the Enlightenment for individual progress also shaped Wesley's interpretive interests. Consider, for instance, the central claim of the Constitution of the United States, written in the same intellectual climate that formed Wesley, that we are a nation in which every individual has free access to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." Before the Enlightenment, happiness was understood to be the province of the virtuous and aristocratic few. But John Locke let the cat out of the bag when he announced that "the business of every man is to be happy in the world." And Wesley baptizes that sort of optimism in the transforming power of divine love that cooperates with our obedience in reforming believers according to the likeness of God.

Yes, this optimism in an individual's potential for life, liberty, and happiness was chastened by the Evangelical Revival of the 1730s and its persistent reminder that an individual's progress to holiness and so happiness is subverted by sinning—and lots of it. Even so, D. W. Bebbington reminds us that this great Revival, in which Wesley played a significant role, was keenly influenced by England's Enlightenment. Why else would a revival have begun in the 1730s? Precisely because its core themes of an individual's happiness, of a transforming experience of God's grace, of human progress from sinner to saint, and even of the marks of the Spirit that assure the troubled believer of God's forgiveness all fit the tempers of an age of optimism.

**Wesley's Canon within the Canon.** A second axiom scholars bring to the study of important players in the Bible's reception history is the critical recognition that, when an interpreter turns to the Bible, he typically privileges particular texts—those sacred texts that most clearly disclose his chief interests and core convictions. Biblical interpreters grant extra-special authority to those passages in Scripture that supply them with the working grammar of their faith or a warrant for their lifestyle choices. All of us practice this. Some of you may refer to these key texts as “life verses.” Scholars refer to them as a “canon within the canon.”

We use the word “canon” as a theological metaphor for a religious norm. A faithful believer or a faith community grants canonical status to various things, including the Bible, to indicate they can be trusted to measure or regulate the content of what believers believe or the manner by which believers behave. While all Scripture has authority for believers—and Wesley affirmed both OT and NT as inspired and indispensable—my thesis is that one part of this biblical whole (i.e., a canon within the Canon) held extra-special resonance for him because it makes plain the story-line or “tenor” that underlies every biblical text. Sharply put, 1 John is that “canon within the Canon” for Wesley; 1 John is that touchstone that makes plain the Bible's gospel message.

Wesley admitted as much in his sermons and journal. For example, in the preface to a fifth volume of his collected sermons, written at the end of a long and productive life, he writes in retrospect: “If the preacher would imitate any part of the oracles of God above all the rest, let it be the first Epistle of St. John.” This exhortation echoes a comment made years earlier in his famous sermon, “The Witness of the Spirit”: “Never was any child of God from the beginning of the world unto this day . . . farther advanced in the grace of God and the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ than the Apostle John at the time when he wrote [his First Epistle].” And consider this entry in his journal, repeated several times in different words, that 1 John is “the deepest part of Holy Scripture, above all other inspired writings, the sublime and simple compendium of all the Holy Scriptures, the plain and full account of genuine Christianity.”

Wesley's conception of Johannine priority integrates an epistemological commitment to progressive revelation with an historical reconstruction of apostolic succession. Listen to this concluding comment in his sermon “Christian Perfection” in which John appeals to 1 John extensively to underwrite his most distinctive doctrine: “Here the point, which

till then might possibly have admitted of some doubt in weak minds, is purposely settled by the *last* of the inspired writers, and decided in the *clearest* manner. In conformity therefore both to the doctrine of St. John, and to the whole tenor of the NT, we fix this conclusion: ‘A Christian is so far perfect as not to commit sin’ ” (II.20, 2:116).

Whether or not we accept Wesley’s doctrine of Christian perfection, this quote nicely expresses his justification for 1 John’s special treatment: the Apostle John is the “last of the inspired writers” and by implication offers the NT’s most current and incisive witness that decides the gospel message in its “clearest manner.” While we might want to reject Wesley’s critical construction as muddled, content analysis confirms his special treatment of 1 John. By counting the biblical quotations and allusions in his sermons, we find that 1 John is among the biblical books he most used. But more importantly, when we analyze how these quotations are used, we find that Wesley uses 1 John strategically to open and close sermons or to underwrite key points made in his most important sermons. Statistics and strategy supply the hard evidence that 1 John is Wesley’s interpretive key that unlocks the spiritual meaning of all Scripture.

**Wesley’s Use of 1 John: A Brief Introduction.** But the critical question remains, why? What is it about 1 John that serves Wesley so well? On the face of it, 1 John is a surprising choice. None of his contemporaries found their way to this letter. And why should they? It is a brief letter whose argument is difficult to follow. The lectionary rarely includes a NT lesson from 1 John. Protestants routinely neglect it because the letter’s theological grammar and literary idiom are so unlike Paul’s. In any case, most biblical interpreters, ancient and modern, never make their way out of the Gospels and past the Pauline letters to discover the three letters of St. John hidden among the Catholic Epistles at the tail-end of the NT canon.

Sometimes an interpreter’s intuitive sense can override custom to recognize the practical relevance of some neglected writing when dealing with a particular spiritual crisis. In Wesley’s case, 1 John made plain his England. The letter’s instruction is especially relevant for an Enlightenment culture, with its high view of religious truth that is tested by human experience. More importantly, Wesley found 1 John useful for rebuking and reinvigorating a Protestant Christianity that had struggled with deeply ambivalent beliefs about the sins of reborn believers.



The verb for sin, *hamartano*, and noun for darkness, *skotia*, the Bible's first and principal metaphor for evil, occur in 1 John far more frequently than in any other biblical book. More importantly, 1 John addresses the spiritual crisis of neglected sin that remains *in believers*, which is different than for Paul who locates sin outside of the body of Christ and therefore outside the realm where believers dwell in and by the Spirit. That is, the concerns of 1 John are Wesley's concerns, and this allows him to take the clearest of Scripture's witnesses to throttle, in his words, "that grand pest of Christianity, a faith without works."

The neglect of their sin among Protestants may reasonably be explained by their separation from Rome's sacramental apparatus two centuries earlier, which had maintained a believer's covenant with God. Believers who received the sacrament in the mass or absolution in the confessional were assured by the church that the damage of their sins had been graciously repaired by a gracious God.

Now left on their own, the Reformation produced (1) Lutherans who were spiritual fatalists and neglected sin because they couldn't do anything about it, (2) Calvinists who neglected sin because it cannot count against their election no matter what, (3) Pietists who neglected sin because they thought it unseemly, (4) Evangelicals who preoccupied themselves with the sins of others, and (5) Anglicans who concerned themselves with virtue more than vice. And, of course, there are the Methodists who are so deeply troubled by their own imperfections that they feel the urgent need to get saved, over and over again. The Reformation hatched a batch of believers who didn't know what to do with their own sins!

Wesley's appointment with 1 John is prompted by this spiritual crisis, not only because 1 John offers a sharp response to this crisis but because 1 John makes plain the intended instruction of Protestantism's Paul. Indeed, the gospel of the biblical Paul proclaims is not that believers should keep on sinning so that God's grace might abound all the more. Rather Paul's point is that God's abounding grace, set loose by Christ's atoning death, makes it possible for believers to sin no more.

### Ten Biblical Practices

Why should we apprentice ourselves to Wesley in matters of biblical interpretation? Not because we agree fully with his theological insight or admire his exegetical innovation, but because his approach to the Bible

can guide a community of faithful readers into that implanted word which, when received with meekness, is able to save our souls. Let me sketch ten interpretive practices that Wesley exemplifies and which mark a way forward toward this redemptive end.

**1. The intuited text.** The Bible is never free of interpreters. The best of the lot rely on sanctified intuition to recognize what is true and important in a biblical text. Wesley recognized the truth of God's gospel, and the struggles of his own world and his intuition led him to 1 John. Intuition is not the same as personal opinion or common sense; it is an intellectual faculty brought to maturity over considerable time by rigorous study and spiritual discipline.

John Webster notes that most recent discussions of biblical interpretation imply that the human act of reading a sacred text is somehow independent of the church's teaching and operations of the Holy Spirit. Scholars offer thin accounts of an interpreter's spiritual formation, which they suppose is incidental to the activity of interpretation. Indeed, the formation of our minds necessary to read sacred texts faithfully cannot go unaided: intuition is a readerly virtue that can only be forged within a worshipping community and by the filling of the Spirit.

In this regard, it is critical for us to observe how Wesley links Spirit and Scripture. He does so differently than do most Protestants for whom the Spirit guarantees *Scripture's* authority. Much like we find in the Book of Acts and later in Origen, Wesley understands the Spirit as opening and enlightening "the eyes of the soul," enabling the reader to discern the spiritual things of God in Scripture ("Scripture Way" II.1). In a Wesleyan key, then, the Spirit's witness guarantees the *interpreter's* authority to read Scripture after the mind of the risen One.

**2. The naked text.** What Wesley calls "the naked Bible" modern criticism calls its "plain sense." Influenced by Newton's science of critical observation, Wesley demands that the interpreter pay close attention to what the text plainly says. He often ridicules "abstract reasoning" when substituted for textual and literary analysis. This is not anti-intellectualism or critical naiveté, but a commitment to the meaning of words and phrases rooted in his core belief that those words and phrases are revelatory of God. If you get the biblical words right, you get your belief in God right.

In fact, against those who accuse Wesley of an unsophisticated biblicism, be assured that he employed the range of interpretive strategies

available to him in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. He was thoroughly alert to the emerging tools of biblical criticism and employed them all.<sup>7</sup> This equipped him to function in a role that John Barton likens to a “tour guide” whose skill in leading travelers is in proportion to an intimate knowledge of every nook and cranny of the place visited. By analogy, then, those students who apprentice themselves to Wesley will learn the tools of biblical criticism to become intimately familiar with every linguistic nook and cranny of the biblical text. If God is love, the traveler has no reason to fear what one might find in that sacred place.

**3. The canonical text.** It is clear to me that Wesley acquired a nuanced sense for how the Bible’s different collections were arranged to perform together as an integral whole. I argue that his use of the Catholic Epistles, 1 John and James in particular, closely coheres to the role assigned to this collection during the formation of the NT canon. The canonical function of this second collection of letters, to which 1 John belongs, is to supply an internal check to the church’s misuse of Paul when approving of a pattern of salvation secured by profession of faith alone. The sophistication of Wesley’s move in using 1 John to correct that nasty “pest,” a faith without works, suggests his depth of discernment as a biblical interpreter that challenges the low estimate of his exegetical skills by friend and foe alike.

**4. The community’s text.** The Bible is not for lone rangers; it belongs to the church and so its interpretative practices are communal, conversational, and participatory. We learn Scripture in the company of saints. Even though somewhat autocratic as leader of the Methodist movement, Wesley received and studied Scripture with other interpreters on whom he depended and from whom most of his explanatory notes derive. First his parents and Oxford tutors, then Bengel, Poole, Doddridge, Guyse, Henry, and others who were counted among the leading biblical interpreters of his day and formed with Wesley a diverse community of interpretation. His sermons reflect someone actively engaged *with* biblical texts, but also in conversation with many others *about* biblical texts.

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<sup>7</sup>Wesley was especially interested in textual criticism, which was the primary critical method of his day. On occasion offered corrections to the KJV translation used by his Anglican church—a dangerous activity in those days since the transmission of the biblical text was linked by church confession to its revelatory role.

**5. The spiritual text.** Wesley admits to the Bible's difficult, confusing, unsettling texts whose meaning for believers remains obscure. While modern biblical criticism is at its best when mining the Bible for its rich but seemingly intractable diversity, Wesley concentrates upon Scripture's simultaneity or unity: every biblical text is rendered as part of an integral whole. In Bengel's phrase, the Bible forms within itself a "whole connection."

For Wesley, 1 John is that plumbline that makes plain Scripture's "whole connection" precisely because 1 John makes plain God's way of salvation from sin. In this sense, a right reading of Scripture is not measured by an explanation of its historical background or by proving its scientific accuracy; rather, a right reading of Scripture attends to the message and experience of salvation. If the Spirit goes where Scripture goes, it does so to illumine the full gospel and to impart the full measure of God's grace.

**6. The ruled text.** In making a similar point, Albert Outler argued that the most important property of Wesley's interpretation of the Bible is the "analogy of faith"—a non-negotiable core of theological beliefs which rightly orders Scripture's diverse witnesses by stipulating the message of salvation to which every interpretation must cohere. If we retrieve meaning from Scripture whose content does not agree with what the church confesses is true, then it is our interpretation we discard, not the church's confession. While I think Wesley's theological conception is insufficiently Trinitarian and concentrated too keenly on an individual's salvation, it is this interpretive practice of constraining the meaning of a biblical text by a rule of faith that we should admire and seek to emulate. And we need to get our theology right to get our biblical interpretation right.

**7. The preached text.** Wesley's most important interpretive practice is also the most evident: the Bible is a preached text. A grace-filled sermon invokes and cultivates the faith of those who hear it. Even Wesley's discourses for university audiences were in the form of sermons preached, not academic lectures presented. Significantly, when Wesley was preparing for his ordination in the Anglican communion, he read a manual for ministers that defined theology as a "practical science." That is, learning theology does not require mastery of an elaborate system of doctrine, because theology is essentially a formative activity, something

enacted and acted upon, especially in the literary form of a sermon that helps ordinary believers track down a living God.

**8. The responsive text.** A preached Bible claims a congregation's most attentive ear. Bible performances are not spectator sport. Wayne Booth's notion of an "ethics of reading" suggests that readers read texts for personal improvement and expect that *what* they read will challenge and change them. To read or listen to a text with suspicion or critical detachment, then, subverts the experience of being "taken over" and shaped by what is read.

Booth helps us understand why Wesley concludes his sermons with action points. He invites a congregation "to be taken over by" the claims the preached text makes on their lives. James calls believers to be doers of the word, not hearers only. The practice of inclining one's ear to hear the sacred text in order to do it is properly motivated by a routine experience of being "taken over" by Scripture. We know from experience that this word is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword. We learn from experience that Scripture is a dangerous book and not for the timid, for it is a word from God that arrives at our heart's door in the company of the Spirit of power, love, and self-discipline.

**9. The practiced text.** Wesley preaches the Bible to the issues of his day. An alert interpreter not only understands the text but also the contemporary context in which an interpretation must ring true. Wesley's Bible performances are informed by his close observations of the practical needs of ordinary believers to whom he ministered. His chief concerns were their doubts and disputations—issues that threatened their relationship with the Lord. While Wesley the theologian surely desired that his sermons form sound doctrine, his principal interest was a practical divinity, a lived love.

**10. The sacramental text.** In her incisive discussion of the language of religion in early modern England, Isabel Rivers describes Wesley's practice of stringing quotations of biblical texts together as an "oracular manner of preaching." Not only does his extensive quotation of Scripture envisage a deep reverence for the Bible's sacred words but his firm confidence that those biblical words deliver the word of God without need of human mediation—a prophet's kind of "thus saith the Lord" moment. Perhaps Wesley's practice of quoting Scripture is finally a property of the sacrament of the word in which reading Scripture aloud invites

the body of Christ to ingest its sacred words and experience in them afresh the Holy Spirit's active presence in our hearts.<sup>8</sup>

## **Part Two: An Exegetical Study of 1 John**

The Rev. John Wesley's evangelical ministry was shaped for an 18<sup>th</sup>-century audience that included both skeptics and saints. In adapting the gospel to the spiritual needs of such an audience, he came to privilege an otherwise neglected NT book as his "canon within the Canon," 1 John or "John's John" as I put it. Not only did John Wesley find in 1 John an idiom that resonated with the optimism of England's reception of the Enlightenment, but he found in this biblical book a theological grammar well suited to his own Christian faith and adaptable to the work of a revivalist whose particular vocation was to call *Christians* to repent of the sin that remained in their lives.

In Wesley's mind the Protestant heirs of Luther within the Church of England had too enthusiastically endorsed the great Reformer's organizing conception of Christian existence, *simul justus et peccator*, "at once justified and a sinner," in a way that often reduced the doctrine of justification to a thin belief in God's pardon of sin's guilt without also changing how one lives. According to many Protestants, sin remains an unwavering, if unwanted, feature of Christian existence. In appropriating 1 John to respond to this species of spiritual fatalism, Wesley's sermons envisage a powerful re-vision of human nature in which once sinful believers are transformed by God's grace so that they are set free to love God and one another perfectly.

I already have identified a catalogue of ten Bible practices based upon Wesley's use of 1 John in his standard sermons. Among those Bible practices is "the ruled text" (*norma normata*). That is, the various ways in which Wesley put 1 John to use, whether in public preaching or in pastoral counsel, were regulated by the church's rule of faith, which he called the "Scripture way of salvation." Wesley brought the content and consequence of every interpretation of Scripture into agreement with his understanding and experience of the good news of God's saving grace.

Now I continue to explore this Wesleyan practice of a "ruled Bible" and in doing so "unite the pair so long disjoin'd," biblical exegesis and

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<sup>8</sup>Among the Jewish practices that Christians must embrace is the public reading of large portions of Scripture during worship. Why not read Scripture aloud, unadorned by human commentary (cf. Rev 1:3)?

theological interpretation. If our careful exegesis of Scripture establishes what a biblical text plainly says, then on this basis theological interpretation seeks to understand what that sacred text teaches us about God's way of salvation. And if the biblical interpreter sounds that sacred note in a Wesleyan key, the goods delivered to the saints will have the effect of making a congregation wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus (2 Tim. 3:15).<sup>9</sup>

I begin the work of joining exegesis together with a Wesleyan theological interpretation of a hard but crucial passage from John's John. It is hard because its plain meaning is difficult to discern, made harder because of the extraordinary demands it makes on its faithful reader. And yet it is this very text from 1 John, so difficult and demanding to understand and apply, that John Wesley uses to support his grand doctrine of Christian Perfection, which remains to this day the most thrilling element of his account of Scripture's way of salvation. That precious passage is 1 John 2:28—3:10.

### **A Bare-bones Exegesis of 1 John**

John Webster calls the exegesis of a sacred text "building the walls of the city of God." The aim of biblical exegesis is the clear-headed understanding of what the holy text plainly says that leads our reverent hearing of God's word to obedience. This is difficult when that text is 1 John, for this letter's argument is notoriously difficult to follow. Not only is its free-wheeling discourse difficult to recognize among the genre of ancient literary letters, 1 John is also persistently anonymous, which makes it difficult to locate in space and time. We know nothing of the author, his audience, or their opponents, whose leaders are depicted only by the metaphor "anti-Christ's." Evidently they were former members of this faith community who have "gone out from them" to plant a rival Christianity. The letter provides no details of their secession or creed. We

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<sup>9</sup>Modern criticism is rightly concerned with careless, uncritical exegesis that intends only to prove one's point. Criticism's elevation of the author's intended meaning as the text's normative meaning is one response to this concern. For both practical and theological reasons, I find this strategy flawed. A superior location both practically and theologically is to study the meaning of a biblical text at the point of its reception as Scripture as the norm. This essay shifts from a point of origin, whether as authored or canonical text, to the ecclesial location of its current interpreter where the rule of faith that shapes one's theological grammar regulates one's approach to the sacred text.

know only that they deny the Son's incarnation (cf. 2:18-27; 4:1-6), which when understood within the bounds of this letter suggests only that this rival group repudiated the apostolic message, which is based upon what the apostles had heard, seen and touched of the Incarnate "word of life" (so 1 John 1:1-3).<sup>10</sup>

On the other hand, the letter's purpose, repeatedly mentioned, is crystal clear. The presence of this rival Christian group has provoked an epistemic crisis, especially among the congregation's immature "children" who now must decide between two gospels, one apostolic and the other not. It is in response to this crisis that 1 John was written to help uncertain believers affirm the two core beliefs of the apostolic message. Rather than correct the theological error of these so-called "anti-christs," 1 John sets out the apostolic criterion that establishes the route by which a Christian congregation may enter into intimate fellowship—*koinōnia*—with God and God's Son (1:3).

Understood, then, as a pastor's response to theological uncertainty within his own congregation, 1 John consists of two interpenetrating essays of roughly equal length. Each essay develops one of two non-negotiable beliefs about God, witnessed in the Incarnate Word and now articulated by the apostolic tradition: God is light and God is love. Each belief comes with a way of life apropos to what is confessed as the gospel truth: so if on the basis of the apostolic witness to the Incarnation we rightly believe that God is light, then we should not sin; and if we rightly believe that God is love, then we should love one another.

With this brief introduction in hand, let's make our way into the text. The first core belief of the apostolic message is set out in 1:5, which claims that God is LIGHT and in God there is no darkness whatsoever. What then follows in 1:6—3:10 is an extraordinary essay on the practical implication of this belief, that if God is light, then to walk with God requires the community to rid itself of sin and falsehood that threaten its *koinōnia* with God in whom no darkness dwells.

Initially, the author poses a series of three conditional statements that help the reader reconsider common mistakes Christians often make

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<sup>10</sup>The denial of Jesus as God's incarnate Son does not seem linked to a proto-Trinitarian heresy of a Gnostic or any other kind. The problem with denying the apostolic claims about Jesus "in the flesh" is that it denies the revealed "word of life" that is criterion of Christian fellowship.



about sin. These mistakes are voiced by an interlocutor—an imaginary conversation partner playing a rhetorical role who makes three alarming boasts about sin, each of which is sharply dismissed as a lie (1:6; 2:4), a deception (1:8; 2:9), and blasphemy against God (1:10). The interlocutor's big fat lie is not the contention that a believer's sinning has ceased, as is often asserted by 1 John's interpreters. In fact, according to 2:1, the very prospect of sin's demise is what occasions the writing of this letter! Rather, the interlocutor's lie is that Christians need do nothing about their sins, presumably because their sinning does not threaten a believer's relationship with the Lord.

The boast that "we do not have sin" found in v. 8 may voice the libertarian's confession that the true believer has no guilt to forgive. Or perhaps 1 John anticipates the position of the Calvinist who admits to the reality of sin but denies that it is a serious problem for a sovereign God who has predestined the believer's salvation by prior election, thus justification by election alone. Wesley is likely right in recognizing this as the idle boast of the "latitudinarian" or religious liberal who finds talk about personal guilt unseemly, even unnecessary, since the gospel's vibe regards God's universal acceptance of all people, believer or not, saint or sinner. Indeed, the problem facing today's church is not its edgy intolerance of all that is wrong but rather its indifference to personal sin too easily dismissed by facile appeal to God's universal goodness.

What stands as important to 1 John is this: if the apostles teach that God is light and nothing evil can co-exist with God, then fellowship with God requires the congregation to confess the guilt of prior sins so that God will cleanse away all guilt to restore fellowship with forgiven believers. Hardly defeated by the author's rejoinder, the interlocutor promptly takes up a second boast in 1:10, saying "we have not sinned." This is where things get interesting. Whilst sounding very much like the previous lie, "sin" is an action verb, not a noun; its verbal tense in Greek is perfect. Here, then, the interlocutor's boast imagines a different and more demanding claim about sin: that the continuing effects of unrepentant sin does not have a corrosive effect on one's relationship with God. This boast envisages the Protestant problem—God pardons the guilt of past sins, but since our sin nature remains we cannot help but keep right on sinning. We continue to sin so that God's grace may abound. *Simul Justus et Peccator*. But, alas, 1 John calls this belief blasphemous because it

forms the motive of a functional atheism which pledges allegiance to God but lives as though God does not exist.

The letter's strategic shift to a pastoral address in 2:1 reflects the seriousness of the interlocutor's fraudulent claim in 1:10. Indeed, how believers deal with their present spiritual failure lies at the very heart of this letter's radical vision of Christian existence. This is the vision that drew Wesley to 1 John and we should join him there. 1 John deals with the most pressing pastoral question of all, and one that Paul mostly ignores. How should the saint respond to spiritual failure?

1 John initially responds to this implied question in 2:1-2 by rehearsing the community's core beliefs about Jesus Christ, who is paraclete, the righteous one, and an atoning sacrifice "not only for sins of the whole world but for our sins too."<sup>11</sup> The noun, *hilasmos*, which I translate "atoning sacrifice," is used to reassure *believers who sin* that Christ's death purposes to bring their present sinning to an end. Perhaps the reader of 1 John is reminded that it is only in John's gospel that we find the Lord's shocking exhortation, repeated twice to confirmed sinners, "go and sin no more" (μηκέτι ἁμάρτανε, 5:14; 8:11). Yes, Christ atones for the world's sin; but the emphasis here is not the global reach of Jesus' expiatory death but rather its salutary effect on repairing the damage done by sin in the believer. As Judith Lieu puts it, "God offers the means for overcoming the mismatch between humanity and God, who makes fellowship between them possible. This is where Jesus belongs; not to the past but as the *continuing* means of restoring and maintaining our fellowship with God."<sup>12</sup>

What follows in 2:3-11 is self-examination, focused by a second triad of conditional statements which tests whether the sinful believer's response to Jesus is genuine. This exam consists of a single, true/false question: if someone claims to reside in God, she should walk in the light just as Jesus walked in the light. The right answer is true (2:6).

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<sup>11</sup>Perhaps this is a tacit response to Paul's missionary gospel that offers a response to the world's sins but rarely for the believer's. Paul's missionary interest concerns "getting into" the community covenanted with God for eternal life, not "staying in" it.

<sup>12</sup>J. Lieu, *I, II, & III John* (NTL, Westminster/John Knox, 2008), p. 67. I have consulted a wide range of commentaries on 1 John, ancient and modern, and find Lieu, along with J. Painter, R. Brown, R. Schnackenburg, J. C. Thomas and B. F. Westcott the best modern readers of the epistle. The careful listener will hear echoes of their influence in my exegesis of the text.

Aware of the different levels of spiritual maturity within the congregation, the author's purpose is again clarified in an address to different groups, identified by three tropes of different stages in a Christian's spiritual formation: parent, young people, and children. What seems plain is the connection made between trusting the apostolic message about God and resisting "all (the sin) that is in the world." The author recognizes that there are different success rates within the congregation according to spiritual maturity and therefore leaves his most expansive pastoral exhortation for the "children"—presumably the newest converts and most vulnerable to the false teaching of the anti-christs.

This leads us at long last to the letter's key passage, 2:28-3:10. What surprises us is not the shift in tone back to pastoral exhortation, but the abrupt introduction of salvation's future horizon when what remains of evil—of darkness—will be no more. The images of God's coming victory are found spread out across 2:28 and 3:2, which elaborates that the confidence God's children will express before the Son at his second coming is based upon special revelation that when he appears "we will be like him because we will see him just as he is"—an image of profound intimacy, when our sight-lines to Jesus are no longer obscured by an evil world system.

But note carefully that enclosed within this announcement of future conformity with the Son is 1 John's stunning assertion about new birth in 2:29. Regeneration transforms the believer into a child of God, fathered by God to live according to the likeness of God. While this supernatural act of new birth makes the believer unrecognizable to the world, the experience of being transformed into a child of God makes realistic the hope of a future with the Lord, characterized by intimate union with him.

Verse 3:3 is a pivotal text in 1 John's discourse on the future of sin because it moves us from what God has already done within us—regenerated our nature—and from what God will do with us in the future, to what the children of God must now do in glad response to God: we must purify ourselves. The insertion of the reflexive pronoun "purify themselves" insinuates our future hope based on our present lives. If we are confident of a future with the Lord, then we will purify ourselves to become like Christ in preparation for an eternity with him. Yes, the prospect of God's final victory over sin supplies the motive, and God's regeneration of our nature supplies the inward capacity to become Christ-like in our purity;

but it is finally our responsibility to become like the one with whom we will be conformed at his coming.

What does this purity look like? According to 3:4-6, purity looks like not sinning. This most demanding of sacred texts does not advance the idea of sinless perfection, since in his opening dialogue with the interlocutor the author indicates that sin remains a constant threat and to deny this threat is blasphemous since it denies the efficacy of Christ's atoning sacrifice for believers. Yet, nowhere does 1 John define what particular species of sin we no longer do. If this purity practice imitates Christ's purity, perhaps the author is recalling 2:16, where sin is defined by alluding to the Gospel story of the three temptations of Jesus. That is, the child of God does not do those very sins that Jesus resisted: the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, and pride in one's career (which is my translation of *bios*).

This allusion to the Gospel story of the Lord's three temptations to help define the sin we do not do makes good sense of the author's commentary on the Jewish tradition of "the two ways" that follows in 3:7-8. Knowing that Jesus' Sonship is tested by the devil, and knowing that Jesus proved faithful to God by resisting the devil's advances long before the Cross seals the deal, leads us to the clearheaded conclusion that God's children, who also find themselves tested in the wilderness, prove their spiritual mettle by resisting the devil's temptations.

1 John's exposition on the purity practice of not sinning is brought to sharp climax in 3:9 by the addition of two new elements that are emboldened by the literary use of chiasmus, which centers repeated claims of the believer's new birth on one of Scripture's most graphic metaphors of regeneration, God's "seed" or sperm residing in the one fathered by God. Although the meaning of this conception metaphor remains obscure, most agree that God's "seed" refers to the transformation of human nature. The logic of 1 John's argument is unequivocal: if our genetic inheritance is from God in whom there is no darkness, then sinning is antithetical to Christian existence.

The full implication of God's regenerative grace is envisaged by the two verbs used in those two parallel lines that enclose that stunning metaphor of divine sperm. The first line of v. 9 repeats what has already been asserted earlier—that everyone fathered by God "does not sin" (*hamartian ou poiei*). But then, in the parallel line, the author goes on to make the wondrous claim that everyone who is fathered by God is inca-

pable of sinning (*ou dynatai hamartanein*).<sup>13</sup> What are we to make of this shift from a disciplined practice of not sinning to the upgraded claim that Christian existence is characterized by the inability to sin?

I take it that this climactic shift of verbs in 3:9 tracks the final effect of our new birth when observed against the horizon of God's coming victory: the eschatology of the Johannine apostolate follows from its conception of new birth so that the final justification of God's children are of a piece with their final and complete regeneration.<sup>14</sup> Read this way, the reborn believer's practice of not sinning heralds our future with God when death and devil are utterly destroyed and replaced by conformity with the Lord; when God's children will no longer be saddled with mortal bodies or a broken creation; and when we will become like God, heirs of a new creation without capacity for evil and infinitely free to do good.<sup>15</sup>

The realization of this promise is envisaged by that magnificent line from the concluding words of John's Revelation, when on that future Day "God's servants will worship God; they will see God's face and God's name will be on their foreheads. Night will be no more, and they will not need light or a lamp or the light of the sun, because the Lord God will shine upon them, and they will reign together forever and ever" (Rev. 22:4-5).

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<sup>13</sup>The exegetical basis for reading 2:29—3:10 as an elaboration of 2:28 is 1 John's introduction of a new *typos*: not only "his coming," but that "everyone who does right is born of God" (2:29), which is picked up again and repeated in 3:9-10 to conclude this section. That is, the regeneration typology is specifically appropriated to cash out the practical implication of the Lord's coming judgment and why the community is so confident in participating in its victory with him. On this reading, everything in 2:29—3:10 is understood against this eschatological horizon as a kind of realized eschatology.

<sup>14</sup>The regeneration *typos*, introduced in 2:29, is here restated negatively: "No one born of God does sin." This is followed by the *hoti* clause for elaboration: "Because God's *sperma* remains/abides in him." The exegetical problem is to explain the shift of verbal ideas from the practice not doing sin to one that claims the child of God is incapable of sinning. At the very least the change of verb signals a different dimension in the letter's conception of new birth: the effect of the divine *sperma* is generative of something more than the mere practice of resisting sin but rather goes to a new nature that makes the child unable to sin. Temptation is a thing of the past.

<sup>15</sup>St. Augustine distinguishes the child's new-found freedom of "being able not to sin" (*posse non peccare*) from the Father's freedom of "being unable to sin" (*non posse peccare*), a condition that contrasts the *infinite* goodness of a God who is incapable of evil and so is infinitely free to do good.

And now to the second movement of 1 John, which unfolds across 3:11—5:12 and is introduced in 3:11 by the moral imperative of the apostolic message to love one another. This movement climaxes in a second core belief, that God is love (4:6, 16). Even though central for a Wesleyan conception of Christian existence, let me say only that the capstone of this second movement is found in the letter's most famous verse: "we love because (*hoti*) (God) first loved us" (4:19). Wesley called this verse the "sum of all religion, the genuine model of Christianity." It is the heartbeat of our Wesleyan communion.

The community's capacity to love and the self-sacrificial pattern of our love for one another has its origins in God who "loved us and sent the Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins" (4:10; cf. 3:16; 4:9a; 2:3-6). The children fathered by such a God will naturally love one another self-sacrificially (4:7-12). And it is because we experience being loved by one another that the community's fearless embrace of God is cultivated, so that we come now into the presence of God with our petitions confident of being heard (3:21-22), and in the future we will come into the presence of God, this time eyeball-to-eyeball, with firm assurance of eternal life (4:17).

In summary, then, 1 John consists of two grand movements of theological exposition; but they are not really two separate expositions. The core beliefs of the apostolic tradition, God is light and God is love, form an interpenetrating whole gospel, one belief glossing the other. Likewise, our Christian discipleship, its definition and its cost, is marked out by both the absence of sin and the perfection of our love for God and one another, by what we don't do and by what we do. This is the walk that Jesus walked, and we seek to follow after him.

Today's congregations seem forever embroiled in intramural contests between those who calibrate their faithfulness by the sin they forsake, while others defend their faithfulness by pointing to those they love. The challenge of 1 John is that both are put into play in equal measure; and our Christian discipleship, its definition and its cost, is exacted from both the absence of the sins we forfeit and the costly love in which we are engaged. And for most of us, myself included, either one of those two demands represents our "growing edge."

### **Part Three: A Wesleyan Theological Reading of 1 John**

"If any doctrines within the whole compass of Christianity may be properly termed fundamental they are doubtless these two: the doctrine of

justification and that of the new birth.” So begins Wesley’s programmatic sermon on the “New Birth.” But what a puzzling note this sounds to Protestants, especially the Calvinists of Wesley’s Church of England for whom no doctrine was more precious than justification by faith alone.<sup>16</sup> After all, on this core belief Luther’s protest movement commenced. For a group of Christians whose theological grammar is shaped in large part by their reading of Paul, the elevation of the doctrine of new birth, which Paul nowhere mentions in his canonical letters (cf. Titus 3:5), to a place equal with that of justification, which is central to Paul’s pattern of salvation, is surprising. In fact, the image that dominates Paul’s evangelical conception of salvation is the law-court of a gracious Judge who pardons believers of the guilt from past sin and legally adopts them as children.

Methodists speak with glad hearts of Wesley’s *via salutis*—his “way of salvation.” This is our rule of faith which authorizes, animates and aims our Bible practices. The note Scripture sounds to a Methodist’s ear maps our way to heaven and helps us understand our experiences of God’s saving grace. And while John Wesley speaks of salvation as the unpredictable unfolding of God’s grace in our lives, no other part of his *via salutis* is more strategic than the moment of new birth. The believer’s new birth is the lynchpin that holds justification and sanctification together.

The shift of metaphors from a law-court to a maternity ward presages an important shift as well in how Wesley imagines the fatherhood of God, from a Deity who legally *adopts* those who are in Christ to a Deity who *fathers* his children and whose very DNA enables them to

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<sup>16</sup>In private note, D. Koskela writes: “The language of holiness, regeneration, and sanctification would have been more familiar to those in Wesley’s Anglican setting. Yes, there was always a strong Protestant stream in Anglicanism stemming from the Puritan reception of Calvin, but from the mid 17<sup>th</sup> century on the Anglican religious societies and various holiness writers served as a sort of English equivalent to German Pietism. Not all Anglicans appreciated this, of course. Much of the religious tension in the later 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> century in England came from the debate between this more pietist stream and those who were deeply suspicious of it. William Law’s *Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life* (1729) is a good example of an Anglican pietist who influenced Wesley deeply. So, in Wesley’s day, I think he would have been heard as part of that Anglican sub-tradition rather than as something completely new. In fact, the early label of Wesley’s holy club as “New Methodists” at Oxford was a derisive way of placing him in this stream of thought.”

live like Christ. That is, for Wesleyans, believers enjoy more than a new status with God, forgiven and cleansed of sin; they are reborn with a natural capacity to live in a radically new way, not only to herald God's victory over sin but to mark out a manner of life—of faith, hope and love—that actually brings the Creator's best intentions to realization.

I seek to move us in a more Wesleyan direction. Modern biblical criticism has taught us to value Scripture's theological diversity: a Pauline conception of salvation, favored by most Reformed Protestants, is different than the one worked out in the collection of Catholic Epistles that includes 1 John and James, favored by most Wesleyans. So we are prepared to hear again Wesley's sermon "Great Privilege" where he explains that, while our justification pardons us from the guilt of past sin, regeneration is a different operation of God's grace that releases the pardoned believer from sin's captive power to begin a new life under the direction of the Spirit. New birth involves a *supernatural* change of human nature. If God's justifying grace puts us to rights with God, then God's regenerating grace transforms our inmost soul. The justified believer at the same moment is reborn as God's child and recreated in God's image with new capacities for partnership with God. As Wesley put it, new birth begins a "vast, inward change"<sup>17</sup> that puts us on a path to holiness. All the resources necessary to live a holy life are given by God *at our new birth*, in the twinkling of God's eye.

I have tried above to build a context in which we might better understand Wesley's scripture way of salvation. His elevation of the doctrine of new birth is not an intellectual decision crafted by careful study of the Bible in the company of the Holy Spirit and no one else. Rather, Wesley's theological reading of Scripture was funded by his experience of being born again and shaped by his active participation in England's reception of the Enlightenment and Arminianism. His understanding of God's way of salvation was hammered out in the gritty social world of early modern England where he confronted professing "Christians" whose lives of spiritual compromise and resolute apathy belied their salvation from sin. Wesley's evangelistic ministry was to the Protestant heirs of Luther within the Church of England who appealed to the great Reformer's organizing conception of Christian existence, *Simul Justus et Peccator*, "at once justified and a sinner," in a way that often reduced the doctrine

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<sup>17</sup>Sermon 10, "The Witness of the Spirit," *Works*, 1:279.



of justification to a thin belief in God's pardon of sin's guilt without also changing how one lives.

Wesley's surprising turn to the neglected letter of 1 John is explained by what he found there, a word from God that powerfully responds to the very species of spiritual fatalism in which believers either neglect or are defeated by the sin they continue to practice. And so it is to 1 John that he appeals often in his standard sermons to envisage a powerful vision of Christian existence in which once sinful believers are transformed by God's grace so that they no longer sin but rather love God and one another perfectly.

Toward the end of securing fellowship with the triune God, 1 John provides an extended essay that clarifies and elaborates each theological claim. To believe that God is light is to understand that believers do not practice sin. Believers have been pardoned from sin and set free from its power; they should now purify themselves after the likeness of Jesus Christ, whose love for God is perfect (2:3-6).<sup>18</sup> Further, to believe that God is love is to understand that believers love one another as Christ loves, actively and self-sacrificially (4:8-12). It is this second great theological movement of 1 John that is climaxed by 4:19, which Wesley calls "the sum of all religion." We love because God loves us first. No biblical text discloses the seamless connection between the loving nature of God and the loving nature of Christian discipleship more adequately than 1 John 4:19. Christianity is an ethical religion.

The passage 1 John 2:28—3:10 is the letter's theological gravitas, where its two theological movements intersect to help readers focus on the nature and practices of Christian discipleship. 1 John claims that, according to the apostles and from the very beginning, the Incarnate Word discloses that God is light and that, if God is light in whom no darkness can exist, then purity will win out and sin will be utterly destroyed. The second grand theological movement begins in 1 John 3:11, claiming that according to the apostles the Incarnate Word also discloses that God is love and that, if God is love, then, unlike the devil's children, God's children will love one another and do so perfectly.

But this passage provokes several puzzlements. (1) On what basis is the community assured before God at the Lord's coming (2:28) when we

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<sup>18</sup>Tertullian put it this way: "For in putting on our flesh, Christ made it his own; and in making it his own, he made our flesh sinless" (*On the Flesh of Christ*, XVI).

shall see him and become as he is (3:2)? (2) What does the believer's new birth as God's child (2:29; 3:9) have to do with the believer's purity practice of not sinning in likeness of Christ (3:3-10)? (3) What is the meaning of the extraordinary claim, set out by a literary chiasm, that because every child of God has God's DNA they are unable to sin (3:9)?<sup>19</sup> Not only does the real Christian not sin, but cannot sin. These are hard claims that are complicated by our experience of the opposite. We are fearful of death; our lives are often no different than those lived by non-Christians with whom we work and play; and we continue to struggle with sin. How should we understand 1 John's bold affirmations?

Father Raymond Brown, one of this letter's most influential modern interpreters, has said about 1 John 3 with characteristic understatement, "No matter what the author thought, the wording of his affirmations about sinlessness is not sufficiently nuanced."<sup>20</sup> Professor William Abraham adds with characteristic hyperbole that "it is hard enough to believe that people can become saints in this life; it is quite impossible to believe that this has actually happened in any particular case."<sup>21</sup> Careful exegesis gets us down the road a fair piece but cannot fully clarify what is insufficiently mapped by the text itself. Brown's comment about this text's lack of nuance rings true.<sup>22</sup> We either find ourselves at a dead-end or we seek a

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<sup>19</sup>The decided individualism of 3:2-3, rather than more corporate or familial models such as found in the OT and even in Paul's primary metaphors for the church—body, temple, household—may reflect this belief in spiritual regeneration rather than sexual generation. Even Paul's preference is for the singleness over marriage (1 Cor. 7) and his corporate models all assume a keen sense of the individual believer's baptism into and role within the covenant community. But 1 John's decided emphasis on new birth does seem to lend itself to an idea of covenant-keeping that concentrated upon the single child of God.

<sup>20</sup>R. Brown, *The Epistles of John* (AB, Doubleday, 1982), p. 430.

<sup>21</sup>W. J. Abraham, *Wesley for Armchair Theologians* (Westminster/John Knox, 2005), p. 91. The contrast of metaphors, "lawcourt" and "maternity ward," which I use in this lecture are also from this book, although I use them to make a somewhat different point from Abraham.

<sup>22</sup>St. Augustine, among the church's greatest interpreters of Scripture, put the central exegetical problem of our text this way: "Once again we are put in fear. How can we be born of God and confess ourselves sinners? Yet John has said that 'whosoever is born of God, sinneth not' and the same John again has told us that 'if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.' It is a serious and difficult question, and I would have your minds set upon finding its answer" (*Homilies on 1 John*).

way forward charted by work that illumines what the biblical text leaves insufficiently nuanced. This way forward is the project of theological interpretation; and the most fruitful way of engaging in the practice of theological interpretation is to do it (Webster).

### **A Theological Reading of Scripture**

Before turning back to 1 John 3 to make better sense of the Lord's word that comes with it, let me first set out a working definition of a theological interpretation of Scripture. If the task of exegesis sets out carefully what the holy text plainly says, then theological interpretation seeks to retrieve God's word mined from these precious texts for use toward holy ends. This simple definition accepts several principles as true about biblical interpretation.

1. Scripture sets before us a word about God, not ancient history, not modern science, but God. Yes, the biblical criticisms of the modern academy have made it clear that Scripture is a collection of human productions that reflect an ancient community's struggle to understand its covenant with God in social and political worlds very different from our own. But real Christians approach these same texts with meekness as indispensable for life and faith today. We do so not because biblical texts are in the likeness of God, but because God's Spirit has acted providentially in hand-picking each one to sanctify each one as the special medium of God's living word. As Paul might put it, Scripture is the church's "treasure in an earthen vessel (cheap tableware, breaks easily) in order to show that its extraordinary power (ἡ ὑπερβολή τῆς δυνάμεως) belongs to God, not to us" (2 Cor. 4:7).

2. The purpose of theological interpretation is to retrieve and clarify God's timeless word from Scripture, which is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes. If Scripture is a sacred text that discloses God's timeless word, it is in its very nature to deliver the goods about who God is, what God is doing in the world and how we as God's people should respond accordingly. If we believe that the Bible was produced under the Spirit's direction and continues to be performed by the Spirit's inspiration for holy ends, then we must be attentive to its teaching, rightly rendered, to enable us to know God and by knowing God to enjoy God's company forever.

3. Scripture's legal address is the church, not popular culture nor even a Christian university. This is so because the Holy Spirit who makes

the Bible holy resides there. This is so because the church is where a community of faithful readers practice, parade and proclaim its sacred texts as formative of a holy nation, a royal priesthood, a community of believers whose life and faith mark them out as the treasured possession of a holy God.

4. Our Bible practices return spiritual profit only when the congregation has been readied to receive this sacrament of the word by worship and with pure hearts. The Bible read aloud or taught in worship will fall on deaf ears or distracted minds unless a people have been spiritually prepared to receive its heavenly instruction. The reverent reception of Scripture as a means of grace requires the transformation of our inward affections so to incline us ever more favorably and eagerly toward that word of life which makes for *koinonia* with God and love for one another.

5. What regulates and keeps God in clear sight when practicing and parading Scripture among God's people is good theology. We can't have canon without creed. What we believe and confess about the nouns that decline God's existence and the verbs that conjugate God's activities regulate what we can and cannot take from Scripture to engage the culture and change the world. And what we believe about God must cohere with what the prophets announced to Israel and the apostles observed in Christ from the beginning—what we might call the "apostolic Rule of Faith." If the content and consequence of our interpretation of Scripture do not agree with this apostolic Rule, then the Spirit cannot and will not use it for holy ends.<sup>23</sup>

6. Like politics, all interpretation is local. Our inward dispositions and inclinations are shaped within particular places—a family, a culture, a congregation. When most of us speak of going to church, we have particular congregations in mind, filled with recognizable faces, where we find God and God finds us. We share with all believers the same ecumenical

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<sup>23</sup>In Sermon 13, "Sin in Believers," *Works*, 1:325, Wesley lists criteria by which to make a judgment on teaching: (1) whether agrees with tenor of Scripture (= Rule of Faith); (2) whether the experience it produces is apropos for God's children; (3) whether an absolutely new teaching, which is not to be trusted if without precedent in tradition; (4) whether consequences are fatal to faith. These criteria are extremely important for JW's resolution of a series of dualisms that he takes up in section IV of this sermon. He reads Scripture by experience, but defines experience by Scripture. He says in IV.10 when rejecting a particular dualism (that if there is sin, it must reign over a person) that this is "absolutely contrary to all experience, all Scripture, all common sense"—in that order (331).

confession of Trinitarian faith in the blessed hope of a common experience of God's salvation-creating grace; but we do so in different keys. The tenor of Scripture in a Reformed key sounds more like Paul, while those of us who sing God in a Wesleyan key sound more like 1 John. While the Pauline voice sings of salvation with a lyrical line that centers on justification, another joins in this round but with a lyric about the believer's full sanctification.

God's Spirit distributes ecclesial traditions as well as different spiritual gifts. While sometimes the body of Christ is a messy and confusing place, each calibration of the Spirit's will is indispensable to the health of the whole. Wesleyans must be Wesleyans, and decisively so, not to divide the church but so the church can become more one, more holy, more catholic and more fully apostolic.

Setting out this peculiar definition of theological interpretation allows me to make an outrageous claim. I suspect the more scrupulous among us may naturally want to inquire into the reasons why the Spirit would select hard texts to sanctify. Like 1 John—a neglected letter composed by an unknown author, with awkward syntax and ambiguous word choices, composed in sometimes confusing arguments that leave readers bewildered precisely at the moment the letter makes its most resounding claims. Why would the Spirit select and sanctify this earthen vessel for the church to treasure?

My bold thesis is that John Wesley's use of this letter in his standard sermons will help the church explain the Spirit's choice. And those Wesleyan tradents—those of us who worship in congregations who are catechized into John Wesley's *via salutis* and whose hearts are quickened by the singing of the lyrics of Charles, whose ears are thereby predisposed to hear more keenly than others the word of God in this precious but prickly letter, it is our sacred vocation to preach 1 John to others so that all our sisters and brothers might be illumined by the face of Christ.<sup>24</sup>

### **A Wesleyan Reading of 1 John 2:28—3:10**

Time has come for rubber to meet its road. The exchange between Father Brown's comment that 1 John's affirmation about sinless disciple-

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<sup>24</sup>In the introduction to my forthcoming commentary on the Pastoral Epistles (THC, Eerdmans), I comment on what might be called "theological intuition" in contrast to a formal strategy of reading texts in light of a particular rule of faith, Wesleyan or otherwise.

ship is insufficiently nuanced, and mine that it is Wesley who comes alongside the interpreter to help make better sense of this letter's inspired affirmation of sinlessness sets out a particular pattern of theological interpretation that I want to illustrate in the final portion of today's Lecture. I believe this is a pattern of interpretation that preachers and teachers of the Wesleyan tradition can use when practicing and parading Scripture with their congregations, always within the bounds of the one holy catholic and apostolic church.

1. 1 John's bold affirmation that real Christians do not sin requires a more nuanced understanding of sin itself. What is it exactly that the child of God does not do? As a Puritanized Arminian, Wesley heartily agrees with St. Augustine's narrative of sin—sinful humanity is unable to know God as the precondition of experiencing God's healing grace. Those who side with Adam against Christ are by nature utterly depraved from head to toe, "desperately wicked" and "entirely corrupt," unable and unwilling to live according to God's likeness. There is no essential difference between Wesley and Calvin on the desperate situation facing those outside of Christ and separated from God.

But I would argue that Wesley's primary interest is not with sinful non-believers but with those who profess faith in Christ and continue to sin. The most important nuances that Wesley might contribute to 1 John's expansive treatment of this topic concern that thin residue of inbred sin that lingers on in the Christian's life and threatens our relationship with Christ and love for one another. But this too is the pastoral concern of 1 John. Recall that the letter's affirmation of the believer's sinlessness follows from the idea of new birth, which is abruptly introduced in 2:29 and strategically sandwiched between repeated assurances of God's coming victory in 2:28 and 3:2. That is, the believer's practice of not sinning is predicated by an experience of being reborn as God's child, an experience so transforming that it testifies to sin's defeat and heralds its final demise so that our hearts are assured that one day we will see Jesus face to face. This is also Wesley's grammar.

Early on, Wesley did say that believers could rid themselves of habitual sinning by practicing virtue. But his own sense of spiritual failure coupled with his Aldersgate experience of new birth convinced him that only by God's supernatural infusion of grace is human nature rid of habitual sin. This seems clear from a pair of standard sermons, "On Sin in

the Believers” and “The Repentance of Believers,” in which he carefully defines the nature of sin with which justified believers continue to struggle. While no longer guilty before God or under the sway of sin, Christians still do battle with those inward tempers, passions, affections, thoughts, motives that tempt us to abandon the heart and mind of Christ for other gods.

Wesley goes on to say that in partnership with Christ the believer removes the sin that remains in us in small steps—sips, not gulps—during a long sanctification by faith in God’s direction. But the residue of sin’s powerful past remains deep within us, tempting us to subvert our spiritual potential. Sin does not reign, but it does remain. He writes, “We do not find any general state described in Scripture from which a man cannot draw back to sin.” In his diary (22:35), Wesley notes that it is more frequent for him to find believers who have lapsed from sanctification into sin than to find those who have perfected their holiness. This, then, is a nuance that a Wesleyan reading of 1 John adds to its affirmation that children of God are unable sin. Yes we can, although embraced by divine love and empowered by divine grace, less and less so over a lifetime of Christian devotion.

In my comment about unwanted, inbred sin that continues to tempt the believer, you may have heard an allusion to Wesley’s distinction between intentional and unintentional sinning. His account of Christian perfection does not include perfect knowledge. Even mature believers on the cusp of entire sanctification cannot avoid making mistakes from ignorance. Believers are always students, always studying, always learning. Our theological education never ends, even in eternity. Nor are believers ever free from their mortality—from “weakness or slowness of understanding, dullness or confusedness or apprehension, incoherency of thought, irregular quickness or heaviness of imagination.” But our infirmity is not a sin.

Over the years of engaging in spirited debates over Christian perfection, Wesley’s understanding of the problem of sin that remained in believers changed. The different tensions he considered in his pastoral and preaching ministry are resident in this passage of 1 John. Does sinning include only the intentional but not the unintentional? Is 1 John’s affirmation of sinlessness exempt of occasional sins and concerned only with habitual sinning? What about the distinction Wesley makes between outward and inward sin—does 1 John regard only outward sinning? Does

new birth make the child of God unable to sin or simply create a desire to form new habits of not sinning in expectation of God's final victory over sin? And what is the covenant status of the believer who continues to sin; does he lose his salvation and, if so, is a Wesleyan a new kind of Donatist?

In his own struggles to understand 1 John's profoundly optimistic affirmation of sinlessness, Wesley fashions a conception of Christian perfection that rejects the idea that sin goes missing in those who are born again. Hardly so. In fact, sin remains in our hearts and threatens to cleave to our words and works. More than ever, believers must worship in a congregation that practices repentance, lest our perfectionism lead us to despair. More than ever, Wesleyans must hear in 1 John 1:9 a call to seek forgiveness to right our relationship with God: "If we confess our sins, God (who is light and love) is faithful and just, will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." The perfection of Christian existence from all unrighteousness is not only a matter of our covenant-keeping practices, but equally so a matter of God's covenant-mending grace.

2. This leads me to suggest that 1 John's bold affirmation that the children of God do not sin not only requires a thickened conception of human sin; it also requires a more robust confidence in divine grace. Is it an inadequate definition of grace that merely forgives sin and frees us from its staying power? What then? It is in response to this that reading and singing with the Wesleys is formative of a theological approach to the sacred text.

Wesley contends that the means of grace, whose source is God, is sufficiently powerful to transform the believer to sin no more. That is, the very idea of sinlessness is conceivable only by grace through faithfulness, otherwise we would be inclined to form legalistic conduct codes and attempt to practice them as the mark of Christian discipleship. The assertion that God's children do not sin is not really about us; it's really about the triumph of God's grace over sin.

In this regard, Wesley found little help from St. Augustine. His claim of an efficacious grace available only to those who are predestined to receive it was incoherent to Wesley because it made no sense of God's light and love shed abroad for all. But also unintelligible for Wesley was a conception of grace that stopped short of entire sanctification and did not go to the bottom of sin to deal with all of its remains in the believer. God being God, grace is greater than sin.



So even while Wesley zeroed in on the need for believers to repent of their sin, at the same time he expanded the operations of grace to supply resources to believers who struggle to overcome the deep reservoirs of sinful passions that tempt them to abandon Christ. This expansive belief in the human capacity to sin is “so that we may find a merciful God whose help is well-timed (εὐκαιρος)” (Heb. 4:16).

So Wesley helps to add nuance to affirmation. It is the wonder-working power of God's grace that makes the Christian practice of not sinning a real but hard possibility. He develops a more robust understanding of prevenient or “preventing” grace that mitigates some of the worse effects of sin (e.g., lack of knowledge of God, lack of conscience to avoid sin, no free will), and makes it possible for the sinner to hear the gospel with an open mind and freely trust in Christ for justification or pardon from sin's guilt.

If sin penetrates deeply into human nature, then grace must as well to restore one's inward moral and spiritual capacity to love and obey God. Not only does the doctrine of justification by faith alone offer an inadequate or incomplete response to the devastation of sin in a person's life; a more incisive operation of divine grace is needed to rid one of sin. In a word, Paul's courtroom needs John's maternity ward to provide a more robust and fully biblical response to the problem of sin in the believer.

Wesley more carefully distinguishes between justification and regeneration as discrete but integral operations of God's grace. While agreeing that the two occur at the very moment the sinner trusts in Christ for salvation, in his sermon “Great Privilege” Wesley contends that justification pardons the sinner from the guilt of past sin while regeneration occurs when this same believer is released from sin's imprisonment to begin a new life under the direction of the Spirit. When one becomes a child of God, reborn with new capacities needed for a participatory partnership with God, Wesley says “there is a total change in all his particulars”—he sees the light of the world, hears the voice of God, feels the love of God shed abroad in his heart by God's Spirit. And now he may properly be said to live. New birth affords the believer all the resources necessary to live a holy life.

Understood this way, our regeneration marks a gateway into the body of Christ where still other operations of divine grace begin the hard work of sanctification. Precisely because regeneration changes the will,

the believer need not willfully sin. Precisely because regeneration transforms the senses, it is now possible to resist evil tempers and thoughts. Precisely because regeneration restores the image of a loving, truth-telling God within the believer, the believer is now assured of God's love and confident of participating in God's coming victory. Precisely because regeneration purifies the human spirit, God's Spirit can bear witness in our spirit, which in Wesley's understanding paves the path for a robust cooperation between God's people and God's Spirit as broker of God's sanctifying graces.

Central to Wesley's conception of Christian perfection is this dynamic cooperation between the divine and human spirits that marks out the believer's new birth as God's child (cf. Rom 8). New birth initiates the believer into a long sanctification in the Holy One's direction; new birth is integral to rather than distinct from sanctification. Wesley described three integral movements marking out a full sanctification: the pure and irresistible gift of our new birth, the process of growth in grace, and that unpredictable instant of Christian perfection when a believer is entirely sanctified by God's Spirit at God's timing.

While new birth is a supernatural event that changes our nature, sanctification envisages a working arrangement between God and the believer who is sanctified by grace in proportion to the amount and quality of grace received. The various practices of Christian discipleship—works of piety and mercy, when complemented by the ordinary means of grace ordained by the church, occasion a profuse outpouring of God's salvation-creating grace that transforms the believer into a conspicuous saint.

The Christian practice of loving one another perfectly and completely is not a moral state that the believer enters; it involves personal choices, personal habits, a Spirit-led activism that presumes a person's loyal love for God and the inward working of God's salvation-creating grace. Listen to the words of this ditty that Wesley taught to his followers, lest they forget the doctrine of Christian Perfection; *Do all the good you can, to all the people you can, at all the times you can, in all the ways you can, by all the means you can, as long as ever you can.* Wesley understands grace as participatory. Believers are activists, with a decisive role to play in the outworking of their salvation. We appropriate the outward means of grace as the ordinary tools given by God and instituted by God's

church to hammer out in cooperation with God a manner of life and faith that bring God pleasure.<sup>25</sup>

1 John's division of the world into children of the devil and children of God in 3:8 assumes that reborn believers are given a supernatural capacity to purify themselves and to engage in holy acts. We also assume such moral activism is not the effect of spiritual osmosis. In cooperation with God, believers do not sin but love others, which is a moral facility cultivated over time within Spirit-filled congregations by the persistent practice of outward means of grace.

3. Learning at the feet of Wesley prepares us for a theological reading of 1 John. There is more to this than fuller definitions of our core beliefs about sin and grace. Reading Wesley also exposes what is lacking in this holy text's affirmation that God's children do not sin. I want to illustrate this interpretive prospect by using his sermon "Marks of the New Birth."

Wesley first suggests that the real mark of new birth is not sinlessness at all, but faith, hope and especially love. In this sense, our outward sins are replaced by outward acts of loving God by our acts of piety, loving our neighbors by acts of kindness. But also our inward sins are replaced by inward affections that prompt us to love and worship. In concluding this sermon, Wesley scores his real point, his deepest probe into the doctrine of new birth. It concerns the real nature of baptismal regeneration. Grace happens to us when we are bathed in the waters of believer's baptism. But he observes that baptized Christians often grow complacent while the lives of recent converts are often transformed beyond all measure. His own Aldersgate renewal confirmed a different kind of baptismal regeneration, more decisive and personal and one not taught in his church. Wesley understood that the inward and outward marks of new birth are the real effects of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Christians do not sin; Christians have faith, hope and love because they bathe in the Holy Spirit. It is very difficult to understand Wesley at this point without a serious pneumatology.

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<sup>25</sup>A reform movement is afoot called "canonical theism," led by the Methodist theologian William Abraham and Douglas Koskela, among others. I consider this a promising development within the academy in helping the church reclaim the "means of grace" by which God's Spirit gains access into our reborn hearts and minds to utterly transform our existence into the likeness of Christ.

The dialog between Paul and John in Wesley's sermons is quite remarkable. He uses obscure texts from John's Gospel or 1 John to explain the plain texts of Paul about the way of salvation.<sup>26</sup> But not when it comes to the Holy Spirit. Wesley uses Paul's theology of the Spirit, especially his grand innovation that the indwelling Spirit is witness to our salvation and agent of God's sanctifying grace, and simply applies it at will to John's teaching of the believer's reborn nature.

1 John 3 does not mention the Spirit when affirming the Christian practice of not sinning or when exhorting the reborn Christian toward perfect love; but Wesley insinuates the Spirit onto this holy text as though it were there all along. It is, for Wesley, the indwelling Spirit who vocalizes God's affirmation, "Be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven thee: go and sin no more." The Spirit testifies to our forgiveness and rehabilitates our spiritual senses in a "kind of spiritual respiration" that restores and sustains one's life with God and enables the child of God to grow up to "the full measure of the stature of Christ." In my estimation, it is this implied work of the Spirit within the believer that most adequately nuances 1 John's affirmation of the reborn believer's stunning capacity to replace sin with perfect love.

### **The Altar Call**

Let me return to 1 John 3:9 and to this letter's most inspiring claim, that God's children are "not able to sin" because they have God's DNA in them. Now that is a claim fit for altar calls! We are now prepared to understand the Christian's inability to sin as proleptic of the sanctified community's future participation in God's new creation, which is devoid of any sin and every form of death. 1 John locates its bold affirmation of

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<sup>26</sup>For Wesley the central tension is between Paul and John, between a Protestant reading of Pauline theological grammar (*sola fide*) and the equally important emphasis on holy living. If he felt and lived within the tension without giving into a reductionism that privileged one or the other, American holiness sought to resolve this tension by creating a reductionism in which entire sanctification is a second, discrete work of the Spirit who mediates divine grace that eradicates all sin and perfects the believer's life morally and spiritually. (most would say incorrect) construction of Zinzendorf's appeal to 1 John to lend biblical support to antinomian perfectionism, then he appeals to Paul's response to Corinthian believers (= immature) in response. This is actually a different conversation than in the ancient church but perhaps one that is implied by canonical decisions.

sinlessness alongside its confident declaration “that whenever the Son appears, we will be like him because we will see him just as he is” (3:2). The Christian’s Spirit-directed, Spirit-filled practice of replacing willful sin with self-sacrificial love is motivated by a firm assurance in the coming new creation of God, when those of us who are born again will no longer be able to sin. Then we will join Charles Wesley with a chorus of saints to sing the lyrics of his great hymn finally come true:

Finish, then, thy new creation;  
pure and spotless let us be.  
Let us see thy great salvation  
perfectly restored in thee;  
changed from glory into glory,  
till in heaven we take our place,  
till we cast our crowns before thee,  
lost in wonder, love, and praise.

# WHOSE WESLEY? WHICH WESLEYAN TRADITION?

by

**William J. Abraham**

When theologians' projects differ significantly, one can expect considerable talk at cross purposes. This is my initial reaction to Professor Kenneth Collins' attempt at sorting through the meaning and significance of canonical theism.<sup>1</sup> Collins has framed the issue in terms of the relation between canonical theism and the Wesleyan tradition, even though this theme is severely underdeveloped. I welcome this angle of vision. In fact, I suspect that one real issue below the surface that animates the discussion is the future of the Wesleyan tradition. Collins perceives canonical theism as a serious threat to his vision of Wesley and of the Wesleyan tradition.

There are other issues as well, of course. What is the nature of historical investigation? What are the gifts and limits of historical investigation in making normative theological claims? What is the best way forward for theology in the future? How should we think of the continuity of identity of a theological heritage across space and time? These are messy and magnificent topics that impinge on our differences. However, as my title suggests, I think that the issue of the future of the Wesleyan tradition is clearly on the table. Hence, after dealing directly with Collins' objections to canonical theism, I shall press very briefly the issue of whose Wesley and what Wesleyan tradition Collins is implicitly relying on in his spirited response to my work.

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<sup>1</sup>Kenneth J. Collins, "Is 'Canonical Theism' a Viable Option for Wesleyans?" *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 45:2 (2010), 82-107.

## Addressing the Objections of Collins

The initial question in the body of the Collins article is a very general one. Is canonical theism a viable option for the twenty-first century? He proceeds to answer this initially by challenging my account of the meaning of canon. Nothing he says there surprises me; I was well aware of the options and materials he cites when I developed my alternative vision of canon and rejected the claims advanced because they were inadequate both conceptually and historically. Collins thinks it is enough to cite a list of authorities that take the view that canon is a criterion. But this simply begs the question against the detailed argument I have provided. My position is a subtle one. I think that there was from the outset ambivalence in the meaning of canon and the Western tradition, under pressure from its epistemological interests, went with one reading, a reading which does not square with the range of material and practices that were identified as canon. If readers want to test this claim, I suggest they read Bruce Metzger's great classic text on canon formation and ask themselves whether the epistemic theory of the canon of scripture Metzger adopts squares with the history he recounts.<sup>2</sup>

Collins then worries that I am on slippery terrain when I claim that the Holy Spirit is actively involved in the production of the canonical heritage of the church. He takes this as a covert way of claiming that its components have authority in an epistemic sense. But this is simply mistaken and only arises because he has forgotten the distinction between canon and criterion at the heart of my work. As his references to my views as a conservative "catholic" move reveal, he imports his own epistemic commitments into my position and fails to see that the Spirit on my analysis inspires scripture not to provide some grandiose *norma normans* but to operate in a host of ways to make us wise unto salvation.

It is this latter insight, which John Wesley and Pietists in general brilliantly exploit, that is at the base of my position. Furthermore, I do not rule out some version of *sola scriptura* as an option in the epistemology of theology; indeed, this is entirely possible for the canonical theist. Talk about being fearful of Protestant's dangerous idea is not at issue. What is at issue is the best way to think of the purposes of the Spirit in inspiring scripture, the best way to think of the epistemology of theology (and

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<sup>2</sup>Bruce Manning Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origins, Development, and Significance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

scripture's potential role in this arena as mediating divine revelation), and, most of all, the *canonical* status of any such theory in Christianity. Equally, it is utterly misleading to try and assimilate my position to Heiko Oberman's category of "Tradition Two" (a dual-source view of revelation) for that drags us back into the world of epistemology that I think is one more snare to be avoided.

The same problem bedevils Collins' persistence in thinking that I see the canonical heritage as an unshakeable ecclesiastical standard. I do indeed think that the bishop of Rome made a serious error in its breach with the East, and in time this breach heightened the tendency to turn crucial elements of the canonical heritage into epistemic agents. But Collins says nothing to overturn this historical claim, which he might well do by marshalling a different narrative. On the contrary, in historical work he wants to impose on me his traditions-reading of the history of the church, just as later he wants to uphold Hans Küng's utterly artificial and misleading periodization of church history derived from the much overused deployment of paradigm shifts in the philosophy of science. I see no good reason for sharing his traditions-reading perspective, not least because I think it distorts the historical reality by overplaying the diversity and underplaying the unity that existed prior to the schism of 1054.

I have never denied the diversity; only a fool would do so; I love the diversity, and I even insist that after the division East and West give different readings of the history. For me, the issue is the surprising unity in the midst of diversity. However, again the crucial issue is that Collins simply cannot get beyond the language of "binding ecclesiastical standards" understood in an epistemic sense. He thinks this is undermined by his story of diversity; as I reject his conception of historiography, I reject his version of events. And I insist that the crucial issue is whether the canonical heritage that is actually shared prior to the division between East and West should be seen as means of grace or as criteria in the epistemology of theology. We will get nowhere here until this talking at cross-purposes is overcome.

The same epistemic confusion runs through Collins' efforts to summarize my vision of scripture and the other elements of the canonical heritage. He is so much in the grip of his own epistemizing prejudices that he thinks that, if one says that the church decided the canon, this makes the church an epistemic authority. Nothing of the sort follows. Causal origin, contrary to common Roman Catholic popular apologetics and to what



Collins' own standard response to that apologetic assumes, does not generally secure epistemic authority. To say that X decided p does not entail that X is a criterion for the truth of p; it merely opens up the important question as to what reasons were deployed to support the truth of p and then bids the serious philosopher to go all the way to the bottom and ask what criteria and epistemology are in play in the discussion.

Moreover, appealing to Wesley and the General Conference of 1988 is not enough to carry the day in the epistemology of theology. This gets us nowhere. Neither of these actually represent the constitutional standards of United Methodism in that much of the material adopted in 1988 is mere legislative enactment.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, they are normatively useless in resolving the epistemological disputes that have to be addressed in their own right. By the end of the section on scripture, despite a hint to the contrary, it is clear that Collins is right back in the business of privileging an epistemic reading of scripture in his comments on the needs of converts. Some converts may indeed need to be given a good vision of divine revelation, and even one mediated via scripture, but again we are back talking past one another. Providing a response to the epistemological questions which converts may raise is not at all ruled out on my view; but I think judgments on this require a large dose of discernment. The track record on giving converts, say, *sola scriptura* or the "Wesleyan Quadrilateral" is itself a very mixed blessing when one looks at the numbers who have deserted Christianity because of it.

Collins is on much firmer ground when he comes to the issue of canon law in the Councils. In fact, we do not deal with this topic in our work because sorting out this material requires more expertise than we possessed. This is indeed a lacuna that few reviewers have noted. Yet it is not difficult to infer the line which we would have pursued, a line completely contrary to the pejorative and negative reading developed by Collins. Perceptive readers can readily see the stance that the canonical theist will take on these materials. Starting with what happened at the

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<sup>3</sup>Albert Outler, in the 1972 General Conference when the material on the Quadrilateral was first introduced, was extremely unhappy that this was all he could achieve. He really wanted a constitutional amendment, but the Judicial Council took this off the table. To his great credit, he came to regret what had happened in 1972, agreeing with the only critic he really took seriously (Robert Cushman of Duke) that such material should never have been adopted. I am delighted that both Collins and I share a keen interest in the canonical developments in all versions of the Wesleyan tradition.

Council of Jerusalem, they will read canon law historically and soteriologically rather than in the simplistic and legalistic way proposed by Collins. Again, the whole language of seeing them as “binding” is misleading; much of this material is situation-relative, as is clear from the rulings made at the Council of Jerusalem. To take them in a purely juridical way or epistemically simply perpetuates any serious engagement with canon law, as is widely recognized by serious students of how it functions.

It is a pleasure to note agreement with much of what Collins has to say about the church fathers and his readiness to read them as a means of grace. Appealing to them epistemically, under the guise, say, of tradition, will not work precisely because of the sheer wealth of material, because of their diversity, and because of all sorts of blind spots and bad judgments. This is one reason why papal infallibility emerged as a way to cope with the problem. Protestants tried out a restricted version of perspicuity by limiting the clear domain to matters essential to salvation.<sup>4</sup> The acrimonious debate about justification and sanctification in both the ancient and modern periods shows how dubious this strategy is to shore up the appeal to scripture.

The worries of Collins about the abuse and supernaturalizing of icons are on target, but *abusus non tollit usum*. On the issue of episcopacy, Collins falls back again into an epistemic reading of canon law, construing it tacitly in terms of divine revelation, the highest of the high in the epistemology of theology. He fails to see the radical criticisms of the historic episcopate that are clearly stated in my paper, and repeats his earlier complaints about women priests. On the latter score, he conveniently fails to note that Natalie Van Kirk is an Episcopal priest. This alone should have led him to look again at the complexity and subtlety of what is involved in canonical theism.

Collins’ account of what systematic theology would look like for a canonical theist is a caricature, deploying a common but vulgar vision of catechesis that ignores the constructive and other work that is envisaged and articulated. His placement of the history I recount in my book on canon and criterion as ensconced in a “catholic paradigm” is risible. It is not difficult to see why he makes this mistake; once again, he thinks I am putting the canonical heritage of the church on a par with divine revela-

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<sup>4</sup>Collins’ own fine contributions to this debate in the Wesleyan tradition, seen in his exchanges with Randy Maddox, confirm this point nicely.

tion. As to the criticisms of modern Protestantism, these are not refuted by treating Methodism and modern evangelicalism as reruns of the Reformation. Nor does Collins offer any arguments against my criticisms of Wesley's account of scripture, both in its content and its consequences. Ironically and happily, he deploys the categories of canonical theism in his unconvincing defense of the future prospects of United Methodism. As to the final effort to make canonical theism a proxy for or apology for Eastern Orthodoxy, it suffices to repeat what I have made abundantly clear. I make no effort to speak for Eastern Orthodoxy; it is well able to speak for itself. Given Collins apparent distaste for all things catholic, he is simply resorting at this point to guilt by association, working off a tendentious and unsympathetic reading of a noble and extremely important expression of the Christian tradition.<sup>5</sup>

It is worth stating afresh what is at issue in my understanding of canon. I read canon in a deflationary mode as a list rather than a criterion. This leaves open whether it can be taken in an epistemic direction (the standard move in the West) or in a different theological register as a means of grace. I favor the latter reading, not least because of appeal to the famous passage in 2 Tim 3:16 which reads the Jewish scriptures, when taken with the gospel transmitted in the family to Timothy, as functioning to make us wise on matters of salvation and service in the church. I then extend this to other canonical materials and practices. I understand how challenging this shift is both in concept and in material application. My goal within this horizon is to develop a healthy, spiritually apt, and historically sensitive ontology of scripture.

This aspiration in no way undermines appeal to scripture when read in the context of a theory of divine revelation, that is, within a substantial account of the epistemology of theology. The latter is a radically different exercise, and I insist again and again that this be done thoroughly and well. Appeal to divine revelation is what the older theories of the inspiration and dictation of scripture meant to capture, but the appeal got elaborated in ways that undercut the manifold soteriological functions of scrip-

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<sup>5</sup>For those interested in a fertile conversation between Wesleyan and Eastern Orthodox ecclesiological reflection at a very deep level, I would recommend Nicholas Afanasiev, *The Church of the Holy Spirit* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007). S. T. Kimbrough, ed., *Orthodox and Wesleyan Ecclesiology* (Crestwood, New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2007) is also well worth consulting.

ture. What was at issue in older theories of divine inspiration was the crucial claim that Jews and Christians both made, namely, that God really did speak and reveal himself in history and that scripture gave us reliable access to such revelation. On all this I am an unrepentant devotee of direct divine action. Needless to say, this latter claim has taken a beating in the modern period, but I am equally insistent that work on this topic be done thoroughly and well. I have been working on this topic since I was an undergraduate and am only now getting the light I need to tackle it with any confidence.

The distinctions involved in and around these claims are not always easy to articulate or to keep in view, yet they are vital to my position. So I understand the frustration that some readers register; they mirror my own experience as I wrestle with the issues. Moreover, given my wide network of academic interests, it is not always easy to see how this work fits into the work I do, say, in Wesley Studies. I readily confess that there are significant elements in my work that are not properly integrated and which may require significant readjustment if I am ever to meet the challenge of reflective equilibrium.

In fact, there are significant matters that remain very underdeveloped in my work to date, not least in ecclesiology, a topic of considerable difficulty in its own right and especially challenging to Wesleyans. This is a matter I am currently pursuing, and in its present phase it makes clear my differences, for example, with much standard material in both Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy. On this, as on his doctrine of scripture, we cannot microwave Wesley's interesting and diverse proposals. Once we place Methodism in the context of its later developments in the Holiness Movement and in Pentecostalism, then we can capture some of its implicit strengths that can get us beyond the current forms of shame and inferiority that are so destructive intellectually and spiritually.

### **Whose Wesley? Which Wesleyan Tradition?**

It is helpful in conclusion to mention the issue of Collins' own alternative agenda. He asks in the title of his essay whether canonical theism is a viable option for Wesleyans. He does not answer the question directly but shifts to the broader question as to whether canonical theism is a viable option for the twenty-first century. Perhaps he thinks that answering that question in the negative will take care of the initial question. Or maybe he thinks that my sharp criticism of Wesley's standard vision of

scripture renders it obvious that no Wesleyan could be a canonical theist. My short answer to these potential moves is that I see no conflict between retrieving a rich account of Wesley's life and work and being a canonical theist. For me Wesley is what he was for other Methodists, that is, my Father in the faith given the pivotal role of his sermons and of his theology and of the people called Methodists in my own conversion from atheism. I also consider him—warts and all—to be a true saint of God. The bigger question raised, however, is this: which Wesley and whose Wesleyan tradition do we use as the benchmark in this conversation?

Collins has his own vision of Wesley and the Wesleyan tradition. I see no reason, however, why I should be held accountable to either of his constructs, not least because I see them as wide of the mark of a fully accurate historical account of both Wesley and the Wesleyan tradition. Thus Collins, in recommending Scott Jones' account of the so-called Wesleyan Quadrilateral, seriously misrepresents Wesley's vision of scripture and embodies the standard confusion of canon and criterion I am intent on eradicating. It would be redundant to argue that case all over again. Moreover, Collins would appear to collapse the Wesleyan tradition into the current canonical commitments of The United Methodist Church, as if these appropriately represented the Wesleyan tradition in our own day and were in good intrinsic and working order.

Most conspicuously, in his own reappropriation of Wesley, Collins quietly leaves out Wesley's vision of scripture as worthy of serious attention.<sup>6</sup> It is hard to believe Wesley—stout “Protestant” that he was—treating this element in his theology as *adiaphora*. Collins has his own way of putting Wesley in his historical stove and burning off what does not fit his theological agenda. In other words, there is more than one way to appropriate what God did in the life and work of John Wesley. It will take more than stipulative definition to settle which way is best. In the providence of God, I am willing to bet that canonical theists can enrich the treasures of Methodism in ways that will bear fruit in the generation to come.

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<sup>6</sup>See Kenneth J. Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley, Holy Love and the Shape of Grace* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2007).

# **JOHN WESLEY, FIRST PEOPLES OF NORTH AMERICA, AND CHRISTIAN PERFECTION**

by

**Heather Ann Clements and Cassandra Shea Sequivel**

Because little has been written about John Wesley's experiences among First Peoples in Georgia and their relation to his understanding of soteriology, particularly with regard to his distinctive doctrine of perfection, certain questions arise. Outside of Wesley's own journal, very little exists to document his goals for his missionary journey to Georgia. However, due to the popularity of missiological literature in Britain during his lifetime, Wesley is likely to have read some primary sources before embarking in 1735 on his evangelistic venture to Georgia, such as ethnographic and/or travel writings from missionaries to the United States. His journal suggests that Wesley did not realize that within the colony of Savannah he would have limited resources for connecting with the First People, and his contact with Moravian missionaries during the journey to Georgia and within the colony may suggest some preconceptions regarding First Peoples (that they were unscathed by modern society and its conveniences and trials) that may have influenced him. Wesley's journal and sermons exhibit features of both ethnography and missionary travel writing. We believe that they indicate a shift in his perception of the potential of the First Peoples he met in Georgia to embrace Christian perfection in his lifetime.

## **Context of Wesley's Work with First Peoples in Georgia**

In order to understand the way that John Wesley reflects upon his encounters with First Peoples in his journal, it is helpful to understand the

style of writing about “the other” that was then emerging. Ethnographer Christian Feest explains that early “modern ethnographic writing emerged in the context of the Renaissance distinction between the genres of *historia*, encompassing . . . the recording of empirical facts in general, and *scientia* as systematically delineated knowledge, at a time when the primarily spiritual goals of traveling (such as pilgrimage) . . . gave way to secular concerns (such as the collection . . . of data for a better understanding of the world).”<sup>1</sup>

During the Enlightenment, a “new ethnographic paradigm” emerged, focusing “on specific peoples.”<sup>2</sup> Wesley engaged in this type of ethnographic writing in his journal during and after key encounters with First Peoples in Georgia, specifically his July 30, 1736, record of his dialogue with Chickasaw warriors about their spiritual beliefs. He asks them questions and recounts their answers rather than evangelizing. However, it seems that his initial goal was to write a diary, which Feest describes as “combining the purposes of bookkeeping and self-observation,” providing “a chronological order of the observational data” as the traveler progresses through both space and time.<sup>3</sup>

As Wesley himself explains, he began his journal “in pursuance of advice given by Bishop Taylor, in his ‘Rules for Holy Living, and Dying.’ . . . I began to take a more exact account . . . of the manner wherein I spent my time, writing down how I had employed every hour . . . wherever I was, till the time of my leaving England. . . . I had no design nor desire to trouble the world with my little affairs” by publishing his journal. In fact, he was obliged by others to publish this journal in defense of false charges of spiritual excess against him.<sup>4</sup>

As Feest explains, “early travel literature on the Americas,” with which Wesley may have been familiar, used both the ethnographic and diary models of writing, but tended toward “categorical generalization,” although “the categories chosen may not really be adequate to describe

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<sup>1</sup>Christian F. Feest, “Moravians and the Development of the Genre of Ethnography,” in A. G. Roeber, ed., *Ethnographies and Exchanges: Native Americans, Moravians, and Catholics in Early North America* (Penn State University, 2008.), 19.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>4</sup>John Wesley, *Journal*. Vol.1, in Thomas Jackson, ed., *The Works of John Wesley* (Providence House Publishers, 1995.), 2.

cultural otherness, but rather tend to assimilate the Other or to contrast it with the Self.”<sup>5</sup> Wesley’s frustrated journey between these two poles of early ethnography seems to be illustrated in his journal and sermons. When he fails to assimilate the Other (First Peoples in this case), he ends up radically contrasting the “Other” with his understanding of the Christian “Self.” By late 1737, when he summarizes his experiences with “Georgian Indians” whom he had previously described in terms of individuals and specific people groups, he refers to them collectively as “heathen.”<sup>6</sup> Feest cites a comparative ethnological work on Native North American morality by Jesuit father Joseph François Lafitau, “a missionary among the Mohawk . . . near Montreal, as very influential and “important in the first half of the eighteenth century.”<sup>7</sup> In this work, which may have impacted Wesley’s expectations of what he might encounter in a mission to First Peoples, Lafitau draws upon multiple sources from the seventeenth century to identify “‘Indians’ who are both generic and untainted by European influences such as his own missionary labors.”<sup>8</sup> Whatever the sources that influenced him, Wesley clearly expected in his mission to First Peoples to encounter such “untainted” people receptive to his ideas of Christian perfection.

Settlements of “praying Indians” had been established in North America’s British colonies since as early as 1646, with the first Native American church founded as early as 1661 and an indigenous translation of the Bible into a Massachusetts dialect available by 1663.<sup>9</sup> In the Plymouth colony alone, “there were twenty-four regular churches of Christian Indians.”<sup>10</sup> According to missionary John Brainerd, a contemporary of Wesley’s, activities in England “stimulated there the formation of societies, with the collection of funds, to aide [*sic*] the good work in Amer-

<sup>5</sup>Feest, 20-21.

<sup>6</sup>Wesley, December 2, 1737, entry.

<sup>7</sup>Feest, 22-23.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>9</sup>Thomas Brainerd, *The Life of John Brainerd: The Brother of David Brainerd, and His Successor as Missionary to the Indians of New Jersey* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Publication Committee, James Rogers Press, 1865), iv, 70-71.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, 71; cites Joseph Tracy, Solomon Peck, Enoch Mudge, William Cutter, and Enoch Mack, *History of American Missions to the heathen, from their Commencement to the Present Time* (Worcester: Spooner and Howland, 1840).



ica.”<sup>11</sup> The Wesley brothers likely heard and were inspired by such accounts and traveled from England to Georgia in 1735, the same year as the Moravians began missionary work among the First Peoples of eastern New York. We know that John Wesley was later an admirer of David and John Brainerd’s missions to First Peoples of New England, as recounted by Jonathan Edwards in his 1749 biography of David Brainerd, that Wesley himself republished.<sup>12</sup>

The Wesley ministry in Georgia was influenced by the work of Moravian missionaries who hoped to evangelize Cherokee and Creek people and “to love the Indians as brothers.”<sup>13</sup> As historian S. Scott Rohrer observes, “The vast majority of Anglicans did not move for overtly religious reasons. They did not migrate to establish congregations untainted by corruption or to venture into the wilderness to convert Indians.”<sup>14</sup> The Wesley brothers were more like the Pietist Moravians than their fellow Anglicans in this regard. It was on the way to this shared mission that Moravians met the Wesley brothers, “who were on their way from England to preach to the Indians along the Savannah.”<sup>15</sup> The city of Savannah itself had only just been founded in 1733 as “the first step in the creation of Georgia,” and the Yamacraw people there were among those the Moravians and Wesleys are most likely to have encountered.<sup>16</sup> John Wesley continued to seek out the Moravian Brethren while he was conducting Anglican services in Savannah and continued his association with them after his return to England, even visiting their settlement at Herrnhut, Germany, and attending the love feasts there. In a journal entry published in 1864, Wesley wrote, “I went to America to convert the Indians: but Oh! who shall convert me . . . from this evil heart of unbelief?”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>Brainerd, 71.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, 80.

<sup>13</sup>Elma E. Gray with Leslie Robb Gray, *Wilderness Christians: The Moravian Mission to the Delaware Indians* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University, 1956), 21.

<sup>14</sup>S. Scott Rohrer, *Wandering Souls: Protestant Migrations in America, 1630-1865* (University of North Carolina, 2010), 66.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>16</sup>“Savannah,” Cities and Counties, *The New Georgia Encyclopedia*, 2004-2009 (Georgia Humanities Council and University of Georgia Press <http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/nge/Article.jsp?id=h-1056>, 8 September 2009.

<sup>17</sup>John Wesley, *The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley* (London, 1864), 20-21, cited in Gray, 22.

In the time of the evangelistic effort of the Wesleys in America, Georgia served as a “buffer zone” between South Carolina and Spanish Florida, so that Georgian colonists saw themselves defined in part by their difference from Spanish Catholics.<sup>18</sup> In fact, just a year after John Wesley left Georgia in 1738, the Moravians themselves were already abandoning their mission to First Peoples in Georgia because of the hostilities between England and Spain in neighboring Florida. Both the Moravians and the Wesleys experienced their evangelism among Cherokee and Creek people as “short-lived and unsuccessful.”<sup>19</sup> By later in 1738, Wesley had his Aldersgate conversion experience, and by 1740, the Moravians had removed to Bethlehem, Pennsylvania’s “holy experiment” in religious and cultural diversity, where they met the peacemaking Munsee.<sup>20</sup>

The political, cultural, and religious tensions between English Georgians and their Spanish Catholic neighbors in Florida caused John Wesley’s Anglican parishioners to be especially wary of his Anglo-Catholic tendencies in liturgy. His foremost desire with regard to his Anglican parishioners seems to have been to re-establish the “primitive” church in the Georgia wilderness, restoring more Catholic liturgical practices back into Anglican worship along with his Methodist personal devotional practices and an egalitarian approach to women. According to contemporary Georgian accounts of Wesley’s failure in Savannah, his appointment of women as deacons, his encouragement of women’s confession, and his general “belief that women were in spiritual matters independent of men and equal to them” were extremely unpopular with those who controlled the Anglican churches he served.<sup>21</sup> Though legal troubles because of his breaking off his alleged engagement with Sophy Hopkey caused Wesley to leave Georgia after twenty-two months, these conflicts also contributed

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<sup>18</sup>Geordan Hammond, “The Social Impact of John Wesley’s Mission to Georgia,” Methodist Missionary Society annual conference. November 2005. <http://www.mwrc.ac.uk/scholarly-papers/>, 7.

<sup>19</sup>Gregory Evans Dowd, *A Spiritual Resistance: The North American Indian Struggle for Unity, 1745-1815* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1992), 64; see also David Corkran, *The Creek Frontier, 1540-1783* (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma, 1967), 97-98.

<sup>20</sup>Gray, 24.

<sup>21</sup>Hammond, 7-11 (direct quote is from page 9); Pat Tallifer, Hugh Anderson, et. al., *A True and Historical Narrative of the Colony of Georgia in America* (Charles Town: P. Timothy, 1741), 42.

to what he perceived as the failure of his work there. However, his lack of opportunity to evangelize First Peoples was initially his primary frustration, according to his own journal.

### **The Influence of Moravian Missions to First Peoples on Wesley's Views**

Anglo-American anthropologists have somewhat artificially described First Peoples of the Americas in terms of regions defined by Anglo-Europeans themselves rather than acknowledging a growing semi-continental, inter-tribal sense of "Indian identity" in the 1740s and beyond. Before this, groups tended to be more localized, "familial, and ethnically oriented," led by clan and village authorities.<sup>22</sup>

The Delawares, Cherokees, and Creeks among whom the Moravians lived and worked were all "peoples of the Eastern woodlands" who "never inhabited isolated, tightly integrated cultures, however much they might identify themselves, as peoples, against all others."<sup>23</sup> The Lenni Lenape (later called Delaware) were one of the people groups that formed the Algonkian Nation of thirty-six "linguistically and culturally distinct" peoples.<sup>24</sup> Like the Creek with whom John Wesley interacted, the Lenape or Delaware had a matrilineal and matrilocal culture.<sup>25</sup> Wesley's contemporary, Moravian missionary David Zeisberger, noted that "sons belong to the mother's lineage" and "marriage partners never belong to the same lineage; thus succession [of leadership] within the same lineage is limited to brothers, nephews, and grandsons" rather than from fathers to sons.<sup>26</sup>

Among the Lenape, men and women also shared leadership. Councils of male elders ordered public laws and war activities, while the oldest female relative of the group determined the male leader's "length of service and the domestic economy of her people."<sup>27</sup> Taking their name from

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<sup>22</sup>Dowd, xiii, xx.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 2.

<sup>24</sup>Gray, 7.

<sup>25</sup>Corkran, *Creek*, 30; Gray, 8.

<sup>26</sup>Hermann Wellenreuther, "The Succession of Head Chiefs and the Delaware Culture of Consent: The Delaware Nation, David Zeisberger, and Modern Ethnography," in A. G. Roeber, ed., *Ethnographies and Exchanges: Native Americans, Moravians, and Catholics in Early North America* (Penn State University, 2008), 35.

<sup>27</sup>Gray, 9.

the “rapid stream” (“lenape-whituttuck”) that ran through their territory in river and valley areas of “what is now eastern Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and part of Delaware,” the Lenape included Wolf, Turtle, and Turkey clans. The Wolf people, northernmost of the three, were known as “Minsis,” “Munsee,” or “Monsey.” Although viewed by missionaries as the more “warlike” of the Lenape clans, they were also most closely associated with the pacifist Christian Moravian missionaries.<sup>28</sup>

Indeed, the Lenape were in a unique position among First Peoples in the northeastern colonies to embrace the peace-church movement within European Christianity. As early as 1681, Quaker William Penn had directly expressed to the Lenape (“children of God, therefore brothers”) his desire “to live justly, peaceably, and friendly” with the First Peoples of the land for his “holy experiment” along the Delaware River.<sup>29</sup> During his lifetime, Penn and the Lenape seem to have had a very amicable relationship, though they preferred to live in wilderness areas rather than European settlements. When Penn died in 1718, the Lenape’s role as “women” in relation to the Six Nations (Iroquois) league of First Peoples in the region became more evident in political negotiations with Penn’s less respectful successors. Since the Lenape, unlike other groups, were successful at times in battle against the Iroquois, the Iroquois “suggested that the Delaware tribes should become the peace nation, the mediator, who would not go to war but would endeavor to maintain peace among others, their members to be known as ‘honored women,’” buffering the southeastern approaches to Iroquois lands.<sup>30</sup> Perhaps because of their matrilineal, matrilineal culture, the Lenape peaceably accepted this arrangement. Their ceremonial role was “to cleanse the ears of evil nations, who would then hear nothing but good counsel, and [give] medicine to purge them of their foolish acts.”<sup>31</sup>

Moravian missionaries were motivated to settle further and further into wilderness areas with converted First Peoples because of their recognition that the Delaware people were being “dispossessed” by Europeans.<sup>32</sup> A descendant of the Munsee converts, historian and genealogist Broken Claw elaborates:

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 8. Broken Claw’s description overlaps with that of Gray.

<sup>29</sup>William Penn Tercentenary Committee, *Remember William Penn* (Harrisburg, 1945), 110, cited in Gray, 12.

<sup>30</sup>Gray, 16.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid.

<sup>32</sup>Gray, v.

... one of the main reasons that the Moravians came to America was to minister to the native population. Their first efforts started in Georgia in 1735, but within five years they had shifted the center of their operation to Pennsylvania, where they founded the town of Bethlehem. Early on they recognized the value of establishing mission villages beyond the frontier, rather than trying to get the settlers to accept the natives in white culture. As a result, the Moravian missionaries were often the first Europeans to live and interact with native peoples where they lived.<sup>33</sup>

Though they initially worked with several people groups in Georgia, as John Wesley did, by 1740 the Moravians focused their work in eastern New York, concentrating on life together with the Delaware (Lenape) people.<sup>34</sup> Although the New York mission failed because of “rum sellers, land speculators” and other “such persecutions,” the Moravians were more successful in “the deeper forests of Pennsylvania.”<sup>35</sup>

By 1782, two of the Moravian-Lenape settlements, both named Gnadenhütten, were the site of massacres (in 1755 in Pennsylvania and 1782 in Ohio). The repeated massacres, wars, and what Brainerd calls “political jealousy” led to the resettlement of the Moravians and Munsee in Canada in 1792.<sup>36</sup> Given Wesley’s interest in Moravian evangelism to First Peoples, he would likely have been familiar with the egalitarian Moravian missionary impulses that led to the peaceful model of missions embodied by the first Gnadenhütten settlement, founded in 1746 and visited by John Brainerd in 1749.<sup>37</sup> Wesley’s respectful and extended dialogue with Chickasaw warriors about their spiritual beliefs belies this kind of outlook.<sup>38</sup>

In spite of the relatively respectful interaction between Moravians and First Peoples, Broken Claw notes that later Moravian missionaries like David Zeisberger seem to have betrayed paternalistic attitudes also seen in the work of Wesley’s contemporaries, the Presbyterian evangelists

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<sup>33</sup>Broken Claw, “Moravian Mission Archives,” <http://native.brokenclaw.net/wp/archives/moravian>.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.; also Brainerd, 73.

<sup>35</sup>Brainerd, 73.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 458.

<sup>38</sup>Wesley, *Journal*, July 30, 1736.

David and John Brainerd. While missionary literature of this and later periods is plagued with racist language about “red men,” “savages,” “pagans,” and “heathen,” even these relatively enlightened missionaries to First Peoples sometimes distinguished between “our Indians” (the “Christian Munsee”) and “wild Indians.”<sup>39</sup> The Brainerds, whose work among the Munsee was widely celebrated throughout Britain and its North American colonies, each referred to the First Peoples among whom they evangelized as “my people” and apparently thought nothing of making them do the bulk of the physical labor required to build a Christian settlement (“their work”) while retiring to pray and meditate.<sup>40</sup> These attitudes also seem to have influenced Wesley to some degree, as he also called the Georgia First Peoples “heathens” by the end of his time there.

### Wesley and First Peoples of North America

John Wesley officially begins his journal by recording his own experiences with First Peoples on October 14, 1735, the day he set sail for Georgia with companions Benjamin Ingham of Queen’s College, Oxford, Charles Delamotte, and his brother, Charles Wesley, sent by the society for the Propagation of the Gospel. John Wesley states the purpose of this missionary journey: “Our end in leaving our native country was not to avoid want (God having given us plenty of temporal blessings), nor to gain the dung or dross of riches or honour; but singly this—to save our souls; to live wholly to the glory of God.”<sup>41</sup>

While en route to Georgia, Wesley and his companions made an effort to live simply aboard the ship, always being attentive to their witness and practicing their faith both publicly and privately. Living wholly to the glory of God was routine aboard the ship between Wesley, his companions, and eventually others. Wesley writes that prayer times took place privately from four to five in the morning, Bible studies together from five until seven in the morning when breakfast was taken, then public

<sup>39</sup>Thomas Brainerd, Tracy, and others provide many examples of objectionable language, while Broken Claw makes the observation about “our Indians” in relation to Zeisberger’s journals, a distinction also found throughout David and John Brainerd, as cited by Thomas Brainerd, 77 ff. That the work of the Brainerds was also among the Munsee is cited in Brainerd’s appendix, 456.

<sup>40</sup>David Brainerd, March 24, 1746, journal entry, cited by Thomas Brainerd, 100.

<sup>41</sup>John Wesley, *The Heart of Wesley’s Journal* (Grand Rapids, Kregel Publications, 1989), 3.

prayers at eight in the morning. In the middle of the morning, studies ranging from John Wesley learning German, Delamotte learning Greek, Charles Wesley writing sermons, or Ingham instructing children in Bible knowledge took place until lunch at one. Evening prayers and liturgy were celebrated at four in the afternoon, followed by private prayer, and then more private Bible reading. Wesley writes that he joined the Germans (Moravians) in their worship celebration each evening at seven before everyone retired to sleep around nine or ten in the evening.<sup>42</sup>

Wesley chronicled different storms encountered during the voyage and the disparity of response between the English and the German (Moravian) missionaries during these storms—writing that he, himself, was “still unwilling to die.”<sup>43</sup> Observing the reaction of the German passengers to the storms, Wesley writes, “If they were pushed, struck, or thrown down, they rose again and went away; but no complaint was found in their mouth. There was now an opportunity of trying whether they were delivered from the spirit of fear, as well as from that of pride, anger, and revenge.” After a particularly dangerous storm, Wesley recalls in his journal that the English passengers aboard were audibly screaming for their lives, while the German Christians calmly continued singing the psalms they were singing before the storm began. Wesley asked the Germans if they were afraid during the tumult, and the reply was, “I thank God, no,” and further, “No; our women and children are not afraid to die.”<sup>44</sup>

On February 6, 1736, Wesley recounts, “we first set foot on American ground.” Those aboard were greeted by Mr. Oglethorpe, and they “all kneeled down to give thanks.”<sup>45</sup> Two key people groups inhabited what was to become colonial Georgia—the Creek people and the Yamacraw people.<sup>46</sup> James Edward Oglethorpe, British founder of the Georgia colony, recognized the importance of native leadership in the budding political landscape of Savannah.<sup>47</sup> Emerging leaders and cultural liaisons John and Mary Musgrove were an interracial couple who served as trans-

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<sup>42</sup>Elisabeth Jay, ed., *The Journal of John Wesley: A Selection* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 12.

<sup>43</sup>Wesley, *The Heart*, 6.

<sup>44</sup>*Ibid.*, 7.

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

<sup>46</sup>David H. Corkran, *The Creek Frontier: 1540-1783* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1967), 82.

<sup>47</sup>*Ibid.*, 84.

lators between Oglethorpe and Mary's native population, the Creek people. In 1733, the same year that the colony of Georgia was officially founded, the Musgroves were already settled along the bank of the Savannah River, situated on the land that was later to become Savannah, Georgia—a land that was also inhabited by the Yamacraw tribe.<sup>48</sup> Historian David Corkran writes, "With the founding of Savannah, the Musgroves achieved a major position. Not only were they acknowledged by Oglethorpe to be an important liaison in negotiations with the Indians, but from their beef herd and corn cribs they furnished a major food supply to the settlers during their first hard year."<sup>49</sup>

Almost a week after Wesley and the others first landed, "Tomo Chachi, his nephew Thleeanouhee, his wife Sinauky, with two more women, and two or three Indian children came on board," with Mrs. Musgrove interpreting for the First Peoples.<sup>50</sup> Wesley recorded the conversation between himself and Tomo Chachi, who started saying, "I am glad you are come. . . . But we would not be made Christians as the Spaniards make Christians: we would be taught, before we are baptized."<sup>51</sup> John Wesley responded, saying, "There is but One, He that sitteth in heaven, who is able to teach man wisdom. Though we are come so far, we know not whether He will please to teach you by us or no. If He teaches you, you will learn wisdom, but we can do nothing."<sup>52</sup>

Between arriving on shore in Georgia and beginning ministry in Savannah on March 7, John Wesley chronicles that on February 19, 1736, he and Charles "took boat, and passing by Savannah, went to pay our first visit in America to the poor heathens, but neither Tomo Chachi nor Sinauky was home." On February 20, according to his collected sermons (or March 7, according to his journal), John Wesley preached "On Love," his first sermon in Savannah, preaching from the lectionary text for the day—the thirteenth chapter of the first epistle of Corinthians.<sup>53</sup> This sermon has a pivotal role within the development of Wesley's ideas on Christian perfection as it is an early explication of Wesley's thoughts on perfect love

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<sup>48</sup>Ibid., 82.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., 84.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid.

<sup>51</sup>Jay, 9.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.



and identity within the body of Christ—which become key components in his later rejection of a relationship with First Peoples.

On Sunday, June 27, “a large party of Creek Indians came” after morning public prayers.<sup>54</sup> Longing to be in ministry with First Peoples, Wesley writes on June 30, 1736, “I hoped a door was opened for going up immediately to the Choctaws, the least polished, that is, the least corrupted, of all the Indian nations.”<sup>55</sup> He demonstrates a romanticized view of this particular tribe of First Peoples as untainted or untarnished by Western civilization. Upon sharing his desire to be with the Choctaw tribe with Governor Oglethorpe, Wesley recounts that Oglethorpe objected because of “the danger of being intercepted or killed by the French there; but much more, the inexpediency of leaving Savannah destitute of a minister.”<sup>56</sup>

In spite of this hesitation on Oglethorpe’s part, Corkran tells us that hopes for John Wesley’s work with First Peoples of Georgia were so high that “in July of 1736, the Georgia authorities under the spell of missionary John Wesley dreamed of extending the blessings of Christianity to the Creeks.”<sup>57</sup> However, actual contact with First Peoples quickly disabused Wesley of these hopes.

One of the key political leaders among First Peoples of the Savannah region was Chief Tomochichi (whom Wesley calls Tomo Chachi), a Yamacraw leader who was in relationship and communion with Oglethorpe and the founding of the Georgia colony. Through this relationship, “Tomochichi . . . rose to an importance he never before had held and showed himself equal to his new stature as a headman of consequence.”<sup>58</sup> The combined leadership of John and Mary Musgrove and Chief Tomochichi led to the signing of a treaty on May 21, 1733, addressing “land cession, trade, and friendship” between the First Peoples of the Savannah region and Oglethorpe. John Wesley directly interacted with Mary Musgrove and Tomochichi in 1736 regarding the issue of education for the Creek and Yamacraw tribes. Corkran writes, “Wesley, who had already been told by Tomochichi that the conflicting stories of French, Spanish, and English on the subject of Christianity had confused the

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<sup>54</sup>Wesley, *Journal*, Jackson ed., entry for June 27, 1736.

<sup>55</sup>Jay, 12.

<sup>56</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup>Corkran, 97.

<sup>58</sup>*Ibid.*, 84.

Creeks, tried fervently with Mary as interpreter, for an opening with Chingelley” or (as Wesley calls him) “Chicali.”<sup>59</sup>

According to Corkran, Chingelley (or Chicali), a relative of Mary Musgrove-Matthews, “showed great enthusiasm for the new school in Savannah” and said to Wesley that “whites knew more than Indians...but pointed out the vanity of whites, who built big houses as if they were going to live forever.”<sup>60</sup> Wesley records in his journal that Chicali claimed “neither we nor you can understand that book [the Bible] unless we are taught by Him that is above.”<sup>61</sup> However, Wesley’s journal demonstrates that he soon became skeptical about the potential of educating the Creek people: “Wesley, witnessing the drunkenness of the headmen, concluded that the Creeks were too corrupted by the white man’s way to be open to conversion.”<sup>62</sup> Perhaps the multi-cultural European voices influencing Chingelley eventually proved too much for Wesley to interact with the educational system and further a holiness tradition of spirituality among this particular group. However, during the first months of his stay in Georgia, Wesley continued to express a desire to leave Savannah to be able to minister to the First Peoples. He writes regarding his disappointment, “Whenever I mentioned it [being able to go the First Peoples], it was immediately replied, ‘You cannot leave Savannah without a minister.’”<sup>63</sup>

Wesley worked with Mrs. Musgrove to negotiate with Creek leaders who had come to Savannah seeking “alliance and trade” with British colonials. He worked to explore the possibility of their children’s English-style education. In response, the Creek leader Chingelley “pointed out the vanity of the whites.”<sup>64</sup> In his journal, Wesley claims Chingelley was sometimes drunk and did not believe God would “teach us while our hearts are not white, and our men do what they know is not good: they kill their own children. And our women do what they know is not good; they kill the child before it is born. Therefore, he that is above does not send us the good book.”<sup>65</sup> Elsewhere in his journal, “Wesley reported

<sup>59</sup>*Ibid.*, 97; Wesley, *Journal*, Jackson ed., entry for July 1, 1736.

<sup>60</sup>Corkran, 97.

<sup>61</sup>Wesley, *Journal*, in Jackson ed., entry for July 1, 1736.

<sup>62</sup>Corkran, 97-98.

<sup>63</sup>Jay, 14.

<sup>64</sup>*Ibid.*, 97.

<sup>65</sup>John Wesley, *The Journal of the Reverend John Wesley, A.M.* (London, 1903), 38-39.

abortion to have been a common practice,” an observation with which other contemporaries concurred. Provision of food was difficult, and Creek families were small.<sup>66</sup> “Yet,” as Corkran adds, “love of children was characteristic” of both men and women.<sup>67</sup>

On July 20 some “Chickasaw warriors,” two of whom had been in Savannah several days, dialogued with John Wesley about Chicasaw beliefs in a conversation he records almost ethnographically, with little commentary or evangelism on his part. They primarily discussed beliefs about the afterlife, with Wesley asking questions, listening, and making little comment. However, by November 23, 1736, Wesley writes that there was “less prospect of preaching to the Indians than we had the first day we set foot in America.” Upon arriving in Savannah, the trustees of Georgia had appointed Wesley to be minister of that city.<sup>68</sup> Wesley states that this appointment was “. . . not done by my solicitation: it was done without either my desire or knowledge. Therefore I cannot conceive that my appointment to lay me under any obligation of continuing there any longer than till a door is opened to the heathen; and this I expressed declared at the time I consented to accept of that appointment.”<sup>69</sup>

The trustees of Georgia had enough influence with Oglethorpe to continually thwart Wesley’s desire of ministering to the First Peoples there. His journal indicates that he assented to continue in this ministry because he believed “the time was not come to preach the Gospel of peace to the Heathens; all their nations being in a ferment,” and especially because of his July 20, 1736 dialogue with Chicasaw leaders Paustobee and Mingo Mattaw. By the time he reflected upon this conversation further in late November, he interpreted it to mean that they saw Anglo-European settlers as “enemies” and would not hear “the great word” until “the beloved ones [deceased Chicasaw people and even aspects of nature] should ever give us to be at peace,” a time they had earlier said they believed would one day come.<sup>70</sup> At this point in his ministry, according to his journal, Wesley did not yet actively oppose slavery and also sought to preach to enslaved people, suggesting his understanding of the full

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<sup>66</sup>Corkran, 34, citing Wesley, 63.

<sup>67</sup>Corkran, 34.

<sup>68</sup>Jay, 14.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., 15.

<sup>70</sup>Wesley, *Journal*, in Jackson ed., entries for July 20, 1736, and November 23, 1736.

humanity of all peoples was not yet as developed as it would one day become, as expressed in his letter to abolitionist William Wilberforce.<sup>71</sup>

By early July of 1737, Wesley was further discouraged by his conversation with “a Frenchman of New-Orleans . . . who had lived several months among the Chicasaws” and now discounted the “Religion of Nature,” the Enlightenment idea of an authentic and pure religion uncorrupted by human civilization and not necessarily inspired by divine revelation. Indeed, Wesley later writes of the Bible as “the only model of pure religion” in his *Plain Account of Christian Perfection*.<sup>72</sup> Religion, for Wesley, was “an entire inward and outward conformity to our Master,” Christ.<sup>73</sup> Like John Wesley, this Frenchman had expected to encounter such pure religion among First Peoples: After telling Wesley that the Chicasaws burned their prisoners alive after beating them, the Frenchman said, “They do nothing but eat, and drink, and smoke, from morning till night; and, in a manner, from night till morning.” Wesley wrote to a friend after this meeting of his disappointment of “a condition I neither desired nor expected in America,” seeking solace afterward in closer companionship with the Moravians.<sup>74</sup>

Corkran recounts that Wesley finally “concluded that the Creeks were too corrupted by the white man’s way to open to conversion. . . . By October, 1737, Wesley, believing there was ‘no possibility as yet’ of instructing the Indians, decided that God had called him to return to England.”<sup>75</sup> Wesley left Georgia for England in 1737, dismissively summarizing the whole experience by the end of the year with the argument that the “Georgian Indians” had “only two short rules of proceeding, to do what he will, and what he can. . . . They are likewise all, except perhaps the Choctaws, gluttons, drunkards, thieves, dissemblers, liars,” and “murderers.”<sup>76</sup> Meanwhile, his associate Benjamin Ingham stayed in the region and composed a Creek-English lexicon and participated in educating the Creek population using European methods.<sup>77</sup>

<sup>71</sup>Ibid., entry for April 27, 1737. Contrast with “Letter to William Wilberforce” (2/24/1791). <http://gbgm-umc.org/umw/wesley/wilber.stm>.

<sup>72</sup>John Wesley. *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* (Relevant, 2006), 37.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid.

<sup>74</sup>Wesley, *Journal*, in Jackson ed., entry for July 9, 1737.

<sup>75</sup>Corkran, 98, citing Wesley, 56.

<sup>76</sup>Wesley, *Journal*, in Jackson ed., entry for December 2, 1737.

<sup>77</sup>Corkran, 98.

Unlike many Anglicans, Presbyterians, and German Pietists who clung to and even reinforced their ethnic identities in the colonies, Wesley's colleague "George Whitefield and...the Moravians discouraged ethnicity, instead preaching the overwhelming importance of being reborn."<sup>78</sup> Thus, Moravians were better able to communicate cross-culturally, traversing the boundaries of their own culture with First Peoples better than Wesley himself. Though Wesley clearly met with Creek people, he never lived among First Peoples himself as the Moravian missionaries he so admired tried to do. The lasting impact of Wesley's life and ministry within the colonies may have influenced the development of both revivalism and what was to be called Methodism as a strong presence in the United States, particularly among those of British descent, but it did not make any discernible impact upon First Peoples in the region as he had initially hoped.

### **Theological Issues in Wesley's Work with First Peoples**

Due to their polity, Anglican and Episcopal Methodist congregations (through their bishops) may discern the gifts of and assign pastors and missionaries like the Wesleys to specific "fields of labor...with great efficacy for noble purposes." Churches with a congregational polity rely on the Spirit to call and equip individuals from among them to specific mission fields.<sup>79</sup> A congregational polity tends to encourage younger, less experienced ministers to mission work, while the episcopal polities allow experienced, well-educated pastors to be assigned even to difficult mission fields.<sup>80</sup> The episcopal polity of the Anglican Church had a significant impact on Wesley's Savannah assignments and frustrations as it pertained to his ministerial identity in Savannah—a role which consistently conflicted with his perceived calling to minister to First People groups. Repeatedly, Wesley's appointment by his superiors to Christ Church of Savannah was reinforced by Oglethorpe, in line with his notions of how the colony should be maintained. British parishioners were to take precedence over First Peoples, regardless of Wesley's own inclinations.

Wesley's expectations regarding Christian perfection also made a significant contribution to his feelings of failure in North America. It was

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<sup>78</sup>Rohrer, 106.

<sup>79</sup>Brainerd, 88.

<sup>80</sup>*Ibid.*, 89.

not until 1740 (after his return to England from Georgia) that Wesley was encouraged to publish his thoughts on Christian perfection. His sermon “Christian Perfection” was printed soon after.<sup>81</sup> His goal in that sermon was to show “In what sense Christians are not [and] in what sense they are, perfect.” He writes:

We are no more to expect any living man to be infallible, than to be omniscient. They are not free from infirmities, such as weakness or slowness of understanding, irregular quickness or heaviness of imagination. Such in another kind are impropriety of language, ungracefulness of pronunciation; to which one might add a thousand nameless defects either in conversation or behavior. From such infirmities as these none are perfectly freed till their spirits return to God.<sup>82</sup>

Rather, a Christian can be perfect in godly love.<sup>83</sup> However, the expectation which Wesley expresses varies from the standard of Christian perfection he seems to have applied to First Peoples in Georgia when he writes about First Peoples as debased, drunk, uneducated human beings who even with the light and knowledge of Christ preached to them would be unable to attain perfection or sanctification in Wesley’s own lifetime.<sup>84</sup> His definition of sin in *Plain Account* clarifies “voluntary transgression of a known law” as more than a mistake (“an involuntary transgression of a divine law, known or unknown,” which could be committed even by “a person filled with the love of God”).<sup>85</sup> This suggests that he held the First Peoples he met accountable for their behavior as those who knew God’s law but chose to disregard it.

Could these passages on Christian perfection, which acknowledge human mistakes even among the perfect, be read as Wesley’s response to his own impractical expectations of the First Peoples he encountered in his Georgia ministry? Specifically, when he returned from Savannah, Georgia, and in his sermon on “The Late Work of God in North America,” he repeatedly omits citing interactions with those who do not fit this

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<sup>81</sup>John Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection: The Annotated Edition* (Alethea in Heart, 2006), 23.

<sup>82</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>83</sup>Wesley, *Plain Account*, Relevant, 9.

<sup>84</sup>Wesley, *Journal*, in Jackson ed., entry for December 2, 1737.

<sup>85</sup>Wesley, *Plain Account*, Relevant, 2006, 53.

classification of perfect holiness recorded in both the first sermon he preached in Savannah (“On Love”) and also within *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*.<sup>86</sup> Even when he later discusses his work in North America, he never again mentions his work with First Peoples.

In one of the most succinct definitions of Christian perfection, Wesley continues this theme of love as he writes, “What is Christian perfection? The loving of God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength. This implies that no wrong temper, not contrary to love, remains in the soul; and that all the thoughts, words and actions are governed by pure love.”<sup>87</sup> We propose that Wesley’s transformed view of ministry upon returning from Georgia has direct connections to his conception that all “thoughts, words and actions are governed by pure love,” which was the tenor of the sermon “On Love.” We see this quote on pure love as an influence upon Wesley’s own writing. In his later sermon “The Late Work of God in North America,” he refuses to record his unsuccessful ministry to the First Peoples of Savannah, Georgia and instead focuses on the moments of that trip when he was able to impart his thoughts on the emerging view of Christian perfection he would later develop. Christian perfection as a concept within Wesley’s writings developed out of this sermon, “On Love,” and was further developed in later writings. Wesley himself signifies the importance of his mission to Georgia in retrospect, through these sermons in particular, as a quest to delve into the concept of love and allow written inquiry of his own concept of Christian perfection to begin during the sermon “On Love” and then flourish in later writings.

Wesley’s focus on love and becoming a child of God through Christian perfection necessitated a changed identity. Based on his journal and later writings, it appears that Wesley omits his unsuccessful communication and ministry with the First Peoples of Georgia from a normally meticulous account of how his views developed. He did not see direct correlations between love and becoming a perfect child of God manifested within the identity of the community of First Peoples in Georgia. It seems that Wesley’s teachings on Christian perfection may be in conflict with or even derived from the disappointed expectations for First Peoples’ natural religion, conversion, and education.

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<sup>86</sup>John Wesley, “The Late Work of God in North America.” Sermon 131. First published 1778. Text from the 1872 Thomas Jackson edition, *The Works of . . .*, v. 7: 409-419. The United Methodist Church: Global Ministries. <http://new.gbqm-umc.org/umhistory/wesley/sermons/131/>. 8 March, 2010.

<sup>87</sup>Wesley, *Plain Account*, 51.

# UNBOUND: THE CREATIVE POWER OF SCRIPTURE IN THE LIVES OF CHINESE NAZARENE WOMEN

by

Daryl R. Ireland

In January, 1914, the Pentecostal Church of the Nazarene joined scores of new missions and denominations pressing through the ports of China. American missionary numbers surged from 1,812 in 1911 to 2,862 in 1916 as Christians eagerly responded to the prospect of playing a formative role in the new Republic of China.<sup>1</sup> Squeezed within this stampede were three Nazarene missionaries eager to find a place of service.

In the context of such a deluge of new missions, it is not surprising that the Pentecostal Church of the Nazarene only managed to negotiate a meager comity agreement. The denomination was granted three rural counties in southwest Shandong Province. Formerly under the supervision of the National Holiness Association, these three counties had remained virtually ignored with only one NHA native worker assigned to the over 1,000 villages, and estimated 1,000,000 inhabitants.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>James Reed, *The Missionary Mind and American East Asia Policy, 1911-1915* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 17-18.

<sup>2</sup>Peter Kiehn, "The Legacy of Peter and Anna Kiehn," unpublished manuscript, Biography, Kiehn Collection (file 192-61), Nazarene Archives, Kansas City, Missouri. (The Nazarene archives will henceforth be referenced by "NA."); Peter Kiehn, "A Sketch of Our Work in China," *The Other Sheep* (October 1923): 16. The Church of the Nazarene eventually moved beyond its comity boundaries and worked in ten (or maybe eleven) counties. Five counties were in Shandong province, and five others were coterminous, but across the provincial boundary in Zhili (Hebei).



Chaocheng, Puzhou, and Fanxian counties were peripheral to the larger Chinese economic and administrative cores. They were isolated, with the major roads being nothing more than mule tracks. Small markets reflected the low level of agricultural commercialization. Overcrowding put intense strain on arable land, as Chaocheng County, for example, packed an average of 1,141 people into every square mile of farmland. Natural disasters, particularly in the form of flooding or drought, befell the region more often than any other place in China. Government employees were sparse and lacked the resources to curb the violence endemic to the area. The counties were only remarkable in so far as the Boxer Rebellion had coalesced in that region fourteen years prior. From this place it had ripped violently across the country seeking to eradicate Christians and their foreign God who defiled the Middle Kingdom.<sup>3</sup>

But if the location assigned to the Pentecostal Church of the Nazarene was on the periphery, then the composition of its subsequent congregations ensured its place at the margins. The Church of the Nazarene in China was a women's movement. It was rural women, devoid of social position and power, who eagerly gathered in the church. Statistical glimpses of new preaching points suggest that 70% of those attending the meetings were girls and women. As the preaching points evolved into churches, baptisms were conducted. In the formation of the church in Hsiao T'an Er, for example, the missionaries baptized 20 people—all of whom appear to have been women. Although the complete absence of men is exceptional, the case is symbolic of the fact that women had strong numerical superiority in the Church of the Nazarene, accounting for approximately 66-71% of the people in attendance. The predominance of girls and women in the church made Christianity appear to outsiders as a religion of the socially insignificant.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Peter Kiehn to the General Missionary Board, September 18, 1914, Biography, Kiehn Collection (file 213-36), NA; R. G. Tiedemann, "Contextual Considerations," unpublished manuscript, 3, 5-12; "Map of China and Our Field," [n.d.], World Mission, China Collection (file 1257-20), NA.

<sup>4</sup>"General Board of Foreign Mission Report," General Board, Foreign Missions Collection (file 262-61), NA; "An Important Event at Hsiao T'an Er," *The China Nazarene* 11 (December 1925): 3; "Annual Council, 1939," World Mission, China Collection (file 412-27), NA; "Annual Council, 1941," World Mission, China Collection (file 412-27), NA; Kwok Pui-Lan, "Claiming Our Heritage: Chinese Women and Christianity," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 16, no. 4 (October 1992): 151.

It remains unclear whether Nazarene missionaries intentionally focused their ministry on “the least of these.” There is evidence that they frequently decided to invest more money in Girls’ Schools than in Boys’ Schools. Furthermore, they occasionally opted to open or maintain only a Girls’ School. Nevertheless, this hint of a preferential option for girls may be explained by the fact that the Chinese government rapidly expanded its network of (first) Boys’ Schools in the region, thereby decreasing the demand for such Mission Schools.<sup>5</sup>

Regardless of the intention, the actual practices of the Church of the Nazarene did place a disproportionate emphasis upon girls and women. In order to become a member of the Church of the Nazarene, it was required—except in extraordinary circumstances—that a person be able to read at least one of the four Gospels.<sup>6</sup> Since no schools for girls or women existed in southwest Shandong until the Church of the Nazarene opened the first in 1914, virtually no woman had been trained to read. It was estimated that only 1 in 1,000 women could grasp anything in a book. The missionaries, therefore, put extraordinary emphasis on equipping girls and women in biblical literacy. They created more than two times as many ways to involve girls and women in biblical instruction than they did for boys and men.<sup>7</sup>

The Church of the Nazarene created multiple delivery systems in order to provide biblical instruction for women of all ages. In Sunday

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<sup>5</sup>O. P. and Zella Deale, Peter and Anna Kiehn, and Pearl Denbo to E. G. Anderson, August 8, 1918, Biography, Deale Collection (file 213-10), NA; Peter Kiehn to E. G. Anderson, December 31, 1918, Biography, Kiehn Collection (file 213-42), NA; “We have with great interest...” [1918], Biography, Kiehn Collection (file 213-41), NA; Peter Kiehn to H. F. Reynolds, July 10, 1919, Biography, Kiehn Collection (file 213-43), NA; “Proceedings of the Fifth Annual Assembly, November 16-20, 1921,” World Mission, China Collection (file 406-22), NA.

<sup>6</sup>The push for membership may have been as much a demand of the Chinese women as a desire of the American missionaries. Popular Chinese religious sects in the White Lotus tradition, active in the area, had levels of association that would have corresponded well to the Nazarene distinction between “inquirer,” “probationer,” and “member.” Through each stage of initiation a person would rise in status in the sect, a prospect presumably appreciated by marginalized women. See, Daniel L. Overmyer, “Alternatives: Popular Religious Sects in Chinese Society,” *Modern China* 7, no. 2 (April 1981): 164-165.

<sup>7</sup>“Proceedings of the Fifth Annual Assembly, November 16-20, 1921,” World Mission, China Collection (file 406-22), NA; Peter Kiehn to H. F. Reynolds, January 7, 1915, Biography, Kiehn Collection (file 213-36), NA; Ida Vieg, “After Twenty Years,” *The Other Sheep* (March 1935): 11; Peter Kiehn, “General Board of Foreign Missions,” *The Other Sheep* (October 1923): 17.

school, biblical stories introduced girls to a golden text each week that they memorized in class. The printed verse would be sent home and the Sunday school scholar was to recite the verse daily, matching each word spoken with the appropriate printed character. For students like Mrs. Chang, this proved to be an effective method to memorize a few characters at a time. Ultimately, she was permitted to enter the Nazarene Bible School as a proficient reader of the Bible, despite having no other formal training.<sup>8</sup> Nazarene elementary schools focused on the Bible, because “our chief objective in all our educational work is the religious instruction of our students. . . .”<sup>9</sup> Therefore, the day was carefully arranged to emphasize the centrality of the Scriptures: besides courses in arithmetic, drawing, and physical culture, girls and young women had three Bible classes every day, as well as a time of worship.<sup>10</sup>

Elsewhere, the Church of the Nazarene hosted three-hour Bible classes every day for elderly women. There were also weekly Mothers’ Meetings and separate Women’s Meetings that met once or twice per week. Churches held three-week Station Classes during the winter to instruct women in the Word of God. Training Classes, designed for deeper study, were also frequently available. In the 1930s, churches added special meetings for adolescent girls. Outside the classroom and the church, the medical staff led courses on how to read the phonetic Bible to women convalescing in the Nazarene Bresee Memorial Hospital. The Chinese nurses also incorporated literacy instruction into the travelling clinic they offered in outlying villages. The Bible functioned as the gravitational center of the women’s work.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>“Nazarene Girls in China,” *The Other Sheep* (October 1937): 25; Mary Pannell, “Eager to Attend Bible School,” *The Other Sheep* (June 1941): 13.

<sup>9</sup>“Proceedings of the Fourth Annual Council, September 24-28, 1925,” World Mission, China Collection (file 406-22), NA.

<sup>10</sup>“First District Assembly, 1917,” World Mission, China Collection (file 406-22).

<sup>11</sup> Anna Kiehn to E. G. Anderson, March 10, 1915, Biography, Kiehn Collection (file 213-35), NA; Anna Kiehn to H.F. Reynolds, April 2, 1917, Biography, Kiehn Collection (file 213-38); Blanche Himes to General Board of Foreign Missions, April 18, 1923, Biography, Himes Collection; Catherine Flagler to Emma Word, April 2, 1935, Biography, Flagler Collection (file 213-17), NA; Edith P. Goodnow, ed., *Hazardous Lives* (Kansas City, MO: Nazarene Publishing House, 1942), 131; Mrs. R. G. Fitz, “From a Letter by Sister Fitz,” *The Other Sheep* (July 1930): 12; Mary Pannell to Dear Friends, January 29, 1941, Biography, Pannell Collection (file 214-27), NA.

All this Bible study, in accordance with the dictates for membership, especially emphasized the Gospels (in which, incidentally, women feature most prominently). Missionaries encouraged women to recognize that God was speaking directly to them in the Bible. It was believed that by placing Scripture at the center of Christian life, women would stand “when the enemy comes with his awful onslaughts . . . surrounded by the heathen who are so bold in their worship of false gods. . . .”<sup>12</sup> A solid grasp of the Word of God was also believed to be the indispensable tool for evangelism. Thus, biblical passages were introduced, memorized, and repeated. Chinese Nazarene women were saturated in portions of Scripture that emphasized the compassion of Jesus or, as Kwok Pui-lan has called it, the femininity of God.<sup>13</sup>

The intensity of Biblical exposure every day of the week initiated remarkable changes in the lives of Chinese Nazarene women. Nazarene women creatively appropriated Scripture in ways that allowed them to rewrite their roles in society. It is the purpose of this essay to trace how that happened.

### **The Adaptation of Social Space**

The multiple Bible meetings for women were segregated events, dedicated to instructing Chinese women in biblical knowledge and literacy. To that end, the meetings were extremely successful, as membership rolls testify. Yet, more than biblical content curried the interest of Chinese women. Female missionaries complained that meetings were sometimes hijacked by Chinese “chatter” on tangential subjects. Frequently, Chinese

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<sup>12</sup>Catherine Flagler, “Report of the Station Class at Chin Tan Chen,” unpublished report, [n.d.], Biography, Flagler Collection (file 213-17), NA.

<sup>13</sup>“Proceedings of the Fifth Annual Assembly, November 16-20, 1921,” World Mission, China Collection (file 406-22), NA; Catherine Flagler, “Ch’ao Ch’eng Phonetic Class,” unpublished article, Biography, Flagler Collection (file 213-18), NA; Pearl Denbo to E. G. Anderson, January 4, 1921, Biography, Denbo Collection (file 213-9), NA; Anna Kiehn to General Missionary Board, September 18, 1914, Biography, Kiehn Collection (file 213-36), NA; Kwok Pui-lan, “Chinese Women and Protestant Christianity at the Turn of the Twentieth Century,” in *Christianity in China: From the Eighteenth Century to the Present*, edited by Daniel H. Bays (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 200. For examples of the missionary rhetoric of feminization see Anna Kiehn to Sister Murphy, September 19, 1914, Biography, Kiehn Collection (file 213-34), NA; Margaret Needles, “Preaching Jesus to Those Who Have Never Heard,” *The Other Sheep* (June 1926): 2.

women would address intra-family and inter-family conflicts through discussion and prayer, rather than stay focused on the missionary lesson. Although happy with the formation of study groups, missionaries were occasionally disappointed that something besides their own instruction was transpiring at these gatherings. However, it may have been the creative appropriation of this segregated social space that particularly infused the Church of the Nazarene with its transformational dynamic for the lives of women.<sup>14</sup>

The anthropological research of Margery Wolf on China during the Republican Era (1911-1949) provides context for what happened—besides studying the Bible—at these women’s meetings. She observes:

[A woman’s] first task was to form good relations with the women in her new village so that in time of need—financial or political—she would have a community to turn to for support. If her mother-in-law beat her excessively, it would be ignored as none of their business by the other women, unless she had established herself early on as part of their community. The older woman soon learned whether or not her daughter-in-law had access to this all-important court of appeal and would not risk her own relations with that community of women by letting herself get a reputation for cruelty.<sup>15</sup>

Martin Yang records what happened in these women’s communities in a rural village in Shandong:

After supper, men go to the hard and clean threshing grounds at the outskirts of the village. Large groups gather and community life is at its height. At home the women rush through the washing as quickly as possible because they also want to have a neighborhood gathering. Since they are women, they do not meet on the threshing grounds, but in the little open spaces in the lanes between their homes. . . . In the women’s groups freedom of speech and freedom from convention are

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<sup>14</sup>See Emma Osborn, unpublished manuscript [n.d.], Biography, Osborn Collection (file 2711-14), NA; Emma Dressel Smith, “China District W.M.S.” *The Other Sheep* (December 1926): 12; Ida Vieg, “Propagating the Gospel,” *The Other Sheep* (June 1933): 12; Ida Vieg, “Why She Became a Christian,” *The Other Sheep* (April 1936): 22.

<sup>15</sup> Margery Wolf, *Revolution Postponed: Women in Contemporary China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985), 8.

also enjoyed, but to a lesser extent. . . . The women return to their homes before the men come back so that the latter cannot see their gathering nor hear what they say.<sup>16</sup>

Such anthropological material illuminates missionary documents, and suggests that missionaries unwittingly created a space for Nazarenes to move the women's community indoors.

It is not surprising, therefore, to find the women's meetings consistently described foremost as a place "where they feel free to tell their troubles [*sic*] and trials and as we all understand their conditions we can pray the matter through."<sup>17</sup> Stories circulated by the missionaries often include descriptions of a daughter-in-law confessing a strained relationship with her mother-in-law, and the young woman requesting all those gathered to pray for the conversion of the mother-in-law. Other reports called attention to the troubled relations women had with their husbands or sons. It is easy to picture how these Bible study meetings functioned as an alternative women's community. Intra-family conflicts between a mother-in-law and daughter-in-law could be freely expressed in a prayer request. Similarly, inter-family conflict (most often between men) could be checked or defused by women's meetings. If tension between families became intolerable, the issue might erupt during a Bible lesson. It was a dangerous possibility. According to tenets accepted by everyone in the community, "to be talked about is to lose face. . . . Few men would risk that."<sup>18</sup> In these ways, Nazarene Bible meetings sanctioned and strengthened the hidden behavior of the women's community, and through them intensified the sense that women could exercise some authority over their own lives.<sup>19</sup>

The dawning awareness of power explains, in part, the enthusiasm with which women participated in raising funds for these study groups,

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<sup>16</sup>Martin C. Yang, *A Chinese Village: Taitou, Shantung Province* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1945), 155-156.

<sup>17</sup>"The China District Assembly of the Pentecostal Church of the Nazarene," [1917], World Mission, China Collection (file 406-22), NA.

<sup>18</sup>Emily M. Ahern, "The Power and Pollution of Chinese Women," in *Women in Chinese Society*, edited by Margery Wolf and Roxane Witke (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975), 201.

<sup>19</sup>Emma Dressel Smith, "A Tin Can Meeting," *The China Nazarene* 12 (March 1926): 4; Emma Dressel Smith, "China District W.M.S.," *The Other Sheep* (December 1926): 12; Ida Vieg, "Propagating the Gospel," *The Other Sheep* (June 1933): 10.

and the intensity with which they disputed how to disperse the money. Money represented a new form of power for these women, and they eagerly leveraged their communal contributions in order to intervene in the lives of other Chinese women.<sup>20</sup> Chinese Nazarene women aggressively pursued donations from members of their groups. If a person missed a meeting, an appointed group of ladies visited the delinquent woman's home asking for a contribution to the collection.<sup>21</sup> Besides weekly donations, the Women's Missionary Society, for instance, held seasonal drives. The missionaries were consistently startled by the response of the women. Although the reports are clearly stylized, emphasizing the sacrificial spirit of the women, the most startling fact is how much money the ladies raised. The ensuing freedom to disperse offerings as they saw fit significantly increased the power of women in their poor, rural society.

Originally, following the lead of the American missionaries, all women and girls' groups donated their money to the work of the Church of the Nazarene in India. However, it did not take long before the Chinese women began exercising independent control of the money. The Women's Missionary Societies from each church, for example, pooled their individual contributions and invested their collective money in projects located within the Nazarene field in China. Working collaboratively, the societies would decide on a women's project. For example, the W.M.S. elected to rebuild the quarters in which the women met for Bible study at one church; they donated money to help erect the Bresee Memorial Hospital; they helped poor women around Chinese New Year; they financially supported young women attending Bible School; they underwrote the costs of sending out a new Bible Woman (female lay pastors); they financed the opening of a new station. As the money increased, so did the friction over how it was to be distributed. In response, women's groups moved away

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<sup>20</sup>Women in traditional Chinese society did not have direct access to financial resources. Thus, a significant part of the Communists' first piece of legislation on May 1, 1950 was the insistence that: "Both husband and wife shall have equal rights in the possession and management of family property." See, Judith Thornberry, "Women in China," *Church and Society* 65, no. 3 (January-February, 1975): 42.

<sup>21</sup>Anna Kiehn, "The Women's Work in China," *The Other Sheep* (October 1931): 13.

from pooling their offerings into one fund and began to exercise local control.<sup>22</sup>

The decision was natural. The new social space organized around the study of the Bible was fundamentally a local phenomenon. It was local groups that evolved various structures of authority to strengthen the study group. Usually, there was an elected leader, a treasurer, a secretary (who held the distinguished position of calling roll, as one of the better readers), as well as various *ad hoc* roles, such as women appointed to collect money from absent members. It was an opportunity for women to experiment with new social roles. They assumed, usually for the first time, a position in their community that was not based strictly on familial relationships.<sup>23</sup>

The power of these women's groups spilled into the churches. With virtually no ordained clergy, the Church of the Nazarene relied heavily on lay leadership.<sup>24</sup> Women of all ages emerged as powerful forces in their churches. At times they acted collectively, shaming the men into action. In Chin T'an Chen 125 women gathered in church (the number of men—it is reported—"was much smaller"). When it was time to take the offering the women responded passionately and generously. Almost every woman gave something. Even the one whose farm had been destroyed wanted to give something—a couple of coppers. The men, though, sat there with heads down. Finally, they were asked, "Do you want what these women have?" After a long silence one old man affirmed: "I want it," and the men came forward to pray.<sup>25</sup>

On other occasions, a particular woman would emerge as the representative of a congregation. Tu Chuan Ai, a Bible School student, frequently returned to her home village during holiday breaks. During one

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<sup>22</sup>Emma Dressel Smith, "Like the Widow's Mite," *The China Nazarene* 11 (December 1925): 8; "Proceedings of the Fourth Annual Council, September 24-28, 1925," World Mission, China Collection (file 406-22), NA; "Proceedings of the Fifth Annual Assembly, November 16-20, 1921," World Mission, China Collection (file 406-22), NA; H. A. Wiese, "Work of the W.M.S.," *The Other Sheep* (June 1937): 19.

<sup>23</sup>Kwok Pui-lan, "Claiming our Heritage: Chinese Women and Christianity," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 16, no. 4 (October 1992): 151.

<sup>24</sup>In 1941 there were 145 Nazarene places of worship, but only one ordained Chinese pastor.

<sup>25</sup>F. C. Sutherland, "Chin T'an Chen," *The Other Sheep* (November 1937): 23.



visit, bandits overran her village. Everyone fled or hid, but Tu remained at home believing God would protect her. When the robbers broke into her family's house, they were startled to find her standing there, alone—and more surprised, still, when she began to preach to them. She remained at home unharmed. However, other bandits stole the revival tent stored at the church. When this was discovered, Tu Chuan Ai sought out the bandit lord, and demanded the return of the church's property. He relented and sent her back to her village with the tent, and with the implicit acknowledgment of her leadership over the congregation.<sup>26</sup>

Normally, Chinese women exercised leadership informally. However, there were specific ways female leadership also took institutionalized forms. After the modification of the Nazarene *Manual* in 1928, for instance, the Women's Missionary Society was guaranteed representation on the local church board. The new social space for women officially penetrated the larger Christian community. What began as various meetings to increase biblical literacy, in fact, provided Nazarene women a new vital social space. Within that space, women were free to negotiate relationships by means of the women's community. They collected significant financial resources through which they could powerfully interact with their environment. Organizationally, the social space required structure and therefore created new roles that provided status for women within the Bible meeting, in the broader church, and in their local communities. The creation of new social space created new constellations of social power. Bible meetings initiated a transformation in the social lives of Nazarene Christian women.<sup>27</sup>

### The Reorganization of Family Structures

After visiting three women in one traditional Chinese home (apparently sisters-in-law), a missionary hurried off a request to American supporters: "Pray with us that the power of the Holy Ghost may open their hearts to receive Christ, that they may become *sons* of God."<sup>28</sup> The familial language from Scripture is significant. The Bible was inviting Chinese women to re-imagine their identity. God was the ultimate Father; they

<sup>26</sup>H. A. Wiese, "Miss Do's Growth and Bible School," *The Other Sheep* (May 1939): 18; Katherine Wiese, "A Bible School Student," *The Other Sheep* (January 1942): 18-20.

<sup>27</sup>Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 11.

<sup>28</sup>Emma Osborn, "A Happy Chinese Grandmother," *The Other Sheep* (November 1932): 7, emphasis added.

were His sons. The patrilineal construction of the Chinese family, in which men composed the indispensable core and women were the tangential (but essential) appendages, was transformed. In the biblical reality, God invited women to join men at the center, with the authority of fathers, husbands, and sons transferred to the Father in heaven. It was a new way of conceiving the world, a new basis to live out gender roles.<sup>29</sup>

The change could be extremely disruptive to family structures. To remain unmarried was almost unthinkable in Chinese society, and yet some Nazarene women now creatively dealt with the reality of not being married. Missionary documents record a family drama from the first year of the work, as now for the first time girls—like boys—were invited to receive an education. A Chinese woman was confronted with the Nazarene Girls' school rule, "No bound feet." The young mother pleaded with the missionaries for sympathy: if her daughter's feet were unbound, no one would ever marry her and the girl's education would be useless. Yet the missionaries were unyielding, and the mother withdrew from the compound in grief. The daughter later returned to the school. Her feet were unbound. Imagine the scene: having unwrapped the fractured toes (and the arch that had been forcibly broken), the mother led her daughter—walking unsteadily and painfully—to the church in order to enroll her in the first school for women in southwest Shandong province.<sup>30</sup> Soon thereafter, the agitated mother returned to the missionaries and offered her daughter to the Mission. When she graduated, the mother suggested, the girl should stay at the school and assume teaching responsibilities. The missionaries rejoiced at God's provision. The Chinese mother, presumably, also had a gladdened heart. She had secured the only socially acceptable option for an unmarried woman in Chinese society: her daughter now belonged to a religious order, something akin to a Buddhist convent.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>29</sup>Kwok Pui-lan, "Claiming Our Heritage," 152.

<sup>30</sup>Glennie Sims, "History of the Work in China," unpublished manuscript [n.d.], Biography, Sims Collection (file 214-45), NA.

<sup>31</sup>"Report to the General Assembly from China, August 11, 1915," Biography, Kiehn Collection (file 213-35), NA; Bret Hinsch, "Confucian Filial Piety and the Construction of the Ideal Chinese Buddhist Woman," *Journal of Chinese Religions* 30 (2002), 65. At the time there were only four students enrolled in the Nazarene school. The documents do not connect the mother worried about unbinding her daughter's feet to the mother who requested her daughter stay on at the school. That is my conjecture. If I am wrong, however, it only reinforces how broadly unbound feet and education were creating anxiety about gender roles.

Even when married, Nazarene women developed their roles in ways that modified the traditional family structure. In so far as a Chinese woman's life was circumscribed to domesticity by custom, it is not surprising to find that Nazarene women focused their energy on creating a different kind of home and family life. Through a mother's prayer, God permeated all that happened in the house. Missionaries encouraged this internal transformation of the home, believing it was the key to the true conversion of the nation.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, familial conversions became very important for Christian women, but not in the way missionaries expected.

For Chinese women, the conversion of biological family members to Christianity became a critical ally in establishing a secure base for themselves in the traditional Chinese family. At marriage, a Chinese woman entered as a stranger into her husband's house. Her sisters-in-law often resented the impoverishment the family had suffered due to the gifts, bride price, and costly rounds of feasting that preceded the marriage. In a polygamous marriage, a new bride was the focus of the first wife's jealousy. The mother-in-law was anxious that the new bride not diminish her influence over her son. The women of the house were competing over scarce access to power—the men. Therefore, it was important for a new bride to bear a son. Until then, she remained an outsider in her husband's family. But with a son, the woman had a male who “valued her praise, her affection, and her support over that of all others, including that of the father.”<sup>33</sup> Through him, a woman could exercise some control in the family. Her only fear, then, was that her son might transfer his affection to his wife when he married. Thus, the pattern repeats itself. However, with Christian conversion, the woman had a new resource. She could intensify the boundary markers between her uterine family and that of the larger family who had not yet believed in Jesus. A common faith, in the face of indifference or opposition from other family members living under the same roof, strengthened the ties of a woman to the family that came from her own body. In that setting, for a son to be loyal to Christ, he must be loyal to the wishes of his mother. It would have been almost unthinkable for a son to align himself with non-Christian family members against the will of his mother. She, after all, represented Christian light in the midst

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<sup>32</sup>Dana L. Robert, *American Women in Missions* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1997), 65-75; Anna Kiehn, “Missionary Experiences in China,” *The Other Sheep* (April 1930): 4.

<sup>33</sup>Margery Wolf, *Revolution Postponed*, 9.

of the “heathen darkness” entrenched in the house.<sup>34</sup> Christianity thus magnified the implicit importance of the uterine family.

The dynamics of the relationship between Christianity and the uterine families of Nazarene women surfaced in various ways. First, it appears that women spoke to their children about the frightening prospect of being eternally separated from their mothers if they did not convert. Second, prayer requests normally revolved around members of the uterine family: sons and daughters. Occasionally, missionaries recorded a woman praying for the conversion of her husband or mother-in-law (the two people outside the uterine family who represented access or obstruction to power). No prayer requests documented, however, extend to any other member of a woman’s family (e.g., sister-in-law, husband’s other wife, father-in-law, etc.) despite the fact that they lived under the same roof. Third, the fact that missionaries never succeeded in curbing marriages between Christians and unbelievers suggests that Christian mothers did not pursue Christian daughter’s-in-law for their sons. From the perspective of a mother’s need to protect the uterine family, such a counter-intuitive move is logical. A non-Christian daughter-in-law would remain on the edges of the Christian uterine family, and thus be unable to compete for the son’s favor. The evidence indicates, therefore, that in trying to create a “Christian home,” women actually channeled the power of Christianity into accentuating their uterine families, subverting the traditional larger family structure.<sup>35</sup>

Not surprisingly, the familial conflict engendered by Christianity pitted Nazarene women against those in the house who were not part of her uterine family. The sharpening of boundary markers, which Christianity offered, intensified intra-family conflict. In some cases, conflict was so severe it led to the re-organization of family roles. Husbands, as representatives of the non-uterine family, at times forced recalcitrant wives to

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<sup>34</sup>This strategy only works, of course, when an entire household does not convert. Significantly, reports from the area indicate very few homes (including parents, children, spouses, and grandchildren) all converting together. For a more detailed analysis of the “uterine family,” see Margery Wolf, *Women and Family in Rural Taiwan* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1972).

<sup>35</sup>Peter and Anna Kiehn, “Double the Number of Christians in a Year,” *The Other Sheep* (June 1937): 19; Ida Vieg, “Prayer Answered After Eight Years,” *The Other Sheep* (January 1936): 22; Ida Vieg, “Propagating the Gospel,” *The Other Sheep* (June 1933): 12; “Proceeding of the Fifth Annual Council, November 16-20, 1921,” World Mission, China Collection (file 406-22), NA; Katherine Wiese, “A Strange Calling,” *The Other Sheep* (March 1940): 11-12.

leave the house. Although not always formally divorced, the social status of such women was dramatically altered. They had to develop an identity independent of their families.<sup>36</sup>

A similar process of conflict and renegotiation can be observed among daughters. Records indicate that some young Nazarene girls, impassioned by faith, defied the non-uterine family. In a few cases, girls zealously desecrated the non-uterine family's worship space. In other cases, girls disobeyed their fathers: some went to school in spite of their father's protests; others refused to follow through on arranged marriages.<sup>37</sup> Almost inconceivable breaches of filial piety begin to appear. Young Christian women, like their Nazarene mothers, often used the amplified importance of the uterine family as a basis for transgressing the social roles expected of them in the larger traditional family.<sup>38</sup>

The fragmentation of the Nazarene Chinese family into uterine units was accelerated by the policies of the denomination. Homes built by the mission for local workers were intentionally small, and thereby discouraged extended families living together. Most significant was the willingness of the church to employ ladies as Bible women. Shockingly, some female converts were asked by missionaries to move to new villages, apart from their larger Chinese family household. Although it was assumed that their husbands and children would follow them, these women were employed as individuals. As women accepted these positions, the uterine family was disengaged from the traditional family unit of China.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>36</sup>Ida Vieg, "Prayer Answered After Eight Years," *The Other Sheep* (January 1936): 22.

<sup>37</sup>Christian mothers, it seems, sought non-Christian daughters in order to preserve their control over male descendants. Based on similar logic, a young Christian woman would want to marry a Christian man in order to secure her voice and place within the larger family unit. How could her husband, for instance, side with his pagan mother-in-law, and not defend his Christian wife? Missionary records confirm that Christian women sought to marry Christian men. See for example: Katherine Wiese, "A Bible School Student," *The Other Sheep* (January 1942): 18-20.

<sup>38</sup>"Thirsting for Knowledge," *The China Nazarene* 10 (1925): 3; Peter Kiehn, "China," *The Other Sheep* (April 1916): 6; Katherine Wiese, "A Bible School Student," *The Other Sheep* (January 1942): 18-20.

<sup>39</sup>First Annual Council Meeting, December 20, 1922—January 1, 1923, World Mission, China Collection (406-22), NA; Mildred McClelland, "Women's Work in Puchow," *The China Nazarene* 15 (December 1926): 8; Peter Kiehn, "The Legacy of Peter and Anna Kiehn," unpublished manuscript, Biography, Kiehn Collection (file 192-61), NA.

Scripture had a remarkable impact on the social roles of many Nazarene women. It encouraged them to recognize themselves as the *sons* of God, co-heirs with men of God's promises. It was a disruptive message concerning gender roles, especially to traditional family structures and expectations. A minority of Nazarene women did not to marry. Those who did marry channeled Christianity directly into the family, but in such a way as to strengthen the uterine family—a sub-unit of the traditional family. There was a very sharp intensification of the uterine family's importance in Christian homes. In some cases women, literally, became separated from larger family units. When that happened, the traditional definitions of a woman's position in society had to be renegotiated. Married or unmarried, women were removed from the larger family, and could no longer be defined exclusively by their position in the domestic network. Christian women could now be designated by their positions outside of the family. Women had appropriated the biblical message in unanticipated ways, and by so doing re-ordered their place not only in the family system, but also in the larger social network of Chinese society.

### Entering the Public Domain

As some Nazarene women disengaged from the traditional family system and experimented with public roles in Chinese society, they intruded upon the male sphere. Girls and women had no clear place outside of the home. The term for wife [inside person] reflected the conviction that the home was the woman's domicile, and that it was indecorous for her to move about the village without a chaperone.<sup>40</sup> These beliefs probably account for the response female missionaries first evoked when they arrived in Chaocheng in 1914. Chinese men could often be overheard arguing whether they were men or women. "They would finally say 'they must be business men, they can't be women for no woman would have so little pride [as] to walk down the street. . . .'"<sup>41</sup> Although the missionaries at first thought the problem was their large feet, the evidence

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<sup>40</sup>The infrequency of women appearing outside of the Chinese home forced the Church of the Nazarene to focus especially on particular fair days when it was culturally acceptable for women to be outside and observe the celebrations. See, "Blanche Himes to Good People of Phoenix," May 18, 1923, Papers, Phoenix First Church Collection (file 896-4), NA.

<sup>41</sup>Glennie Sims, "History of the Work in China," unpublished manuscript [n.d.], Biography, Sims Collection (file 214-45), NA.

suggests the deeper issue was their public persona. The very presence of women in the public domain was an incipient challenge to the structure of rural Shandong communal life.<sup>42</sup>

Nazarene women did not wantonly violate cultural norms as revolutionaries. Even so, Scripture drew them into a new social reality. The centrality of the Bible created new social space and new family structures, which tended to promote new patterns for social engagement. Echoing the ministry of Jesus, a significant number of Nazarene women went about the region preaching, teaching, and healing.

**Bible Women.** Bible women were the first to negotiate a public role for themselves. It has been suggested that most Bible women in China were “older women, especially widows, [because they] had more time to participate in church activities and more freedom to explore new identities, because they were situated somewhat at the margin of the family system.”<sup>43</sup> Yet the evidence indicates a more complicated situation. Some of the Bible women did exist on the periphery of their families, and therefore could presumably edge more easily into uncharted social territory (e.g., an elderly blind Bible woman, Mrs. Wang). The majority, however, appear to be young mothers or middle-aged women. Their departure from traditional social scripts is remarkable.<sup>44</sup>

Bible women forged a public ministry around outdoor preaching. Frequently, they toured through villages. A Bible woman would march through town with a flag, singing hymns, and pretty soon a group of people would follow her out of curiosity. At a designated place, she would then ascend her table that had Christian literature on it and begin preaching to the crowd. The audience was predominantly women and children,

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<sup>42</sup>Myrl Thompson to J. W. Goodwin and J. G. Morrison, June 17, 1933, General Board, Foreign Missions Collection (file 450-56); Adrian A. Bennet, “Doing More Than They Intended,” *Women in New Worlds: Historical Perspectives on the Wesleyan Tradition*, vol. 2, edited by Rosemary Skinner Keller, Louise L. Queen, and Hilah F. Thomas (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1982): 253-267.

<sup>43</sup>Kwok Pui-lan, “Chinese Women and Protestant Christianity at the Turn of the Twentieth Century,” 200.

<sup>44</sup>Ida Vieg to H. F. Reynolds, January 3, 1919, Biography, Vieg Collection (215-10), NA; Emma Dressel Smith, “A Tin Can Meeting,” *The China Nazarene* 12 (March 1926): 4; Emma Dressel Smith, “The Beggar who was Translated to the City of God,” *The China Nazarene* 15 (December 1926): 3; Emma Dressel Smith, “Four Graduate Bible Women,” *The Other Sheep* (April 1927): 5.

but men were also reported to listen in occasionally.<sup>45</sup> Much of a Bible woman's work, however, was performed indoors. Working with small groups or individuals was the hallmark of the Bible woman's ministry. Visitation was a key component in the spread of the Gospel. Bible women were also in charge of dealing with ladies who wanted to respond to the good news after a church meeting. It also fell to them to instruct new believers in the faith and help new Christians memorize the catechism.<sup>46</sup>

Exorcism, too, appears to have been a major feature of a Bible woman's ministry. Instead of remaining at a distance, curious or confused as many missionaries were, Bible women directly confronted the spirits. Missionaries who observed these exorcisms recounted the events in dramatic detail. In each account, the afflicting spirit is conclusively defeated through some ritualized use of the Bible (e.g., placing it on someone's head). The missionaries saw in these encounters the victory of the Word of God. Chinese observers, on the other hand, would have recognized the use of a talisman—a practice common among Chinese religious sects active in the area.<sup>47</sup> In fact, it may have been the co-opting of identifiably religious behaviors, such as the apparent employment of a talisman, which allowed young, middle-aged, and elderly Bible women to move outside of the home and develop a new social role.<sup>48</sup> What Nazarene women were doing was certainly unusual in rural China, but not entirely

<sup>45</sup>G. W. Royall, "In Spite Of," *The Other Sheep* (March 1939): 23-24.

<sup>46</sup>Catherine Flagler, "Report of Station Class at Chin Tan Chen," unpublished report, [n.d.], Biography, Flagler Collection (file 213-17), NA; Catherine Flagler, "Ch'ao Ch'eng Phonetic Class," unpublished article, [n.d.], Biography, Flagler Collection (file 213-18), NA.

<sup>47</sup>See, for example, John Nevius, *Demon Possession and Allied Themes: Being an Inductive Study of Phenomena of Our Own Time*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Chicago: Revell, 1896), 9, 19-21; 37-38; Ida Vieg, "Evangelizing in Shantung Province," *The Other Sheep* (February 1926): 2, and Ida Vieg, "A Strange Substitute," unpublished manuscript, [n.d.], Biography, Vieg Collection (file 215-11), NA. Joseph Esherick, *The Origins of the Boxer Uprising* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 38-67, provides important background on the religious practices in the region where the Church of the Nazarene functioned. See also Daniel L. Overmyer, "Popular Religious Sects in Chinese Society," *Modern China* 7, no. 2 (April 1981): 165-167.

<sup>48</sup>Other important features of local religious practices are incorporated into Nazarene practice. The replacement of family gods with Sunday school posters of Jesus is one important example. See, A. J. Smith, "Sending Sunday School Scrolls to China is a Good Investment," *The Other Sheep* (August 1926): 12.



unique. The Christianity they practiced and preached had formal parallels to Chinese religious sects. The characters were new (women), but their religious performance had important precedents. To that degree, Bible women appeared to be bizarre, but socially identifiable figures.

Religious borrowing may have been the only way for Nazarene Bible women to secure social legitimacy in a reluctant Chinese society, but it also complicated the Bible woman's purpose. In so far as she appeared to be an eccentric extension of Chinese religious sects, she was bound to find repeated rebuffs. "I belong to one sect, why should I join another one?"<sup>49</sup> was no doubt a common rejoinder to her invitations to faith. The prominent entry of Bible women into Chinese social life was complicated, and the results of their labors both marvelous and pathetic. Through Bible women, the Church of the Nazarene became a significant movement of women, but Christians remained numerically small in the counties where the Church of the Nazarene operated.<sup>50</sup>

**Teachers.** The schools operated by the Church of the Nazarene numbered forty-one by 1925. They were staffed with more men than women. However, whenever possible the missionaries prized employing women as teachers. Most of these female teachers were young and unmarried. Although many of the teachers had only a rudimentary education—in some cases, only completing grammar school themselves at a Nazarene institution—they were nevertheless relatively mature. The opportunity to attend school for women was so new to the counties in which the Church of the Nazarene operated, there was no precedent for an age requirements for female students. Hence, missionaries recorded students, up to 20 years old, anxiously waiting to begin first grade. Upon graduation, some of these older students—who found ways to delay marriage—were funneled into the educational endeavor of the church. There

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<sup>49</sup>Anna Kiehn to "Dear Readers of the Other Sheep" [1916], Biography, Kiehn Collection (file 213-36), NA.

<sup>50</sup>In 1941, as the Church of the Nazarene exited northern China, there were approximately 3,684 Christian women. That remains infinitesimally small in comparison to the 2,000,000 inhabitants spread throughout the Nazarene field. China District Council Minutes 1941, World Mission, China Collection (file 406-22), NA. For an explanation of the statistical formula employed to uncover the number of women, see Daryl R. Ireland, "A Protean Church: Nazarenes in China," M.A. Thesis, Nazarene Theological Seminary.

were a few married women who worked in the schools, but they appear to have been spouses of pastors working in that location.<sup>51</sup>

Most Nazarene female teachers taught in Nazarene schools, but a few worked for the government. In at least one case, a Nazarene graduate began a school for the girls of her neighborhood independent of both the government and the church. In all these cases, the relationship with the Church of the Nazarene remained congenial. The missionaries saw the small diaspora of educated ladies as part of the success of their labors.<sup>52</sup>

In the schools, teachers focused primarily on cultivating a spiritual awakening in the pupils' lives. "The Light School for Girls," for instance, taught Bible lessons three times a day, and held two chapel services. Teachers at Nazarene schools were not only to be proficient in reading, arithmetic, Western music, and exercise. Preeminently, Nazarene teachers were to be spiritual guides. To that end, summer training courses were organized by missionaries to equip women for the classroom. The purpose of the training was to awaken teachers to the necessity of the care of souls.<sup>53</sup>

It was assumed that Nazarene schools for girls would be very popular. As General Superintendent H. F. Reynolds reasoned, the total lack of supply of girls' schools in southwest Shandong, would mean astronomical demand for their services. His economic logic, however, failed to account for cultural forces that discouraged education among girls. First, Chris-

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<sup>51</sup>Proceedings of the Fourth Annual Council, September 24-28, 1925, World Mission, China Collection (file 406-22), NA; Blanche Himes to General Board of Foreign Missions, April 18, 1923, Biography, Himes Collection (file 213-31), NA; Emma Dressel Smith, "A Tin Can Meeting," *The China Nazarene* 12 (March 1926): 4; Ida Vieg, "Busy Days for the Master," *The China Nazarene* 15 (December 1926): 6.

<sup>52</sup>Glennie Sims to Emma Word, November 15, 1926, Biography, Sims Collection (file 214-45), NA; Ida Vieg, "Propagating the Gospel," *The Other Sheep* (June 1933): 12; Zella Fitz, "The Influence of Mrs. Lien's Conversion," *The Other Sheep* (May 1934): 7.

<sup>53</sup>Pearl Denbo to E. G. Anderson, January 4, 1921, Biography, Denbo Collection (file 213-9), NA; Emma Osborn, Unpublished Journal, November 10, 1938, Biography, Osborn Collection (file 1008-11), NA; Blanche Himes to Good People of Phoenix, May 18, 1923, Papers, Phoenix First Church Collection (file 896-4), NA; Mrs. Hu, "Report of Revival in Girls School," *The Other Sheep* (June 1925): 9; O.P. Deale to E. G. Anderson, March 24, 1919, Biography, Deale Collection (file 213-10), NA; L.C. Osborn, "God Still Works at Chao Cheng," *The China Nazarene* 10 (September 1925): 2.

tians were suspected of stealing girls and either using their body parts for medicine, or sending them to the United States. In fact, the first girls' school attracted four students only after a mother made the Chinese gate woman vow with her own life to protect the girls from dismemberment or harm. Second, schools for girls were considered a wasted expense. A natal family would have to bear the cost of the education, but receive none of its rewards. Upon or before graduation a girl was married into another family. At the same time, it could be difficult to arrange a marriage for an educated girl. No husband wanted to marry someone with more schooling than he himself had enjoyed.<sup>54</sup>

In spite of these cultural forces, the Church of the Nazarene organized a remarkable program of education for girls and young women. Female teachers navigated the new social domain surprisingly well. They organized the schools to function, unofficially, as cloisters.<sup>55</sup> In order to reduce girls' exposure to danger and ridicule (remember the importance of being "unseen"), Nazarene educational institutions were preferably established as boarding schools. Once separated from the larger community, female teachers could pursue, practice, and model new roles. Although traditionally it was believed:

Women were narrow-hearted. They were incapable of understanding the finer points of human relations on which all civilized life depended. They gossiped and were jealous and quarrelsome. . . . They were dependent, timid, and prone to weeping. They were ignorant and stupid and irresponsible.<sup>56</sup>

Within Nazarene schools, teachers were free to create alternatives. Intelligence was cultivated and prized. Civilized life, albeit expressed in a somewhat Western form, was emphasized and women were encouraged

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<sup>54</sup>H. F. Reynolds to Peter Kiehn, January 22, 1915, Biography, Kiehn Collection (file 213-36), NA; Glennie Sims, unpublished History of the Work in China, [n.d.], Biography, Sims Collection (214-45), NA; Judith Thornberry, "Women in China," *Church and Society* 65 no. 3 (January-February 1975): 39-40; Margery Wolf, *Revolution Postponed*, 5.

<sup>55</sup>Besides physical separation, and intensive study of Scriptures, the occasional shaving of girls' heads in the effort to control lice, almost certainly would have evoked images of Buddhist cloisters. See Margaret Needles, unpublished Story of the Life of Missionary Margaret Needles Williams, [n.d.], Biography, Needles Collection (file 1304-7), NA.

<sup>56</sup>Margery Wolf, *Revolution Postponed*, 2.

to assume a place therein. The immoral qualities commonly ascribed to women were conceded to be inherent, but were redeemable. The Biblical message that Nazarene teachers constantly repeated emphasized the power of the Holy Spirit to free women from narrow-hearted jealousies and the like. Thus, with great satisfaction, missionaries reported how girls were converted, displayed pleasant dispositions, and practiced sacrificial generosity.<sup>57</sup>

Like the Bible women, female teachers assumed new social roles in Chinese society. They worked outside of the home and earned an income. Yet, simultaneously, they submitted to broader cultural imperatives. Nazarene schools bore weak, but identifiable similarities with Buddhist convents. Teachers transgressed popular notions of femininity, but did so in cloistered space. Thus, Nazarene women teachers stretched the social fabric, but did not tear it.

**Nurses.** In 1926, the Church of the Nazarene opened a training school for nurses. It was the last, and least successful, venture opened to women by the church. Finding nurses was not a problem. In fact, the Church of the Nazarene had a continual stream of students. Both married and unmarried women entered the training school. Most of them came as graduates from the Nazarene primary schools for girls, and were hand-picked by the missionaries. However, since the Church of the Nazarene did not operate secondary schools for girls, the female nurses lacked the academic qualifications for government certification. Nazarene nursing diplomas held no currency beyond the reaches of the denomination.<sup>58</sup>

It was not the lack of education, though, that ultimately stymied the social impact of female nurses. The Church of the Nazarene trained women by using translated Western textbooks, and nurses practiced West-

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<sup>57</sup>Nancy Schuster Barnes, "Buddhism," in *Women in World Religions*, edited by Arvind Sharma (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1987), 132; Glennie Sims to E. G. Anderson, December 29, 1917, Biography, Sims Collection (file 214-44), NA; Emma Dressel Smith, "Our Famine Girls," *The China Nazarene* 12 (March 1926): 1.

<sup>58</sup>Mary Pannel, "Training School for Nurses," *The Other Sheep* (April 1939): 26; Proceedings of the Third Annual Council, October 20-24, 1924, World Mission, China Collection (file 406-22), NA; Proceedings of Fifth Annual Council, September 15-18, 1926, World Mission, China Collection (file 406-22), NA; Hester Hayne to J. G. Morrison, January 10, 1937, Biography, Hayne Collection (file 213-27), NA.

ern medical techniques. The conceptual break with Chinese traditional medical knowledge was dramatic and radical. Diagnoses were no longer based on holistic energy flows (氣, *qi*), or—as the missionaries were apt to notice—on witchcraft or religious explanations (e.g., the gods are angry). Instead, a Western conception of the body, and the notion of germs and viruses provided the basis for identifying illnesses. There was no model in Chinese society for what Nazarene nurses practiced.<sup>59</sup>

In particular, Western perceptions of menstruation and childbirth collided with traditional Chinese ascriptions of female pollution. Emily M. Ahern has argued that in China blood related to menstruation and childbirth was both powerful and polluting. It was a powerful substance from which life comes, but all blood that is discharged (in menstruation or in birth) was unclean. Chinese women were prohibited from worshipping the gods during menstruation, or for thirty days after childbirth. In fact, anyone who entered a room in which a woman had given birth in the previous thirty days was contaminated. Yet, Nazarene nurses disregarded these notions. Although in contact with birth and death, they appeared in chapel services. They violated cultural prohibitions, and seemed to do so with impunity.<sup>60</sup>

The medical complex, then, appeared as a foreign place. Diagnoses, treatment, and care diverged from traditional patterns, and even violated certain taboos. Missionaries repeatedly worried about the lack of Chinese women who came to the hospital: “The warmer days have come now and we are having a few more patients, though the women who come are few.”<sup>61</sup> The hospital statistics reflect how few women came to the hospital, particularly pregnant women. Expectant mothers appeared at the hospital only as a last resort. In 1932 only 17 obstetrical cases were reported

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<sup>59</sup>Hester Hayne, “The Training School for Nurses,” *The China Nazarene* 11 (December 1925): 8; Glennie Sims to E.G. Anderson, February 16, 1917, Biography, Sims Collection (file 214-44), NA; Ida Vieg, A Strange Substitute (unpublished article), Biography, Vieg Collection (file 215-11), NA.

<sup>60</sup>Emily M. Ahern, “The Power and Pollution of Chinese Women,” in *Women in Chinese Society*, edited by Margery Wolf and Roxane Witke (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975); Proceedings of Fifth Annual Council, September 15-18, 1926, World Mission, China Collection (file 406-22), NA.

<sup>61</sup>Hester Hayne to E.G. Anderson, March 29, 1923, Biography, Hayne Collection (file 213-25), NA. See also, Hester Hayne to Emma Word, July 2, 1936, Biography, Hayne Collection (file 213-27), NA; H.A. Wiese, “China in Need. China Blessed.” *The Other Sheep* (February 1937): 19.

out of 970 patients (most of whom were men), and in 1933 the number only climbed to 24. Women generally stayed away from the hospital.<sup>62</sup>

Unlike Bible women and teachers, who adapted their public roles from models within Chinese society, Nazarene nurses lacked clear precedent. In fact, their medical beliefs and practices intensified their alienation from Chinese society. Nevertheless, Nazarene women continued to enter medical service. Their diplomas were unusable beyond the Nazarene field, their diagnoses were generally suspect, and they were considered habitually unclean. Medicine was not a path towards social elevation. It was, though, a path towards social service.

Nazarene nurses took as their motto: 濟世與之 [benefit the world as its good friends]. They attempted to comfort and cure those who came to the hospital afflicted with various sicknesses and diseases. They were deeply involved in operations, rehabilitations, and the care of the infectious at the hospital. Their work was generally far more confined than that of Bible women or teachers. Nevertheless, women found in nursing an opportunity to enter the social sphere as healers.<sup>63</sup>

## Conclusion

Women in the Church of the Nazarene experienced significant shifts in their social roles. Gathered around Scripture, women underwent a transformation. New social space created new social power for women. For some of these women, the disruptive elements of the Biblical message were channeled into the family system in such a way as to disengage the uterine family from the larger familial network. When that happened, women were no longer defined primarily by domestic roles. They were free to explore public positions.

Significantly, the records indicate that Nazarene women moved in three directions. They became Bible women, teachers, or nurses. The apparatus of the Church of the Nazarene certainly encouraged women to develop in these directions, but it did not dictate that response. It was possible for Nazarene women to work outside of the church. In fact, some did. Yet even those women did not become involved in politics or pub-

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<sup>62</sup>Mary Pannell to Emma Word, July 5, 1938, Biography, Pannell Collection (file 214-26), NA; Report of the Bresee Memorial Hospital, January 1<sup>st</sup>—November 30<sup>th</sup>, 1933, General Board, Foreign Missions Collection (file 450-56), NA.

<sup>63</sup>Report of the Bresee Memorial Hospital, January 1—November 30, 1933, General Board, Foreign Missions Collection (file 450-56).

lishing, as other women of the time did. Instead, the records indicate that Nazarene women focused on preaching, teaching, and healing. Paid or unpaid, Nazarene women who entered the social sphere mimicked the ministry of Jesus. It was a reflection, I argue, of the extent to which their lives had been shaped by the Bible. Scripture's centrality created new social space for women, and redefined their families. It also scripted how women entered society. Nazarenes creatively appropriated the Gospel, while accommodating prevailing cultural patterns, in order to establish new roles for Christian women in Chinese society.

### Post-Script

The women of the Church of the Nazarene are fascinating. Despite remarkable social pressure, they succeeded in negotiating a place for themselves *and* the church in Chinese society. It is a remarkable achievement, even more so, since it was accomplished without social disintegration. Women, though, are rarely mentioned in the archives of the Church of the Nazarene.<sup>64</sup> The church records remember men and missionaries. But the story of the Church of the Nazarene in China, I believe, is truly one of women.

While searching through the Nazarene archives, I found this off-hand remark in the midst of a long discourse on the history of the Church of the Nazarene in China:

One of the [Chinese] nurses felt strongly impressed to leave home and to go as a missionary to West China near the Tibet border. This was something unheard of. Her parents objected to her pland [sic], but she would not change her plan. She went during 1948 when we lived in Peiping. Word has been received from her. The report was that she had succeeded in learning the Tibetan language. To reach the natives of Tibet she was wearing the native garb of the Tibetan people. As far as we know this young lady was a member of the nurses group that Miss Myrl Thompson was training.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup>The material presented here is a summation of the relatively few times women are mentioned in approximately 2,000 articles of *The Other Sheep* and in hundreds of documents preserved in the Nazarene archives.

<sup>65</sup>Peter Kiehn, *The Legacy of Peter and Anna Kiehn*, Unpublished manuscript, Biography, Kiehn Collection (file 192-61), NA.

The brief account of the first Chinese Nazarene missionary is symbolic: the woman broke from her sequestered life, entered the social sphere of China as a nurse, and finally travelled across the country in order to share the Good News in an entirely new social context. It was an incredibly audacious act, but one virtually overlooked by missionaries. In fact, they fail to recall her name.

This essay is dedicated to this remarkable unnamed nurse—a woman who exemplifies Scripture’s creative power in the lives of Chinese Nazarene women.



# THE BLACK CAUCUS, POWER, AND RACIAL INCLUSION IN THE CHURCH OF GOD (ANDERSON, IN)

by

John E. Stanley

“Power is the issue.”<sup>1</sup> With that declaration, Ronald J. Fowler opened the meeting of the Caucus of Black Churchmen in the Church of God (Anderson, Indiana) on April 13, 1970, in Cleveland, Ohio. The founding of the Black Caucus in the Church of God reflected the larger social and political changes occurring in American churches in the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>2</sup> Peniel E. Joseph notes that “Black power remains one of the most enduring and controversial stories of racial tumult, social protest, and political upheavals of our time. . . . Black power’s reach was

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<sup>1</sup>Ronald J. Fowler, “Introduction,” *The Church of God in Black Perspective: Proceedings of the Caucus of Black Churchmen in the Church of God, April 1970, Cleveland, Ohio*, ed. Ronald J. Fowler (New York: Shining Light Press, 1970), iii. Caucus leaders included Sethard Beverly, Robert O. Dulin, Jr., Edward L. Foggs, James Earl Massey, and Marcus H. Morgan. See James Earl Massey, *African Americans and the Church of God Anderson, Indiana: Aspects of a Social History* (Anderson, IN: Anderson University Press, 2005), 221. Women were active participants in the Caucus. Thanks to Robert O. Dulin, Jr., Robert H. Rear-don, and Susie C. Stanley for reading drafts and helping me avoid misstatements on sensitive matters.

<sup>2</sup>Cheryl Sanders found that “Black caucuses were organized in at least ten of the largest predominately White Protestant church bodies and in the Roman Catholic Church” from 1965 to 1970. *Saints in Exile: The Holiness-Pentecostal Experience in African American Religion and Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 99.

global.”<sup>3</sup> Continuing, Joseph contends that “ultimately, Black power accelerated America’s reckoning with its uncomfortable, often ugly racial past. In the process, it spurred a debate over racial progress.”<sup>4</sup> The influence of the Black power movement on the relatively small Church of God movement illustrates the broad impact of the Black power movement. It also shows that Black leaders in the Church of God were on the cutting edge of social and religious change in the 1960s and 1970s.

The Church of God movement, with general offices in Anderson, Indiana, has experienced significant racial inclusion. In 1989, 19% of the church’s North American membership of 199,786 members were African Americans.<sup>5</sup> In 2002, of the twenty largest congregations in the Church of God, eight were pastored by African Americans and had largely African-American memberships. Of its 2,340 congregations in 2002, 377 defined themselves as African American and another 244 as multi-racial.<sup>6</sup> Since 1970 African Americans regularly have held top leadership positions in the denomination. Such a high degree of racial inclusion is highly unusual in other denominations.<sup>7</sup>

This paper has three aims. First, it explains why this racial inclusion has occurred amid a racist society and in a holiness church. Second, it

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<sup>3</sup>Peniel E. Joseph, “Black Power’s Powerful Legacy,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education: The Chronicle Review* 52, no. 46 (July 21, 2006), B6.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., B8.

<sup>5</sup>Massey, *African Americans and the Church of God*, 20.

<sup>6</sup>All statistics and ethnic designations for Church of God congregations are supplied by local churches to Church of God Ministries which compiles the *Yearbook of the Church of God*. The exact number of Blacks in multi-racial congregations cannot be determined. “Any of the field data being provided by Church of God Ministries is complete only to the extent provided by the constituents of Church of God Ministries,” Dreama Lamb, e-mail message to author, May 16, 2002. I usually use the term “Black” in this paper because it was the self-descriptive term of the Black Caucus.

<sup>7</sup>In comparison, the United Methodist Church in the United States has 8,040,605 members, of which only 432,354 or 5.4% are African-American, “Statistics of the United Methodist Church,” 2008 General Conference Visitors Guide of the United Methodist Church at [http://media.umcom.org/gc2008/Resources\\_for\\_Press/Media\\_Guide.pdf](http://media.umcom.org/gc2008/Resources_for_Press/Media_Guide.pdf). In the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America in 2007, only 1% of its 4,774,203 baptized members were African-American, <http://archive.elca.org/communication/quick.html>. In 2006, 2.6%, or 304 congregations of the Assembly of God’s 12,311 churches were African American. “Statistics of the Assemblies of God (USA),” [http://ag.org/top/About/statistics/-Statistical\\_Report\\_Summary.pdf](http://ag.org/top/About/statistics/-Statistical_Report_Summary.pdf).

suggests why a Black Caucus was needed in 1970 in a denomination which began with an emphasis on inclusive unity. Third, it presents a perceived strategy of social change used by the Black Caucus of the Church of God, not only for historical reasons but also so other groups can adapt that strategy as a usable past in confronting social issues. Although the African American Church of God scholars James Earl Massey and Cheryl Sanders have treated the Black Caucus, neither of them addressed the strategy of social change intrinsic to the Caucus. The uniqueness of this paper lies in its presentation of a perceived strategy of how to execute social change.<sup>8</sup>

### **A Promised Beginning in Unity: 1880-1917**

One must begin by surveying the history of race relations in the Church of God to explain why the Black Caucus emerged in 1970. Race relations from 1880 to 1917 in the Church of God moved from racial unity and inclusiveness to a separatism paralleling American society in general. D. S. Warner was the primary pioneer of the Church of God movement in 1880, proclaiming a message of holiness and unity. John W. V. Smith, one of this movement's historians, noted that the message of unity of all believers "made a very strong interracial position inherent to the message itself. It is notable, however, that in the first decade no special point was made of the racial issue; the message was preached and Black people responded and were accepted."<sup>9</sup> Smith spoke of an "early casualness about racial differences"<sup>10</sup> as evidenced by the growth of the movement among Blacks. For example, in his diary, D. S. Warner mentions holding a revival with Julia Foote without any reference to the fact that she was Black.<sup>11</sup> Even throughout the South, Blacks and Whites worshipped together as equals. In 1886, Jane Williams founded a congrega-

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<sup>8</sup>Massey, *African Americans and the Church of God*, 221-237, and Sanders, 98-105. I write as a supportive observer who was influenced by and then pastored and worked with members of the Black Caucus from 1962 to 1995.

<sup>9</sup>John W. V. Smith, *The Quest for Holiness and Unity: A Centennial History of the Church of God (Anderson, Indiana)* (Anderson, IN: Warner, 1980), 162.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, 162.

<sup>11</sup>D. S. Warner, *Journal of D. S. Warner Tms* (photocopy), 345, 380. Cited in Susie C. Stanley, *Holy Boldness: Women Preachers' Autobiographies and the Sanctified Self* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2002), xxxiii. They worked at a camp meeting in Marion, IN, in 1878 and at Churubasko, MI, in 1879.

tion in Charleston, South Carolina, which became the launching pad for ministry to Blacks and Whites in the South.<sup>12</sup>

James Massey concurs with Smith on the early racial inclusion. Commenting on the fact that in 1989 nineteen percent of the total membership of the Church of God then consisted of African American members, Massey claims that “this significant percentage is due, in no small measure, to the appealing and promising unity ideal that is at the heart of the Church of God message, an ideal that has always been allied in the church’s message with the call to holiness.”<sup>13</sup> Massey further explains:

The message voiced by the Church of God about the unity of believers appealed strongly to Blacks who were otherwise restricted and segregated in a racist society. The message of unity provided promise for needed affirmation of self-worth on the one hand, and the need of social togetherness on the other. Unlike other church groups whose doctrinal positions accented non-relational themes, the central theme of the Church of God was a relational one: the unity of believers.<sup>14</sup>

Marcus Morgan emphasized that even truth itself “has a relational dimension.”<sup>15</sup> Ozie G. Wattleton’s father was a first-generation minister in the Church of God and she herself pastored from 1910-1940. Wattleton testified that “the first generation of pioneer ministers witnessed and labored in one accord.”<sup>16</sup> The doctrine of unity fostered inclusive racial relationships.

Despite these strong, inclusive beginnings in the first twenty-five years of the Church of God movement, by 1909 a move towards racial separatism began when some states developed separate assemblies for White and African-American ministers. Wattleton stated, “the monster of racism divided the leaders and muzzled the message of love Christ com-

<sup>12</sup>Smith, *Quest*, 163-164. Massey lists thirty-two early Black leaders in the South “as named in Church of God ministerial lists for 1905, 1907” and two hundred thirty-two “Black leaders active in Church of God life by 1915,” *African Americans and the Church of God*, 265-272.

<sup>13</sup>James Earl Massey, “Minority Relationships within the Holiness Movement,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 31 (Spring 1996), 48.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 48-49. Massey cites the “disturbingly meager” number of Blacks in the Evangelical Movement, as well as in the American Holiness Movement, 43.

<sup>15</sup>Marcus H. Morgan, “The Importance of Doctrine,” *Inform! The Mission and Ministry of the Church of God* 1 (June 1997), 1.

<sup>16</sup>Ozie G. Wattleton, “Historical Reflections of a Pioneer Minister of the Church of God,” *Church of God Historian* 2 (Spring 2002), 5.

manded and the unity he prayed for.”<sup>17</sup> Between 1912 and 1916, so many Blacks were attending the national gathering of the Church of God at Anderson Camp Meeting that some White leaders were concerned that Whites might eventually stay away. According to Massey, 1916 was a decisive year because “by that year social sensitivities had so increased even in the North that many of the interracial churches there divided over race concerns.”<sup>18</sup> Sanders shared that some Blacks already had envisioned a camp meeting near West Middlesex, Pennsylvania.<sup>19</sup> In 1917 Blacks purchased land there, which became the site of the Black West Middlesex Camp Meeting and the headquarters of what emerged as the National Association of the Church of God.

The National Association became an organization of Black churches within the Church of God, with separate structures paralleling the national ones located in Anderson, Indiana. Thus, the Church of God had two missionary boards, two Women’s Missionary Societies, and two national youth conventions. Blacks continued to be part of the Church of God and attended Anderson Camp Meeting but they developed independent, Black-controlled structures. A few select Blacks served on national church agencies in Anderson. Although these ministers were stalwarts in the National Association, it is fair to say that they were perceived by many Whites as tokens in the Anderson agencies.<sup>20</sup>

Evaluation of the dual national organization structures is revealing. Smith, a White historian, reported that “the West Middlesex structure in

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 5.

<sup>18</sup>James Earl Massey, “The National Association in Historical Perspective,” *Historical Society of the Church of God (Anderson, Indiana)* 2 (Fall 2001), 6.

<sup>19</sup>Cheryl Sanders, *Empowerment Ethics for a Liberated People* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 66-69. She stressed that origins of the West Middlesex Camp Meeting were “guided more by an ethics of inclusion than by a desire for racial solidarity,” 69. David Telfer gave another account of these developments in *Red & Yellow Black & White. Ministry and Evangelism in Ethnic Communities* (Anderson, IN: Warner, 1981), 47-49. Also, see Smith, *Quest*, 168-169.

<sup>20</sup>For instance, S. P. Dunn was a charter member of the Anderson College Board of Trustees in 1925. Daniel F. Oden was a charter member of the Missionary Board in 1909. Raymond S. Jackson was the first Black member of the Publication Board in 1938 and J. D. Smoot and S. P. Dunn were charter members of the Board of Church Extension and Home Missions in 1921. James Earl Massey, “The Question of Race: An Historical Overview,” *A Time to Remember: Milestones*. Church of God Heritage Series, ed. Barry L. Callen (Anderson, IN: Warner, 1978), 547.

many ways paralleled what was done in Anderson, providing for various boards to be responsible for various cooperative functions. This was not considered a breakaway action, only separate, and later years proved this to be a viable working relationship.”<sup>21</sup> Some Blacks disagreed with Smith’s assessment, thinking it a rationalization. Raymond S. Jackson, Massey’s pastor in Detroit, served in both Anderson and West Middlesex agencies while rejecting the rationalization that social custom demanded separate congregations and organizations. Jackson regularly spoke at Anderson Camp Meeting while at the same time serving as Chair of the General Assembly of the National Association at West Middlesex from 1940 to 1955. Massey credits Jackson with opposing local and national segregation and calling for the Church of God to “give moral guidance to the nation in the realm of social race relations.”<sup>22</sup> Morgan stated in 1970 that “since 1916, the developmental pattern of Church of God organizations, for the most part, has been along separate racist lines.”<sup>23</sup> Inherent in Morgan’s statement is a theological and ethical questioning of Smith’s contention that the parallel structures proved “to be a viable working relationship.”<sup>24</sup>

Benjamin F. Reid, who developed a three-thousand member church in Los Angeles, explained that the National Association and West Middlesex Camp Meeting “grew out of the need for fellowship among the Black saints without racist overtones and segregationist control.”<sup>25</sup> According to Reid, West Middlesex became “a rallying point for protest . . . a religious political power base with which Anderson had to reckon and a place where we worshiped God and heard in our language and according to our cultural patterns the great message of the Church of God.”<sup>26</sup> While Black leaders regretted the segregationist patterns which forced them to develop a separate organization within the Church of God, they regarded the National Association as a necessary training ground for Black preachers

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<sup>21</sup>Smith, *Quest*, 169.

<sup>22</sup>James Earl Massey, *Raymond S. Jackson. A Portrait* (Detroit: James Earl Massey, 1967), 65.

<sup>23</sup>Marcus Morgan, “The National Association: Present Crises and Future Shapes,” *The Church of God in Black Perspective*, 51.

<sup>24</sup>Smith, *Quest*, 169.

<sup>25</sup>Benjamin F. Reid, “The National Association Must Live On,” *Church of God in Black Perspective*, 64.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, 66.

who did not get asked to preach at Anderson Camp Meeting, as an educational center, and as a haven of fellowship free from the stress of racism.

Concomitant with the development of the National Association at West Middlesex as a parallel national structure, and many separate Black and White ministerial assemblies, there was an unequal participation of Blacks in the organizational structures centered in Anderson. The ideal of unity which birthed the Church of God and fostered racial inclusiveness from 1880 to 1909 was not being practiced by 1917. Thus, the original vision of unity was fractured. Separation rather than inclusion marked the era from 1917 to the 1960s.

### **Resolutions Leading to the 1970 Black Caucus**

Unfortunately, the Church of God movement came to mirror the racial segregation typical of the United States between 1917 until the emergence of the civil rights revolution in the 1950s. In the 1950s and 1960s the Church of God affirmed a series of five resolutions and actions that called the church to acknowledge racial injustice and move toward racial justice.

On January 16, 1957, Black ministers representing the National Association of the Church of God met with leaders of agencies in Anderson. Smith records that these Black leaders “called attention to the fact that, despite the historic interracial stance of the movement, a great amount of segregation had been allowed to develop at almost every level from the local church to the national and international work.”<sup>27</sup> The Black leaders “submitted a list of Black persons whom they would recommend”<sup>28</sup> to serve on the study commission which evolved from the meeting. In its five-year tenure, the Study Commission reported to the General Ministerial Assembly in Anderson, an Assembly which included both Blacks and Whites. The members of the Study Commission were respected, proven leaders. All the reports over the five-year period sought an end to the separate state ministerial assemblies still existing in ten states and called for merging the work of duplicate boards, a recognition of the need to move toward structural inclusion.

A second key report came in 1964 when Black leaders alerted Anderson agencies to the urgency of the need for more Black inclusion.

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<sup>27</sup>Smith, *Quest*, 360.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 360.

The Executive Council presented “A Report on Race Relations” to the General Ministerial Assembly in Anderson on June 15, 1964. The Report confessed that

. . . while the Church of God has been historically an interracial group, it is very obvious that we have either consciously or unconsciously allowed problems of relationships to grow between the races within our fellowship. It is also true that many of our local congregations have succumbed to the social pressures about them, rather than maintain the underlying principles upon which the body of Christ is founded.<sup>29</sup>

The 1964 Report placed the Church of God’s failures in racial inclusion in the setting of the broader American context of racial struggle and injustice. It recognized that “in the year 1963, a new word was interjected into the whole movement for racial equality. That word was ‘now.’ It has changed the whole movement from one of a gradual process into a rapid revolutionary pace.”<sup>30</sup> The 1964 Report encouraged the church, nationally and locally, to work to integrate fellowship meetings, to integrate national agencies, to nominate qualified persons of all races for state and national boards, and to end segregated state assemblies.

In response to pressure from Black leaders, a third step forward took place in the 1964 General Assembly. The General Assembly established a Commission on Social Concerns consisting of fifteen elected members and a representative from each of the ten major agencies responsible for the ministries of the church. The Commission increasingly advocated for social activism, especially regarding the awareness of Black concerns across the church. For instance, it offered conferences at the annual International Conventions in Anderson on such topics as “Racism: Black Power; Racism: Riots; Racism: Open Housing; and Racism: Law and Order.”<sup>31</sup> These hard-hitting conferences, led by Black leaders, addressed crucial concerns of American society and how the church should address them.

Two resolutions in the 1968 General Assembly marked the end of an era and sparked the resolve that eventually produced the Black Caucus.

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<sup>29</sup>“Report on Race Relations: Executive Council of the Church of God,” in *Annual Reports of the General Ministerial Assembly of the Church of God 1964* (Anderson, IN: Warner Press, 1964), 9-10.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>31</sup>Smith, *Quest*, 382, 385.



The first 1968 “resolution on race” from the Executive Council perfunctorily reviewed the goals of the 1957 Study Committee and the 1964 Report on Race Relations. It cited gains that had been made, such as the merger of the Missionary Committee of the National Association of the Church of God with the Missionary Board of the General Ministerial Assembly of the Church of God in 1967. Also, the speakers and programs of the Anderson International Convention were becoming more representative of both races. This Resolution on Race was ready to be presented to the General Assembly in June.<sup>32</sup>

However, following the death of Martin Luther King, Jr., on April 5, 1968, fourteen Black leaders of the Church of God, mainly from cities which had experienced riots in 1965–67, held an ad hoc meeting with agency heads in Anderson on May 28, 1968. These fourteen leaders were veterans of the civil rights movement who were aware of the “soft” impending resolution on race to be offered at the June General Assembly. The Black pastors impressed upon the agency leaders the trauma urban churches were experiencing. They diagnosed the cancer of institutional racism as a sin that disrupted society and the Church of God movement. From that meeting came a deepened resolve that resulted in a 1968 resolution of the Business Committee entitled “Racial Justice a Spiritual Priority.”<sup>33</sup> According to the parliamentary procedure of the General Assembly, resolutions from the Business Committee took precedence over other actions. This resolution from the Business Committee, formulated just three weeks before the General Assembly meeting, reflected a deepened resolve to address racism within the church.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>“Resolution on Race,” in *Thinking and Acting Together: God’s Guidance of the Corporate Life of the Church through the First Seventy-five Years of the Work of the General Assembly, Church of God*, compiled and ed. Barry L. Callen (Anderson, IN: Warner Press, 1992), 62–63.

<sup>33</sup>“Racial Justice a Spiritual Priority,” in *Thinking and Acting Together*, 62. See “Minutes,” Joint Meeting of the Executive Committee of the Executive Council, Representatives of the National Association of the Church of God, and Representatives of Our General Agencies, May 28–29, 1968, Anderson, IN. These minutes are available in the Archives of the Church of God at Nicholson Library, Anderson University.

<sup>34</sup>Robert Dulin believes “the May 1968 meeting certainly turned up the heat and heightened the urgency of the Board of Christian Education’s plans to employ a Black staff person.” Dulin continues, “My being asked to come to the board was a result of the church’s growing awareness of its need to be inclusive.” Robert Dulin, e-mail message to the author, May 25, 2002.

When the General Assembly met in June, 1968, it approved the initial and weaker Resolution on Race from the Executive Council that summarized what had been done and called for further action by the church to address racism. What happened next signified a changing of the guard and the influence of a new generation of leaders schooled in the civil rights and Black power movements. After the approval of the mild Resolution on Race, an older Black pastor moved for an expression of thanks to the Anderson agencies for “the acceleration of the integration of our national agencies.”<sup>35</sup> At that point, James Massey “rose to a point of order as to whether or not it would be proper for this motion to be delayed until after the presenting of the race relations resolution by the Business Committee.”<sup>36</sup> The Chair agreed and recognized Edward L. Foggs who read the resolution from the Business Committee which was seconded by Benjamin F. Reid.

The Business Committee Resolution called for two momentous actions. First, it moved that national boards and agencies in Anderson “be directed to make deliberate moves to secure Negro leaders for executive and/or administrative roles wherever and whenever possible.”<sup>37</sup> Second, it “resolved that this Assembly call upon the Church to repent for the deficiencies and failures as a people on the point of race relations, turning to God for renewal and grace during this International Convention.”<sup>38</sup> Although debate ensued over whether or not corporate guilt should be expressed and confessed, the motion passed. This confession of the corporate guilt of racism was a major achievement for any church body in 1968. A new generation of Black ministers had demonstrated that they would not tolerate racism or accommodate themselves as tokens within the church. The 1968 resolution of the Business Committee, “Racial Justice a Spiritual Priority,” signaled a shifting of Black leadership to a group of ministers committed both to the church and to their Black identity and strategy, fostered in part by the Black power movement. They were veterans of the civil rights movement who were not willing to commend the church for tolerating racism while moving slowly towards shared power.

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<sup>35</sup>“Minutes of the General Assembly of the Church of God,” in *Annual Reports of the General Ministerial Assembly of the Church of God*, 1968 (Anderson, IN; Warner Press, 1968), 30.

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*, 30-31.

<sup>37</sup>“Racial Justice a Spiritual Priority,” 62.

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*, 62.

The 1969 annual report of the Commission of Social Concerns recorded “that in 1957 there were only six Blacks serving on national boards and agencies. In 1963 there were ten serving. In 1967 there were nineteen, and in 1968-69 there were twenty-six, or 14 percent of the total board membership.”<sup>39</sup> However, Blacks read these statistics less positively than the White power structure did because Blacks still were excluded from power in key decision-making roles as members of executive committees and as executives, even though their representation was increasing on boards and committees.

Numbers do not tell the entire tale of institutional power and influence, thus the need was sensed for the Black Caucus of 1970. The church’s slowness to hire Black leaders as agency executives fueled the rise of the Black Caucus in 1970.

### **“Power Is the Issue”: The 1970 Black Caucus**

Thirteen years of study commissions and resolutions had not moved Church of God agencies in Anderson adequately to share power proportionately with its African-American members. Hence, on April 13-14, 1970, at the Sheraton-Cleveland Hotel, ninety-two registered delegates of the Caucus of Black Churchmen in the Church of God (Anderson, Indiana) convened.<sup>40</sup>

Ronald J. Fowler, who graduated a few years before from Anderson School of Theology and was an Associate Pastor in Akron, Ohio, stated that a caucus was a legitimate forum for developing a strategy of social and political action. According to Fowler, the purpose of the Black Caucus was “to give to the total church insights into the Christian life drawn from God’s Word but related to the Black experience in a White-controlled world.” It was “an attempt both to share the burden of the Black church and to show the concerns it feels under God to be imperative if the church is to be the salt of the earth.” The Black Caucus was a means of Black self-determination, or as Fowler phrased it, the Caucus “has been

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<sup>39</sup>Smith, *Quest*, 385.

<sup>40</sup>The following is a summary of the proceedings of the Caucus as they appear in *Church of God in Black Perspective*. The Black Caucus stated why a caucus was necessary, outlined the polarizations of society, defined the meaning of social action for the Black Christian, presented a history of the National Association centered in West Middlesex, PA, scrutinized each Anderson agency in light of its progress towards racial justice, and called for specific actions.

convened to allow the victims of racial oppression affiliated with the Church of God to determine for themselves their assignment under God amid the Black revolution.”<sup>41</sup>

Fowler gave three reasons for the calling of the caucus. First, “Power is the issue.”<sup>42</sup> Fowler observed how Black suffering had resulted because power had not been administered justly. Claiming that the flight of White churches from urban areas left an increasing burden on Black inner city churches, Fowler proclaimed that “only as the disadvantaged gain power can there be hope of closing those gaps which work against the forgotten of society.”<sup>43</sup> Fowler made six observations regarding power that he adapted from the civil rights and Black power movements.

Blacks cannot ignore the lessons of history within and beyond the Church of God. Blacks must not forget: (1) That power is seldom yielded apart from confrontation and conflict. (2) That the drive toward self-preservation often supersedes the claims of Christ when *one's source of power is threatened*. (3) That racism is so pervasive that only a radical surgery can remove its presence and influence. (4) That silence in the midst of a revolution is a sin. (5) That until all men are free no one is really free. (6) That the church is not detached from the world's predicament.<sup>44</sup>

The second reason for the caucus, Fowler explained, was that “the response of the White church to the answers articulated by Black churchmen will determine the future of the Church of God.”<sup>45</sup> At no point in the proceedings of the Caucus was there a threat to leave the Church of God, but Fowler implied that the future of the Church of God would be drastically shaped by the church's response to the Caucus. Third, Fowler claimed that this caucus had resulted from “the failure of the church to be the church. . . . The church's pronouncements are yet well ahead of her performances. This would be ideal if equals were striving for common

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<sup>41</sup>Fowler, “Introduction,” *The Church of God in Black Perspective*, i.

<sup>42</sup>*Ibid.*, iii.

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

<sup>44</sup>*Ibid.*, ii-iii.

<sup>45</sup>*Ibid.*, iii. Massey acknowledges that Church of God Blacks “did, at certain times and for due cause, become a protest organization within the larger movement, but there was never a time when separation from the movement was advocated or desired.” *African Americans and the Church of God*, 226.

objectives. But equality is not a fact where Blacks and Whites are concerned. A 'united church for a divided world' [a popular slogan in the Church of God] continues to be a vision awaiting birth."<sup>46</sup>

The Caucus did not engage in empty rhetoric. Instead, it employed a systematic analysis of power and racism in the major agencies of the Church of God. The Caucus evaluated each agency's progress toward racial inclusion and justice. For instance, it applauded Warner Press, the church's publishing house, for including minorities in pictures on church bulletins and for forthright editorials on racial matters. However, they chastised Warner Press for not hiring a Black person to fill a recent vacancy in the editorial department. The Caucus praised Anderson College for starting a Black studies program, but accused the college of "gross neglect and inequity in the awarding of honorary degrees to worthy Black leaders."<sup>47</sup> The agencies responded, as evidenced by the eleven pages in James Massey's monumental *African Americans and the Church of God, Anderson, Indiana: Aspects of a Social History*. He details breakthroughs "of the color lines," especially at the national level. He believes that "some of these outcomes were in process before the 1970 Black Caucus, and some of them resulted from recommendations and agreements developed because of that caucus."<sup>48</sup>

Two specific demands of the Black Caucus do need consideration—executive hires and inclusion of Blacks in top national leadership positions. In regard to executive hires, the Black Caucus asked each agency to add a Black at the level of Associate Secretary.<sup>49</sup> These hires required financial commitment. They meant that the church had to create new agency positions to comply with the concerns of the Caucus. These hires would place Blacks in places of influence, budget control, and decision-

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., iii.

<sup>47</sup>"A Statement of Progress Regarding the Agencies and Commissions of the Church of God," *Church of God in Black Perspective*, 108. Between 1934 and 1977, Anderson College awarded honorary doctorates to S. P. Dunn in 1934, Raymond S. Jackson in 1970, E. J. Morris, Jr., in 1971, Pansy M. Brown in 1974, Addie L. Wyatt in 1976, and Cauthion T. Boyd in 1977. Warner Pacific College honored Marcus H. Morgan with an honorary doctorate in 1970. See: "Recipients of Honorary Doctoral Degrees," *A Time to Remember: Milestones*, 508.

<sup>48</sup> Massey, *African Americans and the Church of God*, 226-236. Sanders also lists gains, *Saints in Exile*, 104, as does Smith, *Quest*, 404-406.

<sup>49</sup> "A Statement of Progress," *Church of God in Black Perspective*, 109.

making. Agencies in Anderson changed from having no Black executives in 1966 to having at least eight by 1979.<sup>50</sup> These placements meant that Black perspectives would be present in the agencies. The Black Caucus had desired a veto voice over who was hired to make sure that tokenism bereft of power did not occur. Moving toward racial inclusion and justice meant sharing power and an institutional financial commitment.

Perhaps the most strategic move of the Black Caucus involved the office of the Executive Secretary of the Executive Council of the General Assembly. This position was the most visible and powerful in the Church of God. The Executive Secretary coordinated the work of the different agencies. In light of the anticipated change of office that soon would occur due to retirement, the Caucus was “of the firm opinion that there should be included in the office of the Executive Secretary a Black associate with the incoming secretary, now rather than later.”<sup>51</sup> In essence, the Caucus instructed the church to hire a Black leader as Associate Executive Secretary, with the understanding that this Black associate would be groomed to become Executive Secretary. Smith records that in 1975 Edward L. Foggs was “ratified and installed in this newly created office, the first Black person to hold an administrative post of this stature in the Church of God.”<sup>52</sup> Foggs assumed the position of Executive Secretary of the Executive Council in 1987.

Additional evidence of the church’s positive response to the Black Caucus’ call for inclusion occurred as Blacks occupied top leadership positions in national offices and events. Marcus Morgan served as President of the Board of Directors of the Executive Council from 1970 to

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<sup>50</sup>“At least eight” is used because transitions occurred as leaders moved from one post to another. Smith, *Quest*, 404-406; and Massey, *African Americans and the Church of God*, 226-236. Edward L. Foggs, one of the newly hired executives, spoke of the value of policy discussions around the water fountain and at coffee breaks. Edward L. Foggs, interview by author, March 22, 2002. Michael B. Emerson and Christian Smith stated that two factors are most striking about evangelical solutions to racial problems. The solutions are “profoundly individualistic and interpersonal” and “do not require financial or cultural sacrifice,” *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 130. On the contrary, as a holiness body, the Church of God movement changed its corporate culture by hiring executives, a financial investment the church made for the sake of unity.

<sup>51</sup>“A Statement of Progress,” *Church of God in Black Perspective*, 109.

<sup>52</sup>Smith, *Quest*, 405

1981. That was one of the three highest posts of influence in the Church of God movement. Twice since 1983, the two most visible and influential positions in the Church of God have been occupied concurrently by Blacks.<sup>53</sup> That is progress from 1957 when Blacks held only six of the several hundred committee positions in the national church and were excluded from agency leadership. The Black Caucus sought to place Blacks in leadership positions that enabled them to have the authority to exercise power. That demand was significantly realized during the two decades following the convening of the Caucus in 1970.

### **Seven Reasons for Success of the Black Caucus**

Why was the Black Caucus successful? One definition of structural change is the formal inclusion of Blacks in designated agency positions, the greater placement of Blacks on agency boards, increased participation of Blacks in national preaching and teaching settings, and the change in budget priorities to make these developments possible. According to this definition, the Black Caucus met many of its goals. How did the Black Caucus create such significant structural change? What was its strategy of social change?

Except for Ronald Fowler's initial comments regarding power not being "yielded apart from confrontation and conflict,"<sup>54</sup> no one has explained in writing why the Caucus ignited such social change. As a supportive observer who was regularly in communication with several of the Caucus leaders from the mid-1960s until the mid-1990s, I offer seven reflections which help to explain why the Black Caucus ignited such change in the Church of God. These seven elements are crucial to understanding its theory and practice of social change.

First, the Black Caucus knew its Black constituency was a critical mass comprising nearly twenty percent of the Church of God. They had a power base from which to operate.

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<sup>53</sup>This took place from 1987 to 1989 when Edward Foggs was Executive Secretary of the Executive Council and Samuel Hines was Chair of the General Assembly. Then in 2001-2002, Robert Culp served as Chair of the General Assembly and Rhodell Valentine was Chair of the Leadership Council, which replaced the Executive Council. See *Yearbook of the Church of God* for the years 1987, 1988, 1989, 2001, and 2002.

<sup>54</sup>Fowler, *Church of God in Black Perspective*, ii.

Second, leaders of the Black Caucus were significant pastors who commanded the respect of the Church of God. Not only did they often pastor large congregations, but some had been building relationships with White leaders that established them as leaders of the church as a whole. Pastors in the Church of God listen to other pastors who build strong churches, meet human needs, and serve society. Ronald Fowler, who then was Associate Pastor alongside his father, was developing a congregation in Akron with a Sunday morning attendance that would reach 1,200 in 2007. James Massey already was a recognized international speaker, as evidenced by being asked to conduct the private funeral service for the family and friends of Howard Thurman in 1981. Massey was a key speaker at Detroit's memorial service for Martin Luther King, Jr., on April 5, 1968.<sup>55</sup> It is appropriate to acknowledge Massey as the Church of God pastor and scholar whose writings have had the largest impact beyond the Church of God.<sup>56</sup>

Sethard Beverly, pastor in Kansas City, Kansas, would eventually teach urban ministry and Black theology at schools such as Central Baptist Seminary and St. Paul School of Theology, in addition to writing on urban ministry. Pastors Claude and Addie Wyatt of Chicago began working with Martin Luther King, Jr., in 1956. They served on the founding board of Jesse Jackson's *Operation Breadbasket*, which became *People United to Serve Humanity*. Rev. Addie Wyatt was the first woman Vice-President of the Amalgamated Meat Cutters Union. *Time* magazine featured her on the cover of one of its issues in 1975. *Ebony* cited her as one of the "100 Most Influential Black Americans."<sup>57</sup> According to Robert O. Dulin, Jr., Black leaders were generals in the church, not majors or captains, as well as leaders in their cities:

. . . it is my opinion that White leaders were forced to recognize that neither they, nor the church, could continue to lead

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<sup>55</sup>James Earl Massey, *Aspects of My Pilgrimage* (Anderson, IN: Anderson University Press, 2002), 246-248, 341-342.

<sup>56</sup>In addition to his many books, especially on preaching, see James Earl Massey's "Reading the Bible as African Americans," in *The New Interpreter's Bible*, gen'l ed. Leander Keck, 1 (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995), 154-160, and "Hebrews," *True to Our Native Land: An African American New Testament Commentary*, gen'l ed. Brian K Blount (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 444-460.

<sup>57</sup>Richard L. Willowby, "Addie Wyatt—a Christian Activist," *Vital Christianity* 111, no. 2 (February 1991), 25-27.



while ignoring the Black and competent generals in their midst. It was not a matter of earning the right to be heard. The church's witness was at stake and the Black generals stepped forth and said so. White leaders now had to earn to maintain their advantaged positions of leadership.<sup>58</sup>

Third, Black leaders applied to the church the institutional analysis of power and negotiating strategies that they had learned in their national and local civil rights struggles. The author observed Claude and Addie Wyatt teaching ministers how to negotiate with Chicago businesses to get companies to hire neighborhood residents who bought products so that money could be earned from the company and spent in the workers' neighborhood. After determining how much a company earned in a neighborhood in comparison to how many residents the company employed from the neighborhood, the Wyatts began negotiations. The negotiating team would have one member argue an extreme position. Then discussion of the extreme speech ensued. After discussion, these strong demands were followed by a speaker with a more moderate compromise which was what the negotiating team hoped to achieve all along.

The Black Caucus did a similar audit of the power, budgets, and ministries of Church of God agencies, made demands based on their structural analysis, and adopted the negotiating strategies of the civil rights struggles.<sup>59</sup> Although they never threatened to leave the church movement they loved and were trying to change, the Black Caucus strongly reminded Anderson agencies that the future of the Church of God would be determined by the church's response to the concerns of the Caucus. Black Church of God leaders often were leaders in their cities' civil rights movements and used those experiences for changing the church.

Fourth, Black leaders educated and brought along Blacks who initially appeared less militant on the surface. Black Caucus leaders were aware that not all members of the National Association were at the same place ideologically. Key national civil rights leaders, such as C. T. Vivian, spoke and taught at summer institutes at West Middlesex Camp Meeting

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<sup>58</sup>Robert O. Dulin, Jr., e-mail to author, May 21, 2002. Dulin helped me refine and rephrase points two, four, and five of this section.

<sup>59</sup>Reardon recalls these negotiating tactics in a meeting with the Black Caucus when he was president of Anderson College. Robert Reardon, interview by author, May 3, 2003.

and Anderson School of Theology. Pansy M. Brown founded the In-Service Institute of the National Association of the Church of God in 1956. Brown devoted her life to Christian education and the training of ministers.<sup>60</sup> These teaching and preaching sessions in familiar, safe settings gave more conservative Blacks space and time to consider how to adopt more assertive stances in regard to national church polity.

Fifth, the Black Caucus knew there were trustworthy White leaders whom they needed and were therefore willing to risk being dependent on them to help execute change. Two examples represent scores of other supporters. Robert H. Reardon served as president of Anderson College/University from 1958-1983. In 1960 he named the new men's dormitory Dunn Hall in honor of S. P. Dunn, a retired Black Church of God pastor in Chicago. Dunn's successor, E. J. Morris, had directed a gift of \$100,000.00 to Anderson College. Reardon invited James Earl Massey, then a thirty-two year old pastor whose Detroit church had a membership of 702, as Religious Emphasis Week Speaker at Anderson College in October, 1962.<sup>61</sup> When Martin Luther King, Jr., led the March from Selma to Montgomery in March, 1965, Anderson College, under Reardon's leadership, sponsored a march from the college campus to the county courthouse to show support for King. In 1969 Reardon appointed Massey as Anderson College's Campus Pastor. When asked why he supported most of the requests of the Black Caucus, Reardon replied, "It was the right thing to do. Some of us believed in the national civil rights movement and knew this was something we should support."<sup>62</sup>

Martin Luther King, Jr., scheduled a March on Washington for August 28, 1963, and invited church leaders to come and show support for president John F. Kennedy's Civil Rights Bill. Louis Meyer was a White staff executive for urban evangelism and future planning in Anderson, Indiana, and perceived as a very progressive leader. Meyer asked for

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<sup>60</sup>For a biographical sketch of Rev. Brown, see Massey, *Aspects of My Pilgrimage*, 205-213. The author served with Rev. Brown from 1970 to 1976 on Christian education and racial reconciliation seminars in Baltimore and Washington.

<sup>61</sup>Reardon believed Dunn Hall was the first residence hall named for a Black leader on a non-Black college campus and that Massey was the first Black to be Religious Emphasis Week Speaker at Anderson College. Robert H. Reardon, e-mail message to author, August 2, 2002.

<sup>62</sup>Reardon, interview by author, May 3, 2002.

a meeting with his supervisor William E. Reed, Executive Director of the Board of Church Extension and Home Missions. Meyer shared with Reed that he was going to the March on Washington and would pay his own way. Meyer hoped that Reed, also a White, would understand and not be overly concerned by the anticipated backlash that would occur from conservative ministers opposed to the March. Reed listened to Meyer, sat quietly, and said, "I am going with you. We need to represent the Board and the church in this cause. The Board will pay our way." Reed also invited and paid for Edward L. Foggs and Maurice Caldwell to go.<sup>63</sup>

Black leaders positively noted the Board of Church Extension's participation in the March on Washington. However, not all Anderson executives responded as readily as Reardon, Meyer, and Reed. Foggs told of one executive who just did not understand what Blacks wanted. Foggs said, "He was persuaded along the way. He responded because of institutional pressure and the milk of human kindness."<sup>64</sup>

Sixth, thirteen years of church resolutions and study commissions set the stage for the Black Caucus. Blacks usually initiated these resolutions and study commissions. These actions slowly led the church to accept most of the concerns presented by the Black Caucus in 1970. Sometimes activists dismiss denominational resolutions as empty rhetoric, or as escapist alternatives to action, but the initiatives of 1957, 1964, and 1968, and the creation of the Commission on Social Concerns in 1964, were positive steps that prepared the church to support most concerns raised by the Black Caucus in 1970.

Finally, the Black Caucus appealed to the message of unity and holiness central to the Church of God's origin and reason for being. The church's radio program broadcast the slogan "A United Church for a Divided World." The Caucus pleaded for the church to implement institutionally the unity it proclaimed. It was that message of holiness and unity that drew Blacks to the Church of God in the early decades of the movement's existence.

Black clergy continue to monitor and address issues of racism in the Church of God. Cheryl Sanders maintains that these Black clergy are

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<sup>63</sup>Louis Meyer, interview by author, August 1978. See Maurice Caldwell, "My Two Visits with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., *Church of God Peace Fellowship* (Autumn-Winter 2004-05), 9

<sup>64</sup>Edward L. Foggs, interview by author, March 22, 2002.

motivated by the dream “of an eschatological community guided by a vision of racial harmony, spirited worship, and holy living.”<sup>65</sup> However, the appeal to institutional ideology was effective for the Black Caucus because it was combined with the prior six elements of social pressure. Rhetoric was joined with profound social analysis and the awareness that power must be confronted with power and action. The Black Caucus of the Church of God embodied Black power and brought institutional change at the national level of at least one holiness body, the Church of God (Anderson, IN).

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<sup>65</sup>Sanders, *Saints in Exile*, 105.

# THE ROLE OF SCRIPTURE IN KARL BARTH'S RELATING OF THEOLOGY AND ETHICS

by

Nathan J. Willowby

*By utilizing scripture as the starting point for doing theology, and taking seriously the classic texts on holiness and sanctification, Barth shares common ground with Wesley and the Wesleyans. Barth's understanding of the meaning and extent of sanctification, and the ethical implications he draws out from it are all quite acceptable to Wesleyans. His location of the objective basis of sanctification in the atoning work of Jesus Christ, his willingness to speak of sanctification as the impartation of righteousness to man, his strong emphasis on the death to sin accompanied by a rising to the newness of life in Christ: all of these concepts are remarkably compatible with the Wesleyan point of view.<sup>1</sup>*

One of the great feats of Karl Barth is the way in which he reclaims the Christian study of theology and ethics as one field. He said: "There is no dogmatics which is not also and necessarily ethics."<sup>2</sup> Barth is an invaluable guide and resource to those who recognize the inherent ethical

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<sup>1</sup>Daniel B. Spross. "The Doctrine of Sanctification in the Theology of Karl Barth," *Wesleyan Theological Journal*. 20 no 2( Fall 1985): 71.

<sup>2</sup>Karl Barth. *Church Dogmatics*, 2/2. trans. G. W. Bromiley, et al. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1957), 12. Subsequent citations will cite volume and page number.

concerns facing theology or approach ethics from a theological center. The epigraph above comes from one of only a few articles expressly dealing with Karl Barth published in the *Wesleyan Theological Journal*. Its author, Daniel B. Spross, saw in 1985 that the theological winds were changing and Wesleyans could begin to use the Reformed Barth in theology, especially regarding the theology of sanctification. Spross is correct. Karl Barth has much to offer Wesleyans, particularly the way he relates theology and ethics through a thoroughly biblical Christology.

How did Barth relate theology and ethics? I will pay particular attention to the importance of Christology for this relation, specifically considering the biblical nature of Barth's Christology and the centrality of Christology for the biblical nature of his theology and ethics—though these two are never truly separable. I will then consider some Wesleyan similarities to the way Barth understands theology and ethics. Finally the paper will close with a proposal for the use of Scripture for the formation of a holy people.

### **Theology and Ethics in Barth**

Karl Barth draws together theology and ethics in such a way that whenever he speaks of theology he speaks of ethics and whenever he speaks of ethics he speaks of theology.<sup>3</sup> In Barth, each treatment of a particular aspect of faith has an equally integral and corresponding ethic, “not as a practical ‘corollary,’ but as the equally essential ‘decision-side’ of the truth of an article of faith.”<sup>4</sup> Throughout Barth's major work, *Church Dogmatics*, he treats the doctrines of the Word of God, God, Creation, and Reconciliation in a manner that exemplifies the inherent relation between the often separated fields of theology and ethics. Reader of Barth and theological ethicist Stanley Hauerwas notes, “each volume of the *Church Dogmatics* exemplifies how any attempt to treat one aspect of Christian doctrine requires all the others in a manner demanding that you

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<sup>3</sup>Barth himself expressly described his intention to hold together theology and ethics. Gerhard Sauter. “Vorwort zur Neuausgabe” to the *Christliche Dogmatik im Entwurf* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 1982), xvi. Accessed in Digital Karl Barth Library (<http://solomon.dkbl.alexanderstreet.com>). Author's translation: “The first talk of a five-volume construction of Dogmatics with the inclusion of ethics, which will be distributed over the dogmatic loci, is in a letter to Karl Stoevesandt from December 12, 1930.”

<sup>4</sup>Hans Urs von Balthasar. *The Theology of Karl Barth* (San Francisco: Communio, 1992), 222.

return to the beginning and start all over again.”<sup>5</sup> The fields of ethics and theology and even particular theological doctrines require one another. In this way, the doctrine of God requires the doctrine of the Word and the doctrine of the Word requires the doctrine of God. In addition to this doctrinal interrelation, the implications for ethics of each doctrine is thoroughly related to the other doctrines.

Beyond this necessary relation between the various Christian doctrines, the connection or relation between dogmatics and ethics exists implicitly in all doctrines, but can be seen expressly in Barth's doctrine of sanctification.

The various departments of dogmatics do not lie alongside each other, but are implicated in each other, so that we cannot really work through any of them without expressly bearing in mind all the others to a greater or lesser extent, and certainly not without keeping them all in view. At what point, for example, does the doctrine of the Trinity cease to have any decisive importance, or the doctrine of the Church, or of justification, or of the return of Jesus Christ? At what point especially can we cease to keep in view the doctrine of the incarnation of the Word of God? It is just the same with the special doctrine of sanctification in which dogmatics directly and expressly becomes ethics.<sup>6</sup>

While dogmatics directly becomes ethics in the doctrine of sanctification, there is neither a separate volume of the *Church Dogmatics* on ethics, nor is ethics limited to sections treating specific ethical concerns related to sanctification, e.g. in IV/2. This structure is not accidental. Barth intended to write dogmatics that incorporated ethics throughout the dogmatic sections.<sup>7</sup> While some have overlooked Barth as having value for Christian ethics because he does not treat ethics as a separate field, he has historical precedence for his approach. Hauerwas points out, “Once there was no Christian ethics simply because Christians could not distinguish between their beliefs and their behavior. They assumed that their lives exemplified

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<sup>5</sup>Stanley Hauerwas. *Sanctify Them in the Truth*. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998) 2.

<sup>6</sup>I.2, 792.

<sup>7</sup>Cf. note 3—the letter to Karl Stoevesandt. I am thankful for D. Stephen Long alerting me to Gerhard Sauter's “Vorwort zur Neuausgabe” in *Christliche Dogmatik*.

(or at least should exemplify) their doctrines in a manner that made a division between life and doctrine impossible.”<sup>8</sup> Consistent with these lines, Barth is instructive for seeing the necessary correlation between belief and behavior, but relating the two does not mean that ethics disappears (nor does theology).

What, therefore, does Barth mean by “ethics”? Theological ethics is understanding the command of God.<sup>9</sup> The command of God guides and is ethics for Barth. Ethics is not making decisions, but rather recognizing the decisions that God makes and how we understand ourselves as people who are obedient to God’s command. If ethics is not making decisions but evaluating what is the will of God, then ethics implies a cooperative response to each person’s knowledge of the divine command (as given by God).<sup>10</sup>

Doing this well requires a particular approach. Knowing what God is commanding and how humans are to respond means placing the question of “Who” before the questions of “Ought.” First get God right, then get human agency right. But there is no real distinction; they come together, belief entails responsive action.<sup>11</sup> One can only know “How” to live with knowledge of “Who” God is. We see here the resonance with Wesleyan participation themes that are also present in Barth’s understanding of participation in Christ.<sup>12</sup>

At this point, we must turn to the role of Christology in the relation of theology and ethics. Christology is the *noetic* and *ontic* source of the command of God and human anthropology. Barth states, “If dogmatics, if the doctrine of God, is ethics, this means necessarily and decisively that it is the attestation of that *divine* ethics, the attestation of the good of the command issued to Jesus Christ and fulfilled by Him. There can be no question of any other good in addition to this.”<sup>13</sup> In Christ, God has

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<sup>8</sup>Hauerwas, 20.

<sup>9</sup>III/4: 4.

<sup>10</sup>Drawing on Nigel Biggar, *The Hastening That Waits*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 27, note 92.

<sup>11</sup>Allan F. Torrance, “On Deriving ‘Ought’ from ‘Is’: Christology, Covenant and *Koinonia*” in *The Doctrine of God and Theological Ethics* (New York: T & T Clark International, 2006), 167. He draws upon Bonhoeffer here.

<sup>12</sup>Cf IV/2: 307-380 and McCormack, “Participation in God, Yes; Deification, No,” in *Orthodox and Modern*.

<sup>13</sup>II/2: 518.



shown the world who God is. In knowing who God is, humanity also receives true knowledge of what it means to be human. Christ makes possible this knowledge. Christology is thus a larger category for Barth than many theologians. He states,

We must repeat that Christology is more than the doctrine of the incarnation or person of Christ. It is also the doctrine of the work of Christ. His humiliation. His exaltation, His three-fold office. And as such it forms the presupposition and substance of our whole doctrine of reconciliation and faith, of justification and sanctification, of the Church and the sacraments.<sup>14</sup>

Both humanity's created *being* and *becoming* derive from Christ. Christology is the lynchpin behind understanding the command of God, and, as such Christology holds together theology, ethics, and the particular expression of ethics within the doctrine of sanctification. Furthermore, since for Barth, "the special doctrine of sanctification [is the one] in which dogmatics directly and expressly becomes ethics,"<sup>15</sup> we must understand how sanctification is tied to Christology.

McCormack offers one explanation of the relation in Barth between Christology and sanctification:

In that we hear his call, in that it is given to us to share in an event of Self-interpretation in and through which Jesus Christ corresponds here and now to the event of his existence there and then, we are given a share in his sanctity—and to just this extent, we anticipate our future participation in God. We do not cease to be sinners—but we are now "disturbed sinners." Without ceasing to live "below" and therefore "in the flesh," we are enabled to look away from ourselves, to lift up our heads to the One who is exalted above.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid: 80. Another example comes in IV/1: 48—"As very God and very man He is the concrete reality and actuality of the divine command and the divine promise, the content of the will of God which exists prior to its fulfillment, the basis of the whole project and actualization of creation and the whole process of divine providence from which all created being and becoming derives."

<sup>15</sup>I/2: 792.

<sup>16</sup>Bruce McCormack. "Participation in God, Yes; Deification, No," in *Orthodox and Modern*, 247.

Participation and witness are central to the correlation of sanctification with Christology. It does not try to grasp after that which belongs to God, but rather points to Christ who in his life points to God and the Spirit.

Witness is important in connecting ethics and theology through Christology because it is the way in which we point back to the source of our being and knowledge. This theme of witness in Barth is crucial to understanding the Christian life as obedient response to the divine command. Before turning to specific expressions of ethics in Barth, particularly in connection with Wesleyan understandings of the relation of theology and ethics, the importance of Christology in this relation must be considered.

### Importance of Christology in This Relation

Barth's massive amount of writing is concerned with the seemingly simple task of helping the church to proclaim more faithfully and obediently that "Jesus is Lord." But, even in understanding this claim, "pressure of interpretation is necessarily *from* and not *to* the person of Christ."<sup>17</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar emphasizes the centrality of analogy in Barth's theology. This analogy functions always to keep Christ in the center of all that is said and known by Christians. Balthasar noticed that, as Barth continued writing his successive volumes of the *Dogmatics*, he moved from the central notion of "the Word of God" to "Jesus Christ, God and man."<sup>18</sup> The more deeply that Barth explicates and expresses the implications of the Incarnation, the Christologically founded concept of analogy, which "already led Barth to acknowledge a compatibility between God and creature," begins to move beyond the contrast and contradiction between proclamation and theology.<sup>19</sup> Christology and specifically the *analogia fidei* becomes the way forward for theology and ethics. Christ as God and man is the central expression of the "Who," determining the "ought." Balthasar adds that "man's freedom, rationality and spirituality must be understood from their basis of creation-in-Christ. We can only know what created spirit *really* is from the fact of its being created in Christ. We can only know what *true* freedom really is when it encounters the event of revelation."<sup>20</sup> Christ is the epistemological ground of all ethics.

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<sup>17</sup>Torrance, 168.

<sup>18</sup>Balthasar, 114.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 131.

As source and end of God's activity on earth, Christology is the central and crucial doctrine that illumines Barth's interrelated theology and ethics. This relation incorporates the importance of the church as well. The power of the resurrection of Christ is the basis for the church that in turn reciprocally exists to witness back to Christ. In this way, Christology is the source and foundation as well as the ultimate end of the church's life.<sup>21</sup> Christians are not lords, but rather follow and serve the Lord.<sup>22</sup> In Barth, ethics is living in the granted freedom that follows the leading. It is not making decisions but rather the freedom to respond to the divine decisions which are commanded from above in each and every particular moment in time. We must highlight that Barth sees the command of God as discernable within a Christologically defined reference.<sup>23</sup> The command and guidance can only be heard by the revelation in and of Christ, and dogmatics or theology is the substance of what it means to say "Jesus is Lord."

From this point of revelation in Christ, the man Jesus makes faithful obedience possible for sinful humanity. Barth explains how the event of Incarnation, including the death and resurrection of Christ, becomes constitutive of Christian ethics. William Werpehowski highlights the importance of the story of Christ. In the Incarnation, Christ did not live a "successful" life but suffered and was killed as a criminal, yet he was raised from the dead and in his resurrection all humanity is exalted to glory. This is the covenant and mercy of God with humans and it happened in Christ.<sup>24</sup> He quotes Barth, saying that "Christian ethics cannot be understood if this story is omitted or misinterpreted. For it is just this history which calls out continually to the activity of men."<sup>25</sup>

This Christological foundation is significant in the way it makes possible the human exaltation that is so crucial in any understanding of sanctification and ethical living. Barth states, "Because there is a way of

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<sup>21</sup>IV/2: 310.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 377.

<sup>23</sup>cf III/4 and II/2 on formed reference and the command of God. In IV/2 this formed reference is identified with Jesus Christ in §66 "The Sanctification of Man."

<sup>24</sup>William Werpehowski, "Narrative and Ethics in Karl Barth," in *Theology Today*, 43 no 3 O 1986, 335. Citing: Karl Barth, *God Here and Now*, trans. Paul M. van Buren (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), 88.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

God downward to man, there is also a way of man upward to God.”<sup>26</sup> This happens in the man Jesus Christ for all of humanity, and within Jesus humanity can receive exaltation. While at first glance Barth’s emphasis on God’s sovereignty and the centrality of Jesus may leave one to question what capacity humanity has in communion with God, reconciliation in Barth does include this move upward. In this case, the pervasive existence of Christology as answer to questions in *Church Dogmatics* does not limit human participation, but rather enables it. Jesus—fully human and fully divine—always includes the possibility of human participation. This participation comes through the work of the Holy Spirit that draws the Christian into the glorification of Christ.

We must note here the limit of this participation. While Jesus makes human participation possible and exalts humanity, only in the *anhypostatic/enhypostatic* person of Jesus of Nazareth, who is Son of God and Son of Man in one person, does this participation reach the level of divinity. McCormack specifically considers deification and theosis in Barth. He sees in Barth a future possibility of deification, but must present deification be denied? McCormack’s understanding of deification should be questioned. A more thorough understanding of the Eastern Orthodox understanding of theosis as mediated through a Western theologian like Wesley raises the possibility that Barth’s understanding of participation aligns more closely with theosis than McCormack acknowledges.<sup>27</sup> This participation in Barth must be understood to function within received boundaries instead of constituting the boundaries, as will be mentioned in a later section.

Consistent with the way Barth makes all doctrines relate to one another, in as much as Barth emphasizes the Christological aspect of ethics, he also connects human participation with his doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Barth’s Christology is deeply pneumatological, just as his pneumatology is Christological. A person becomes a Christian by the sovereign operative power of Christ’s resurrection and the revelation it brings.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, this power is presupposed in the New Testament and “is the outgoing and receiving and presence and action of the Holy Spirit” who

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<sup>26</sup>IV/2: 118.

<sup>27</sup>cf. Randy Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley’s Practical Theology* (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 1994).

<sup>28</sup>IV/2: 318.

leads our change to think, speak, and act in a new way and creates the fellowship of the Christian community.<sup>29</sup> Says Barth, "It is He who opens [the community's] mouth to confess Him . . . it is He who gives to it and all its members, to the witnesses and those who hear them and themselves become witnesses, to Christians as He makes them such, the appropriate contour and impression and form and direction in which, for all their likeness with other people, they are and act differently from others."<sup>30</sup> Through the Spirit, this community responds to the divine command and conforms to Christ—the source and *telos* of the Christian community.

The Spirit is also described not just as the giver of directions but as the actual direction given.<sup>31</sup> And the Holy Spirit is characterized as "definite instruction."<sup>32</sup> But perhaps most importantly, Barth asserts, we have to do with the true Son of God when we have to do with the Holy Spirit.<sup>33</sup> "The Holy Spirit who instructs the community and the individual Christian is concretely the Spirit of Jesus."<sup>34</sup> The Spirit is crucial to ethics, salvation, theological knowledge, and even the revelation of Christ. The Holy Spirit always points to Christ and derives power from Christ, so that when Barth speaks of the Spirit, he is also speaking of Christ illumining the relation of theology and ethics.

Barth's relation between theology and ethics now appears to be Christological at some places and pneumatological at others. But which one is it? Much that Barth says conveys initial contradiction. He says things at one point and later makes a claim that appears to totally contradict his earlier claim. Some statements seem paradoxical or confusing, for example, "He is *the* Rejected, as and because He is *the* Elect."<sup>35</sup> Is Barth confused? George Hunsinger has identified a helpful frame in which to understand Barth's theological and ethical approach.

### **Barth's Christology and Use of Biblical Idiom**

Hunsinger notes the juxtaposition used by Barth in his Chalcedonian Christology and sees an intentional alternation between "Alexandrian"

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 319.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 362.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 372.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 373.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> II/2: 353. This is but one example of the yes and no, yes that overcomes a no, the dialectical theological claim of Barth.

and “Antiochian” idioms. Furthermore, he notes that this diversity of idioms follows the practice of the New Testament itself.<sup>36</sup> Barth did, after all, storm the theological scene with a biblical commentary, so finding tension in Barth similar to the tension found in Scripture should not be a surprise. Hunsinger sees in Barth’s theology a collage that has collected “seemingly incompatible materials” toward the end of articulating a true theology.<sup>37</sup> Barth understood the task of theology, and particularly the central doctrine of Christology, as comprehending “the incomprehensibility of the incarnation precisely in its incomprehensibility.”<sup>38</sup>

The New Testament presents Jesus as both Son of God and a man from Nazareth. Barth recognized that “it is impossible to listen at one and the same time to the two statements that Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God, and that the Son of God is Jesus of Nazareth. One hears either the one or the other or one hears nothing. When one is heard, the other can be heard only indirectly, in faith.”<sup>39</sup> Beyond the doctrine of Christology and the biblical witness about Jesus, Christ himself makes seemingly contradictory claims. Jesus says “if you are not for me you are against me, if you are not against me you are for me” (Matt. 12:30 and Mark 9:40). Grounding his theology biblically, Barth recognized that Scripture does not always paint a fully cohesive system of describing the acts of God and identity of Jesus. “The Incarnation is inconceivable, but it is not absurd, and it must not be explained as an absurdity.”<sup>40</sup> Barth is not one to hide behind the challenges of Christology and claim Jesus’ divinity and humanity as an “absurd mystery.”

Barth takes the biblical witness seriously and treats it with textual responsibility. He incorporates copious exegetical notes into his doctrinal sections. Michael Wyschogrod considers Barth’s textual responsibility and writes, “Reading a page of Barth is something like shock therapy because it introduces the reader or listener to a frame of reference that attempts only to be true to itself and its sources and not to external

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<sup>36</sup>George Hunsinger, “Karl Barth’s Christology: Its Basic Chalcedonian Character,” in John Webster ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, 127-143

<sup>37</sup>Hunsinger, 130.

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.* Hunsinger’s direction pushes this argument forward. He mentions the synoptic and Johannine differences that combine to tell who Jesus really is.

<sup>39</sup>I/1: 180. Hunsinger cites this quote 131.

<sup>40</sup>I/2: 160. Hunsinger 131.

demands that can be satisfied only by fitting the church's message into their mold, a mold foreign to it and therefore necessarily distorting."<sup>41</sup> Barth reckons with the world of the Bible and brings that world to inform all theology and all ethics. In the Bible, Barth adds, "we find the 'indispensable documents' by which we may call to remembrance the history of Jesus Christ; there we also find an account of that 'condition of life' created among us by the grace of God. 'From the Bible we learn to submit to such a condition of life.'"<sup>42</sup> By locating knowledge of God and humanity in the actualized Christology found in the New Testament, Barth identifies the Bible as the place where ethical and theological boundaries are found. Theology and ethics cannot be done faithfully unless they speak within these boundaries, and the juxtaposition of alternating biblical idiom provides a way to make sense of the inconceivable.

This biblical idiom is not isolated to Christology and is instructive for Barth's approach to specific Christian ethics. Because his ethical understanding rests upon the vertical reception and encounter with the command of God, Barth's ethics has been accused of occasionalism or being a "situation ethics." Furthermore, those who seek to take his ethics seriously as instructive for Christian communities wrestle with the difficulty in lived experience of knowing when the voice or command of God has been heard. Barth's sections on special ethics can be read in the light that the biblical idiom provides boundaries. This is a way to understand and articulate the horizontal nature of Barth's ethics that he always claims is present.

### **Benefits of Biblical Idiom in Barth's Ethics**

The biblical witness can be understood as a source of the horizontal history of God's controlling witness which shapes boundaries of the divine command. "The hearing and obeying which proceeds from and by the Word of God is man's sanctification. Ethics has to understand the Word of God as the fullness, measure and source of this sanctification."<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup>Hunsinger, "Response to Werpehowski," in *Theology Today*, 43 no. 3 O 1986. Hunsinger raises the example of Wyschogrod—fr. p. 79 in Michael Wyschogrod, *The Body of Faith* (New York: Seabury, 1983) "The Christian theologian whom Wyschogrod goes on to mention as displaying an eminently Jewish sense of textual responsibility is Karl Barth."

<sup>42</sup>Werpehowski. 335. Quoting from Barth, *God Here and Now*, trans. Paul M. van Buren (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), 90.

<sup>43</sup>III/4: 4.

Barth's use of biblical idiom in the ethical concepts of casuistry and formed reference provides a way of understanding the horizontal realm of Barth's ethics as well creating space to draw parallels between Barth's ethics and some Wesleyan approaches to moral theology and the creation of a holy people.

Barth denies that his ethics can be understood as casuistry. He states, "The way of casuistry is basically unacceptable, however enticing it might seem, and however convenient it would be both for spiritual advisers and above all for troubled souls if this way could be followed."<sup>44</sup> However, Nigel Biggar and John Howard Yoder have discussed Barth's ethics and questioned if he has a full enough account of casuistry in mind when he dismisses it as an ethical option.<sup>45</sup>

Biggar claims that Barth's only major problem is "his lingering tendency to equate system with sinful moral autonomy, resulting in a failure to distinguish between open and closed rationalistic systems and leading him to a misguided attack on casuistry *per se*."<sup>46</sup> In addition, Biggar states that Barth's special ethics is in fact itself an instance of such a non-deductive, open-ended form of casuistry. However, the problem with casuistry or any other ethical system for Barth is removing the need for a revelatory encounter with God in receiving the divine command. "Casuistry destroys the freedom [to voluntarily confess what is proposed in] obedience. It openly interposes something other and alien between the command of God and the man who is called to obey him."<sup>47</sup> The only way to reconcile Barth with any casuistry, even the open-ended version proposed by Yoder and Biggar, is to repeatedly emphasize the nature of formed reference or boundaries which are not established or owned by the system but are only received from the history of God's activity with creation. The boundary or formed reference is given by God and controlled by God in the person of Jesus.<sup>48</sup> Any proposal to understand Barth's ethics in any way similar to casuistry must maintain that for the

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<sup>44</sup>Ibid., 8.

<sup>45</sup>Nigel Biggar, "Ethics as an Aid to Hearing," in *The Hastening that Waits: Karl Barth's Ethics*. and John Howard Yoder, *Karl Barth and the Problem of War*.

<sup>46</sup>Gerald P. McKenny. "Heterogeneity and Ethical Deliberation: Casuistry, Narrative, and Event in the Ethics of Karl Barth," in *Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics*, 20 2000, 208.

<sup>47</sup>III/4: 13.

<sup>48</sup>IV/2: 373ff.



Christian "it is not merely his ethical conduct, nor his will, purpose and intention, but himself that is demanded."<sup>49</sup>

The concept of formed reference must take center stage at this point. Faithfulness to God and the divine command requires response to God's faithfulness in the covenant. In the biblical record of the divine command through time, Israel is to co-respond by mirroring back God's faithfulness. They are to be "unconditionally faithful to God and to each other (those others to whom God is faithful)."<sup>50</sup> "Special ethics" amounts to a commentary on the history of relationship between God and persons, and it is not surprising that Barth will turn to biblical narratives in his attempt to offer the commentary."<sup>51</sup> Formed reference must be understood through these biblical narratives. Part of Barth's genius is being able to hold the breadth of Scriptural metaphors and directives in the horizontal aspect of the divine command through his use of the alternating biblical idiom.

### Formed Reference in the Idiom of Biblical Witness

For Barth the human creature hears and understands the command of God and how this command is understood to be consistent without losing God's freedom in each situation of command.<sup>52</sup> This consistency and constancy is the formed reference. The divine command will not come in a way that is inconsistent with the history of divine revelation and the history of the divine command through time (the horizontal record of the vertical divine command). Practical ethics serves a pedagogical purpose, providing "instructional preparation [*unterweisende Vorbereitung*] for the ethical event."<sup>53</sup>

This formed reference is special ethics. Though the command of God cannot be made to fit within a system, "special ethics may thus serve as an instructional preparation for the ethical event. And as such instruction it will plainly be distinguished not only from all casuistry but also from an ethics which is satisfied with a formless reference to the God who claims, decides and judges in the ethical event, to the Holy Spirit, or to the 'command of the hour' and such like."<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>49</sup>Ibid., 14.

<sup>50</sup>Torrance, 172.

<sup>51</sup>Werpehowski, 342.

<sup>52</sup>III/4: 17.

<sup>53</sup>McKenny, 216.

<sup>54</sup>III/4: 18.

Barth continues, “Since in this event it is a matter of the claim, decision and judgment of God, we can allow ourselves to be instructed, if at all, only by God Himself, and therefore by His Word, concerning the connexion, the permanence, continuity and constancy in which [the divine command] takes place.”<sup>55</sup> Though in Barth’s understanding of the formed reference he continues to dismiss the possibility of casuistry, certain understandings of careful casuistry incorporate this notion of formed reference. Forms of careful Christian casuistry and specifically a biblically formed reference offer ways to understand faithful contemporary Christian ethics.

### **Wesleyan Similarities to Barth**

Reconciling Wesleyan and Reformed Christology, sanctification, and ethics does not happen seamlessly. A Wesleyan reading Barth will often dispute various theological claims. In Barth’s relation of ethics and theology, however, there are similarities and places for rapprochement. At places, Barth offers articulations of sanctification which correspond to Wesleyan understandings. For example, “Because we are what we are in Jesus Christ before God and therefore in truth, it can be said of us that we are righteous before God and that we are also holy before God.”<sup>56</sup> In Barth’s understanding, the ontological truth is that we are actually righteous and holy *in* Christ despite the “madness” that the claim would be outside of an identification with Christ.

Another aspect of correspondence is Wesley’s rejection of a universal context for ethical practices. D. Stephen Long notes that Wesley was not a good modern theologian in his attempt to discover a universal principle of the good for ethics, and it is precisely because Wesley did not do this that he is instructive for contemporary ethics.<sup>57</sup> Wesley is similar to Barth in that they both recognized that obedience to God requires atten-

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<sup>55</sup>Ibid., 19.

<sup>56</sup>IV/2: 273-274. Also consider: “Justification is not sanctification and does not merge into it. Sanctification is not justification and does not merge into it. Although the two belong indissolubly together, the one cannot be explained by the other. It is one thing that God turns in free grace to sinful man, and quite another that in the same free grace He converts man to Himself.” IV/2: 503, cited in Spross, 63.

<sup>57</sup>D. Stephen Long, *John Wesley’s Moral Theology: The Quest for God and Goodness* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 2005), xvi-xvii.

tion to God in each and every ethical situation, not grasping to a system or principle that would remove God from the equation.<sup>58</sup>

### **The Future of Scripture as Boundaries for the Command of God**

Wesleyans face a challenge to their historical expressions of ethics and sanctification. Normative experiences of entire sanctification from past decades no longer dominate the lived experience for many. Understandings of ethics and sanctification must take into account that "ethics is not to be . . . a strenuous form of 'heroic obedience' to impersonal laws."<sup>59</sup> Grounding ethics as obedience to the command of God can move the focus to the encounter with God instead of courageous will-power, passive Spirit-filling, or acute deliberation. In addition to focusing on the command of God, emphasizing Scripture as the source of the boundaries for this command requires a renewed emphasis on the parish context and the communal nature of ethics.

There is a level of deliberation that must take place within ethics as the command of God, so long as the final judgment and command comes from God. However, what cannot happen is for humans to claim ability to know God's will outside of a revelation event—no matter how precise and careful the system of deliberation. Despite using them throughout his discussion of ethics in III/4, Barth goes so far as to claim that even the Decalogue and Sermon on the Mount are not norms that enable the human being to know God's will in any given situation. Even these biblical accounts of God's will are situated in particular times and contexts and point to vertical commands. Ethics is the evaluation of a decision, not making decisions. Only God makes decisions concerning what is in the will of God.<sup>60</sup> Adequate participation in this deliberation, which maintains dependence on God's decision, requires communal support and reflection.

Much like the band meetings in Wesley's England, the future of ethics must incorporate faithful communal reflection. Ethical obligation entails ecclesial participation "in the love of God . . . and the unconditional and irreducibly historical commitment of God to the world in

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<sup>58</sup>Further similarities include the role of the commandments as intended to be lived in this lifetime, but they can only be lived because of Christ's righteousness.

<sup>59</sup>Torrance, 182.

<sup>60</sup>Biggar, 27, note 92.

reconciliation (1 John 4:9-10)”<sup>61</sup> As one approach, Yoder raises the option of careful Christian casuistry which “comes to the situation prepared with certain criteria derived from the Christian community’s past experience with God’s revelation, instead of coming empty-handed and deciding extemporaneously on the basis of the possibilities and interests which seem in the moment to be at stake.”<sup>62</sup> But, once again, this requires the *community’s* experience, and particularly a communal engagement with Scripture and knowledge of each other’s encounters with God’s divine command. This reflection upon history helps the community discern the boundaries within which the Christian can expect to find God’s vertical command.

The biblical witness anticipates the need to remember the lives of the saints, the faithful, and the obedient when Deuteronomy 6 instructs the Israelites to tell the story of God’s faithfulness when asked to explain the meaning of testimonies, statutes, and ordinances.<sup>63</sup> Related to the community discernment of the boundaries for God’s command, Wesley highlighted biography in the *Christian Library* in order to “highlight the importance of the oppositional character of lived experience in the story of martyrs.”<sup>64</sup> The history of the faithful as revealed in Scripture reminds the church and those seeking to be holy people that obedience to God has taken various forms throughout time. But in these stories, a general shape emerges—similar to the formation of boundaries (defined by God) in Barth’s ethics—in which the church can trust that the road of faithfulness will be located. Admittedly, Barth is going to point more specifically and repeatedly to Jesus as the boundary, but the point remains that he and Wesley offer examples and communities as sources of understanding the boundaries of faithful Christian living, or what God has consistently commanded through time.

Beyond recalling the history of both lived experience and biblical witness, Barth’s model of thoroughgoing biblical ethics offers an instruc-

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<sup>61</sup>Torrance, 181.

<sup>62</sup>John Howard Yoder, *Karl Barth and the Problem of War and Other Essays on Barth* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2003), 44-45.

<sup>63</sup>Werpehowski, 340. Werpehowski uses this text in establishing the legitimacy of the divine claim as does Barth in II/2: 562.

<sup>64</sup>Long, *Living the Discipline*, 27. Admittedly, there is no emphasis on martyrs in Barth, but we can understand Wesley’s use of the stories of the faithful as consistent with Barth’s understanding of formed reference.

tive way forward. Instead of seeking to make ethics logically consistent, the goal should be faithfulness to the biblical idioms and formulations. Christian ethics must seek faithfulness over acceptance. Hunsinger notes, "the rule which seems constantly to govern [Barth's] theology could be formulated like this: Adequacy is a higher virtue than consistency. Adequacy for Barth meant loyalty to the world of the biblical text, even at the cost of tolerating logical and perceptual discrepancies. It meant espousing truths which logic could not contain and present experience did not shape."<sup>65</sup>

Additionally, Stanley Hauerwas notes a similar feature of Barth's theology: "One of Barth's great virtues was the courage to say what he knew needed to be said before he had figured out how to defend it."<sup>66</sup> Wesleyan moral theology can learn from Barth that, even if we do not know how to fully defend or even understand what it means to follow the purpose of holiness as a people, obedience requires the courage to affirm what needs to be said, to *be* and *remain* obedient to the world of the biblical text while calling Christians to allow this biblical world to shape their experience and understanding and actions.

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<sup>65</sup>George Hunsinger, "Response to Werpehowski," 359.

<sup>66</sup>Hauerwas, *With the Grain of the Universe*. (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2001), 144.



**Dr. Howard A. Snyder**

## “LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT” RESPONSE

by

Howard A. Snyder

Recently I have been reading Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen’s book *The Trinity: Global Perspectives*. In discussing Asian views of the Trinity, Kärkkäinen notes that a sharp criticism of Western theology raised by some Asian theologians is the Western tendency to think in either/or categories. To quote Kärkkäinen, summarizing the Eastern criticism: “Western thinking is founded on the dualistic principle of the excluded middle. A sentence can be only true or false, not both-and. The Asian way of thinking resists that kind of either/or distinction.”<sup>1</sup> Kärkkäinen cites in particular the criticisms voiced by theologians Raimundo Pannikar and Jung Young Lee.

We may debate whether the criticism is valid or not. At the least, it certainly needs some qualification. However, I think we can acknowledge some truth here. Western theology often does tend to either/or ways of thinking that fail to grasp the breadth and depth of the biblical gospel, and this is particularly true of highly rationalistic forms of theology, including much of Evangelicalism.

To me, one of the great strengths of John Wesley’s thought and practice is precisely its inclusive, both-and character. We could list many examples—“all inward *and* outward holiness,” “justice, mercy, *and* truth,” “holiness *and* happiness.” Or, more fundamentally, there is Wesley’s affir-

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<sup>1</sup>Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *The Trinity: Global Perspectives* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 313. We may want to quibble with Kärkkäinen’s use of “excluded middle.”

mation of *both* God's sovereignty and human freedom, of *both* salvation by faith and the necessity of good works, and the continuing value of the law despite the priority of grace. There also is his insistence that salvation is *both* a present and an eschatological reality—or, more accurately, that it is present as fact, promise, and process, all at once, and it is future according to the sure promise of the full "restoration of all things."

I noted this conjunctive feature of Wesley's theology in a chapter called "The Wesleyan Synthesis" in my 1980 book, *The Radical Wesley*. And as I comment in my new book *Yes in Christ: Wesleyan Reflections on Gospel, Mission, and Culture*,<sup>2</sup>

Wesley had several unusual advantages that lifted his vision beyond that of most figures in Christian history. He was blessed with a well-informed Christian upbringing, especially with a wise mother who helped him think deeply. He had a both/and rather than an either/or mind, both rational and poetic, fascinated by language, alert to metaphor and paradox, yet interested in logic and in scientific discovery (both right-brained and left-brained, we would say today). He was a voracious reader with broad and eclectic tastes. His grounding in the Anglican *via media* of Scripture, reason, and tradition gave him historical and theological breadth. He studied at Oxford during the rediscovery of early Christian sources.

Further, Wesley lived at the height at the Age of Reason but also at the beginning of new interest in human experience and emotion or "enthusiasm." He read of the discoveries coming from the "New World" and England's far-flung empire. He experienced the Industrial Revolution and experimented with the newly-discovered force of electricity. In short, he inhabited "the Age of Wonder" when "the Romantic generation discovered the beauty and terror of science," as historian Richard Holmes puts it.<sup>3</sup>

The conjunctive nature of Wesley's theology runs deep. Some of my doctoral students from Asia have picked up on this and explored its theo-

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<sup>2</sup>Howard A. Snyder, *Yes in Christ: Wesleyan Reflections on Gospel, Mission, and Culture*, Tyndale Studies in Wesleyan History and Theology, Vol. 2 (Toronto: Clements Academic, 2011), 16-17.

<sup>3</sup>Richard Holmes, *The Age of Wonder: How the Romantic Generation Discovered the Beauty and Terror of Science* (New York: Pantheon, 2008).



logical and missiological implications for their contexts. The more we understand the deep inclusive structure of Wesley’s theology, the more we find it necessary to make a clear distinction between *John Wesley’s* theology and *Wesleyan* theology.<sup>4</sup> Wesleyan theology, of course, runs into many streams and eddies. A general critique I would make is that most versions and streams of Wesleyan theology accent certain themes in Wesley and tend to ignore others—a common phenomenon in the theological followers of any creative leader in history. This one-sided tendency in dealing with Wesley started during his lifetime, as we know, and has continued as theologians in the generations immediately following Wesley tried to force his teachings into the categories of systematic theology. This one-sidedness continues up to the present.

One of the starkest examples was the bifurcation in Wesleyan theology in the nineteenth century as seen in the Holiness Movement, on the one hand, and attempts to recast Wesley’s theology in the forms of rising European liberalism and rationalism, on the other. Today, of course, theologians want to recast Wesley in terms of process theology, “open theism,” liberation theology, discourse analysis, or a reaffirmation of systematics. So it goes. Thus, I see the vital necessity of studying Wesley *on his own terms* and *within his own context* (as Randy Maddox has brilliantly done, for instance, with regard to the science of Wesley’s day).<sup>5</sup> Equally important is the necessity to keep our theology carefully grounded in Scripture, as Wesley was concerned above all to do.

I discovered this both/and, conjunctive character of Wesley’s theology only when I began reading Wesley systematically in seminary and in the years following. The fundamental insight is that truth is found not in either/or discursive, linear thinking but in an appreciation of paradox and bridging perspectives. This insight initially came to me, however, not from reading Wesley but from the sermons of the remarkable nineteenth-century Anglican preacher, Frederick W. Robertson (1816-53). Robertson made the point that often truth is found not in one side or the other of an

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<sup>4</sup>This is not to mention the significant and sometimes sharp differences between the theologies of John and his brother Charles.

<sup>5</sup>In particular, “Wesley’s Engagement with the Natural Sciences” in Randy L. Maddox and Jason E. Vickers, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to John Wesley* (Cambridge University Press, 2010), 160-75, and Randy L. Maddox, “John Wesley’s Precedent for Theological Engagement with the Natural Sciences,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 44:1 (Spring, 2009).

argument, nor simply in a “golden mean” or midpoint between, but in acknowledging the degree of truth that may exist in opposing viewpoints and discerning how to synthesize them coherently and experientially (not just conceptually). I helpfully encountered Robertson during a “great preachers” course at Asbury Theological Seminary with a visiting professor from England, Dr. Bishop. This way of thinking avoids both extremes, (1) overly-categorical rationalism and (2) a non-rational or irrational affirmation of paradox or mystery.

This is simply the recognition that God’s truth, and thus the truth of nature, history, and human experience, is so grand that it readily transcends our rational tools and categories. Still, it is fundamentally rational or reasonable—even if always beyond our full grasp—and it is fundamentally personal. Yet it affirms rather than denies the stark difference between good and evil, the way of truth and the way of error, the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness. It affirms both rationality as traditionally understood and a rationality that transcends our reason. Wesley is a good model; he knew how to use a syllogism correctly, and he also knew the limitations of syllogistic reasoning.

It is this conjunctive insight that has helped me think *ecologically* in more recent years. It also helps us in thinking about the Trinity, about the *perichoresis* or mutual “dance” of the Father, Son, and Spirit, the “ecology” of the one Tri-personal God.

Here the much disputed “Wesleyan Quadrilateral,” despite its flaws, has been useful, for it reminds us that Wesley does in fact use the tools of reason, insights from tradition, and learnings from experience in interpreting the Bible. The starkly missing element is Wesley’s affinity for the created order—“the wisdom of God in creation.” Quadrilateral thinking ignores the way the “Book of Nature” functioned in Wesley’s theology, increasingly so in his later years. If we are going to use any such geometric construct, we should put Scripture at the center with the four emphases of reason, creation, tradition, and experience as elements dynamically circling and interacting with Scripture.

Like many of you, I have attempted to take a both/and approach with regard to Wesley himself. I consider myself an unapologetic partisan of Wesley and his ministry and theology. But I insist that he is just one voice in the long story of Christian witness and theology. Our dialogue must include many voices, both past and present, both global and local, and across cultures in the ongoing engagement between Scripture and current contextual challenges.

As time goes by, I find myself wanting more and more to be *homo unius libri*, a man of the Bible—more and more immersed in God’s great plan of redemption that is so marvelously revealed there. As I continue to apply and expand upon the tools of inductive Bible study that I learned in seminary, I am constantly finding fresh things in Scripture about God’s great healing, restoring plan in Jesus Christ (which is the theme of my forthcoming book, *Salvation Means Creation Healed*).<sup>6</sup> At seventy-one, I find renewed excitement in Bible study, particularly in the light of Jesus’ incarnation and resurrection and his remarkable hermeneutical instruction: “Search the Scriptures, for they testify of me.” Only in recent years have I come to see the absolute centrality of Jesus’ physical resurrection in space and time for discerning God’s overall plan (*oikonomia*) for “the restoration of all things,” the new, renewed earth and heaven.

Over the past few years I’ve become increasingly convinced of how much of theology comes down to the centrality of Scripture and issues of hermeneutics. I am more and more convinced that the proper standpoint for Christian theology is to inhabit the world of Scripture (to paraphrase Lesslie Newbigin), and above all to interpret the world and all of theology through Jesus’ incarnation, life, and resurrection, rather than fitting those central acts of God in time and history into some alien or external framework, whether it is labeled “Wesleyan” or something else.

God still seems to be up to something through Jesus Christ by the Spirit, and it is exciting to be a part of it. And, I believe, we still have much to learn from John Wesley.

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<sup>6</sup>Howard A. Snyder with Joel Scandrett, *Salvation Means Creation Healed* (Eugene, Ore.: Cascade Books, 2011).

**TRIBUTE TO JOHN WIGGER**  
**2011 Winner of the WTS**  
**Smith/Wynkoop Book Award**

by  
**Ted Campbell**

I am delighted to present Dr. John Wigger as this year's recipient of the Smith/Wynkoop book award for his definitive biography of Francis Asbury entitled *American Saint: Francis Asbury and American Methodism*, published by Oxford University Press in 2009. The Smith/Wynkoop award honors Dr. Timothy L. Smith, distinguished American Church Historian at Johns Hopkins University and also a Nazarene pastor, and Dr. Mildred Bangs Wynkoop, one of the leading theologians of the Wesleyan movement and also an ordained Nazarene elder.

John Wigger has emerged as the leading voice of a renewed interpretation of American Wesleyanism distinguished by its attention to the popular culture that Methodism shaped and that, in turn, shaped American Methodism. His depiction of Methodists' "Boiling Hot Religion" in *Taking Heaven By Storm* (1998) laid out the popular, revivalistic, often quirky, and deeply experiential character of American Methodist popular piety, a memory that "mainstream" Methodists later would work hard to forget.

The work now being honored has been years in the making, and I think it's fair to say that *American Saint* really is the first truly critical as well as comprehensive account of the career of Francis Asbury. This is a biography grounded in extensive study of primary historical documents, manuscripts as well as printed sources, with the kinds of lengthy com-

ments in the notes that delight the hearts of scholars and demonstrate the author's intimate knowledge of his sources.

*American Saint* will stand for decades as the definitive biography of the most influential shaper of early Methodism and the broader Wesleyan movement in America. Dr. Wigger, generations of scholars and interpreters of American religious history will be in your debt for this great work, and the Wesleyan Theological Society honors your work with this year's Smith/Wynkoop Book Award. Congratulations!

Ted A. Campbell

4 March 2011

## BOOK REVIEWS

Green, Joel B. *Reading Scripture as Wesleyans*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2010. 186 pages. ISBN 9781426706912.

Reviewed by Bart B. Bruehler, Visiting Professor of New Testament, Indiana Wesleyan University, Marion, IN.

How do we read Scripture as disciples of Christ within the broad movement known as Methodism, and, more particularly, how do we as Wesleyan scholars read the Bible as Scripture? Joel Green seeks to answer both of these questions in the short book, *Reading Scripture as Wesleyans*. Green identifies the root of the problem when he says, “As important as Scripture is within the Wesleyan tradition . . . methodists have not always known what to do with Scripture. More particularly, we have not always known what to do with Scripture as *methodists*” (vii). This manual wisely weaves together issues relevant to both laity and scholars. Green’s explicit concern is the people called “methodists” (always with a small “m”) for they seem to falter when it comes to reading Scripture, a central part of their own theological and ecclesial heritage. However, Green is also a biblical scholar, and he speaks to the academic community saying, “The typical patterns of reading the biblical materials taught and learned in formal biblical studies today have little to do with reading the Bible in and for the church, methodist or otherwise” (vii). Green suggests that we turn to Wesley to see “what he actually does as he reads Scripture” (ix) as a pattern for us, his ecclesiastical and theological descendants.

Green does this in the following eleven chapters, each one treating a book or block of the New Testament: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts, Romans, 1–2 Corinthians, Hebrews, James and 1 Peter, 1 John, and Reve-

lation. The chapters typically open with a brief overview of some of the theological elements of scholarly consensus on that book. For instance, he mentions the revival of interest in Mark's gospel given the judgment of scholars that it was the first gospel written (15-16), and he discusses Paul's long stay in Corinth, a city whose history and immorality presented special challenges for a fledgling Christian community (93-95). After this brief introduction to historical and academic matters (aimed to bring a lay audience up to speed), Green identifies the sermons that Wesley preached on that particular book, but he also draws upon Wesley's *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament* to exemplify Wesley's use of that portion of Scripture. Each chapter then ends with a series of discussion questions aimed at processing the contents of the chapter for personal discipleship and the life of the Christian community.

Green's exploration of Wesley's use of the various books of the New Testament forms the heart of each chapter, and it is here that he achieves his two primary goals for the book: providing lay readers with key Wesleyan theological themes for spiritual formation, and setting forth the assumptions and practices of Wesley's biblical interpretation that should shape the study of Scripture. We will review a few of these examples and discuss three of the key patterns of Wesleyan biblical interpretation that Green advocates. First, Wesley's concern for discipleship finds ample fodder in the Gospel of Matthew: he draws 16 of the standard 52 sermons from the Sermon on the Mount alone, but also several more sermons from other parts of Matthew. In his sermon, "The Cure of Evil Speaking," Wesley cites Matthew 18:15-17, regarding the proper way to confront another member of the church who sins. However, to interpret this passage, Wesley turns neither to the context in Matthew nor to historical background. Rather, he calls upon a passage from another book of Scripture: "Speak evil of no one" from Titus 3:2 (8-9). Green points out that Wesley does not pursue the intention of the human author of the Gospel of Matthew. "Instead, [Wesley] operates with the assumption that behind both texts—even though they come from different pens and address different circumstances—stands a single Author" (9). Thus, Green advocates that methodists (and Wesleyan scholars too?) adopt a similar practice of interpreting Scripture based on the foundation that God's inspiration of all of these texts gives them a basic coherence.

Second, Wesley was drawn repeatedly to the image of the "new birth" found in John 3:3. Green traces through Wesley's wide-ranging

comments on this concept, comments which encompass most of Wesley's soteriology. In preparation for this, Green cites the oft-quipped quotation of Wesley, "You are in danger of enthusiasm every hour if you depart ever so little from Scripture; yea, or from the plain, literal meaning of any text, taken in connection with its context." And yet, Wesley's interpretation of John 3:3 ranges far beyond what we would call the "plain sense" of the passage. Thus, Green concludes that a "plain sense" reading should "include the plain sense of the text *when read within the framework of the church's theology*," for this is part of the context of the text (54, emphasis his).

Third, and finally, especially when preaching from the letters of the New Testament, Wesley acts as if Scripture simultaneously and directly addresses both the original audience and his eighteenth-century methodists. We see this in Wesley's discussion of the new creation in 2 Corinthians 5:17 (98-103) and in the way he turns 1 Peter's words "On Dress" to his own contemporary audience (126-29). Green claims that most biblical scholarship operates with a two-stage process of interpretation and then application, which creates a chasm between Scripture and the current reader (102). He recommends that we take Wesley's path, which emphasizes the theological continuity of God's people both past and present and allows Scripture to continue to speak directly to issues of contemporary Christian faith and practice (37).

I would heartily recommend this handbook on reading Scripture as methodists to a variety of uses in the church. Its language, length, organization, and intent are well suited to spiritual formation through the reading of Scripture in small group settings. As a fellow biblical scholar in the Wesleyan tradition, who is Green's junior both in age and in the scope of learning, I have a few questions about the hermeneutical principles that he advocates from his study of Wesley's use of Scripture. First, how should we balance the principle of the unity of Scripture written by a "single Author" with the principle of the incarnation? The fact that God throughout Scripture takes particular forms to address particular people in particular ways seems to be at the core of Scripture and the Christian theological tradition. Granting that there is unity, do we silence parts of Scripture if we flatten out the variations in order to make all the texts sing univocally? Second, how can we avoid a dangerous, self-reinforcing circularity between theology and biblical interpretation if texts are always fit into meanings within the church's theological tradition? Do we silence parts of



Scripture (as Green says Wesley does with Luke 17:21 on pp. 23-24) if we make these texts join a chorus that is already singing certain tunes? The framework of orthodoxy is necessary for interpretation, as chord progressions to good improvisation, but interpretation need not be micro-managed theologically. Third, I have rarely felt the distancing effect described by Green as built into the interpretation-application model. History can be a friend that connects us to God's work in all of the past, not necessarily a foe that divides us. Cannot both past and present sing together to create a richer harmony? In the end, Green's work helps us to hear the voice of Wesley speaking to us as we seek to be faithful interpreters of God's word in the Wesleyan tradition.

Akkerman, Jay Richard, Thomas Jay Oord, and Brent D. Peterson, eds. *Postmodern and Wesleyan: Exploring the Boundaries and Possibilities*. Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2009. 191 pages. ISBN-13: 9780834124855.

Reviewed by John Culp, Professor of Philosophy, Azusa Pacific University, Azusa, CA.

This collection of essays models scholars ministering to non-academics rather than scholars talking to scholars. The individual essays using postmodern ways of thinking suggest a variety of resources that the church can use to come to terms with significant shifts in thinking and practice, and without alienating those who disagree. The reversal of capitalization of the book's title on the cover immediately challenges the reader by difference. However, the structure of the book reassures readers in several ways: critical responses to sections of essays by church leaders who do not find a postmodern culture helpful for the church, a concluding chapter for each section by an outsider who is well-informed about popular cultural manifestations of postmodern thought, and both forwards and a concluding essay by general superintendents of the Church of the Nazarene.

Each essay is short, 3-5 pages in length, followed by penetrating discussion questions and the application question of how the reader might act, think, feel, and relate differently. The postmodern conversation, the role of the Gospel in a postmodern world, the nature of the Church in postmodernity, and how Christians can live in postmodern culture organize the essays into four sections. Although the sheer number and brevity of the essays make a description of each essay impossible, a brief description of the topics in each section provides some sense of the essays' content.

The essays in the first section identify crucial aspects of postmodern ways of thinking, such as the importance of change and the changing understanding of truth that calls for faith rather than either unchanging propositions or a complete absence of reliable knowledge about reality. In this context, resources within the Wesleyan theological tradition offer guidance in the appropriation of postmodern culture. The Wesleyan concern for community, ministry to the dominant culture, and living out the Gospel resonate with postmodern culture. The second section's focus on the Gospel discusses the importance of carefully understanding the Bible in order to affirm the reliability of Scripture, the priority of loving God and others over doctrine in salvation and holiness, and how evangelism

even among other religions should demonstrate God's influence upon people's lives. The essays in the third section—which examines the understanding of the church in a postmodern culture—consider new forms of the church, such as the emerging church movement and ways that the church as a community can more effectively live in a postmodern culture. Creating opportunities to serve, stressing the Eucharist, utilizing visual media, and opening new ways to be disciples will enable the church to minister more effectively to the contemporary world. The final section seeks to think through the role of the individual Christian in living in the postmodern world by calling for responses, such as recognizing those overlooked by others, suffering rather than controlling through political action, and living in concern for God's non-human creation.

The variety of topics and perspectives facilitate using this book as a starting point for discussion in a congregation. People used to tweets, blogs, and short summaries will appreciate the brevity of the chapters, and the multiplicity of the chapters helps overcome limitations due to brevity. However, trying to read through the book by oneself in order to find a fully developed understanding of the church in the postmodern world could be frustrating. Some essays give informed and helpful descriptions of postmodernity and Christian use of postmodern resources, but others use the term “postmodern” merely to express their dissatisfaction with prior practices in Wesleyan traditions. At points, the desire to get to the major issues can lead to oversimplifications. For example, in chapter one, the emphasis upon community is much more accepting of a diversity of opinions than either John Wesley was or most Wesleyan congregations today are.

Some of the critical responses fail to address directly the challenges offered in the prior selections because their responses miss nuances in the essays to which they were responding. The critical responses do express common concerns about postmodernity, but they often do not advance the discussion within the church. The outsider “Conversation Igniter” sections by Leonard Sweet express helpful ideas, but the jargon used to describe those ideas hinders the application of the ideas. The questions after each essay provide important and pointed guides that will push discussion groups into valuable conversations. These questions make the readers work through the essays and are much more useful than the critical responses and Conversation Igniter sections in advancing the discussion about the relationship of postmodern culture and the church.

This collection of essays does not intend to offer technical analysis or debate regarding current postmodern concepts. One essay provides a helpful summary of the variety of postmodern understandings, but the purpose is not to engage in a debate about how to understand the complex movement of postmodern thought. Instead, the essay offers people with limited contact with postmodern thought a way to begin to think about the confusing impressions that they may have about postmodernity. More specifically, the intended audience clearly is congregations in the Church of the Nazarene. The authors of the individual essays and the critical responses come from and write for a Nazarene context. The statements by the general superintendents will have little significance for non-Nazarenes. And yet the essays and questions are valuable for any congregation in both holiness and mainline expressions of the Wesleyan theological tradition as they work in the contemporary postmodern context.

Medearis, Carl. *Muslims, Christians, and Jesus: Gaining Understanding and Building Relationships*. Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 2008. 191 pages. ISBN 9780764205675.

Reviewed by Benjamin B. DeVan, Ph.D. candidate in Ethics and Theology, Durham University, Durham, UK.

Among contemporary writings on Islam and Muslims, Carl Medearis' *Muslims, Christians, and Jesus* is one of the most accessible relevant resources faithful to John and Charles Wesley's prayers "desirous of the salvation of Muhammad's followers."<sup>1</sup> Medearis lived in Beirut, Lebanon, for twelve years, is a fluent Arabic speaker, has met and prayed with numerous Muslim public figures, and is coauthor (with *New York Times* bestselling author Ted Dekker) of *Tea with Hezbollah: Sitting at the Enemies Table: Our Journey Through the Middle East* (New York: Doubleday, 2010). Medearis estimates that he has spoken in person to about 100,000 Evangelicals in venues pertaining to Christian-Muslim relations in 2010 alone.<sup>2</sup>

*Muslims, Christians, and Jesus* consists of eight chapters plus an introduction, two forwards, an appendix with statistics, a glossary of terms, and recommended reading. The first two chapters introduce the life of Muhammad, the five pillars of Islam, six articles of Islam, and their implications for relationships between Christians and Muslims. Chapter three carefully details what the *Qur'an* teaches about Jesus. Chapter four is about women. Chapter five replies to five common questions Muslims ask Christians: "Do you believe the *Qur'an* is God's inspired book? Do you believe Muhammad is a true prophet of God? Has the Bible been changed? How can God have a son? Was Jesus crucified?" Chapter six speculates how Jesus (and Jesus' followers) might respond to jihad. Chapter seven discusses "Muslims who follow Jesus." Chapter eight concludes this work by addressing the topic of reaching out in practical ways to Muslims as an expression of loving one's neighbor.

Medearis focuses on empathy, bridge-building, ethical and theological commonalities, and mutually edifying Christian-Muslim relationships.

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<sup>1</sup>Michael A. G. Haykin, "'For Those who Spurn the Sprinkled Blood!' Praying with Charles Wesley for Muslims," *Southwest Journal of Theology* 49 (2007): 189.

<sup>2</sup>Carl Medearis, in e-mail correspondence with reviewer, September 29, 2010.

Without ignoring common variations in Christian and Muslim understandings of Jesus, Medearis presents Jesus as a source for unity rather than division between Muslims and Christians, since Muslims traditionally respect Jesus as a virgin born prophet, Messiah, and a “Word” from God in language reminiscent of John 1 (see the *Qur’an*, Surahs 3:45, 4:171).

Exemplifying the fruitfulness of this paradigm, Medearis integrates poignant and humorous personal stories into every chapter. One of the stories describes an exchange with Lebanese Parliamentarians exploring how Muslims, Christians, and Druze could constructively pray together and study the life of a noteworthy exemplar they all admired. After putting forth candidates like Gandhi and Mother Teresa, one Sunni Muslim pounded the table and said, “I’ve got it. It’s Jesus! Muslims like Jesus. Druze like Jesus. Even Christians like Jesus. . . . We would all love to meet and discuss Jesus . . . we should do one of these groups in parliament” (141-42). And so they did. They studied through the Gospel of Luke.

The work’s most controversial chapter for Christian readers may not be the chapter on women or on Jesus and jihad, but rather the chapter regarding Muslims who follow Jesus (133-50). Medearis contends that Muslims can authentically follow Jesus as portrayed in the New Testament (called the *Injil* or “gospel” by many Muslims) and remain “Muslim” in their identity without officially converting to Christianity or calling themselves “Christians.” Medearis writes that Jesus’ invitation was to follow Jesus, not “change your name, go to a Western-style church, and give up your family and tribe” (134). Moreover, the author asserts, “Truth be told, there is a growing number of Muslims around the world who maintain their cultural identity as ‘Muslim’ but choose to align themselves with the spiritual and moral teachings of Jesus, becoming *his* disciples while becoming what ‘Muslim’ truly means: submitted to God” (134). This is not unlike the “Messianic Jewish” movement, where believing in Jesus as Messiah is conceived as the true fulfillment of Judaism rather than a renunciation of Jewish identity.

Medearis similarly explores the theological and cultural viability surrounding a Muslim becoming a “Christian” terminologically. For Medearis, if a Muslim can retain his or her cultural identity and yet follow Jesus without having to convert his or her religious *title* to Christianity, “he benefits in that he can keep his family and his normal . . . relation-

ships. He can also begin what I like to call an ‘insider movement toward Jesus Christ’” (136) by eschewing the nearly inevitable ostracism (or worse) by Muslim friends and family, due at least in part to a perceived rejection of family tradition and identity by formally converting to Christianity. Furthermore, “We are never commanded, exhorted, or encouraged to use the word *Christian*” in the Bible (138). Therefore, when “Christian” as a term becomes problematic or distorted, such as being associated as synonymous with America, Europe, sexual licentiousness, or a certain kind of cultural identity, it may be set aside permanently or on an ad hoc basis in place of more helpful or accurate terminology in that context. As Shakespeare’s Juliet mused, “A rose by any other name would smell as sweet” (*Romeo and Juliet*, Act 2, Scene 2).

It is important to note that Medearis is not advocating theological compromise for “Muslim followers of Jesus,” but compromise relating to terminology and conceptions of cultural identity. Thus, Medearis may very well be consistent with John Wesley’s insistence on a grace-centered, Christ-centered approach to God’s saving work among Muslims.<sup>3</sup> This “Muslim Insider” approach is not unique to Medearis, but is a source of vigorous debate among missionaries and missiologists.<sup>4</sup> From a Wesleyan perspective, Randy Maddox may be apropos at multiple points, “If God is already graciously at work in a beginning sense in one’s existing cultural setting, then conversion to Christianity [or Christ] need not require a comprehensive rejection of this culture. Rather, one would begin the demanding perennial task of cultural discernment, in light of the definitive revelation of Christ.”<sup>5</sup>

The question thus becomes this. To what extent one can remain a “Muslim” culturally or theologically, while seeking to follow Jesus as definitively revealed in the New Testament and anticipated in the Old Testament, including the call to community with other believers. To the

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<sup>3</sup>Randy L. Maddox, “Wesley as Theological Mentor: The Question of Truth or Salvation Through Other Religions,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 27 (1992): 18-19. Cf. Tony Richie, “John Wesley and Mohammed: A Contemporary Inquiry Concerning Islam,” *Asbury Theological Journal* 58.2 (2003): 79-99; W. P. Stephens, “Understanding Islam – In the Light of Bullinger and Wesley,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 81 (2009): 23-37.

<sup>4</sup>See, e.g., Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne, eds., *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader*, 4th ed. (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2009), 663-76.

extent this can be done with integrity within the “Muslim Insider Movement,” this reviewer wholeheartedly supports it, while concurrently looking forward to the time, whether in the near or far future, when disputes or conceptions about vocabulary and syntax, particularly with regard to the term “Christian,” will not lead to unhelpful bickering, persecution, or unnecessary family or cultural conflict.

For Christians who want to build relationships with Muslims, and Muslims who want to build bridges with Christians, *Muslims, Christians, and Jesus* is valuable, whatever one’s position on the “Muslim Insider Movement” might be. I recommend it heartily as a resource for Christian-Muslim interaction and conciliation.

<sup>5</sup>Maddox, 19. The phrase “or Christ” added by reviewer.



Campbell, Ted A. *The Gospel in Christian Traditions*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009. 216 pages. ISBN 0195370621.

Reviewed by Jonathan S. Morgan, Ph.D. candidate, Marquette University.

In the twenty-first century an interest continues in closer ecclesial ties between the varied Christian traditions. The activity of the ecumenical movement in the previous century and the renewed interest among Evangelicals to “rediscover” the historic faith and branch out among the broader Christian community are just some of the reasons for this. Ted Campbell’s book, therefore, is a timely one. This study is the result of his experience as an historian, theologian, and participant in ecumenical dialogue. His aim is to “document critically the basic Christian narrative ... as it has been professed and received across confessional traditions and in the ecumenical movement” (xi) in order to demonstrate that this narrative—the gospel itself—is the common thread which unifies distinctive Christian communities.

Campbell outlines four issues that reveal the importance of discerning a common Christian gospel among the Christian traditions. First, many modern studies documenting the diversity in early Christianity have given the impression that traditional Christian doctrine was a late development that differed fundamentally with the earliest Christian message. This assumes a disconnect between the early proclamation of Jesus and the formation of “orthodox” Christian doctrine. Second, a number of contemporary studies of Christian theology assume that there is not nor has there been basic agreement about the essential meaning of the Christian faith. Thus, we cannot “recover” a unitive Christian message because such uniformity never existed. Third, the “old-line” (Campbell’s term for “mainline”) denominations are facing challenging issues that threaten their unity, in part, because they no longer share the same degree of confidence in unitive Christian teachings and practice they once had. Fourth, many churches with Evangelical roots are opening themselves up to other Christian traditions, seeking a greater degree of unity and cooperation. Campbell sets out to address these concerns with an historical investigation of the earliest Christian texts and the role these texts have played and continue to play in the different Christian traditions.

Campbell mines Christian texts from diverse authors and communities to show a common thread. Of particular importance is 1 Corinthians

15:1-4, one of the clearest and earliest expressions of the gospel: “Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures . . . he was buried . . . he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures.” Campbell observes that this text (among others) exemplifies the existence of oral transmission of the gospel message that preceded the written documents (i.e., the canonical New Testament) and maintains an organic connection between this proclamation and the Jewish Scriptures. Crucial to Campbell’s concern is the fact that this text serves as a kind of template for later Christian texts by outlining the basic contours of the gospel narrative. He points to early creedal texts by writers such as Ignatius of Antioch, Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Origen to show that, in spite of some differences in wording and structure, “central elements remained tenaciously embedded in them” (24). These “central elements” consist of the fundamental teachings of Christ’s life, death, and resurrection, and it is these elements that continue to persist in the different strains of Christian traditions and cultures up to the present time.

After establishing the identity and coherence of the gospel at the earliest stages of Christianity, Campbell identifies the three main church traditions within the greater Christian Tradition, and explores the presence and role of the gospel narrative in these traditions. These include the “Ancient Churches” (Catholic, Orthodox, and Assyrian), “Protestant and Related Churches” (mainline and Anglican), and the eclectic cluster of “Evangelical Churches.” Campbell has a firm grasp of the content, structure, and flow of worship among these communities, and shows how the gospel is communicated through the distinctive worship forms. An ancillary, though no doubt intended, byproduct of his discussion is an opportunity for readers to gain familiarity with the practices and customs of traditions outside their own. If greater understanding of one another is essential for Christian unity, Campbell’s artful comparison works well to that end.

In most “Ancient Churches” the gospel, in accordance with 1 Corinthians 15:1-4, consists of the basic narrative of Jesus Christ. This message is ensconced and proclaimed in the creeds (such as the Nicene Creed), liturgy (particularly the Eucharist), and the commemoration of the Christian year. Likewise, “Protestant and Related Churches” have continued the use of historic creeds in their worship along with the commemoration of the Christian year to repeat the basic gospel narrative. Many of these communities also employ doctrinal statements to articulate the

gospel along similar lines as the creeds. But Campbell also points out differences between these churches and “Ancient Churches” that reach back to the Reformation. One major distinctive concerns the very meaning of the gospel itself. Among many Protestant churches, the gospel is two-fold: it includes the basic narrative of the Christ event *and* the specific application of Christ’s work to human salvation. Although soteriological motifs are not absent from “Ancient” communities, they may not be as explicit.

As in the “Ancient” and “Protestant” communities, Evangelical Churches, broadly speaking, understand the gospel to include the narrative of Christ’s life and work. Like most Protestant churches, Evangelicals make the application of Christ’s work to human salvation, but with a unique emphasis on personal, affective conversion where unbelievers are called to respond to divine grace by “accepting” Christ. Evangelical churches have not traditionally promulgated the gospel through formal creeds and marking the Christian year (though this trend is changing). Instead, the gospel is usually embedded in doctrinal statements particular to a denomination or independent church along with sermons, altar calls, the sacraments understood as a memorial, hymns, contemporary music, and evangelistic literature.

One of Campbell’s more astute observations of Evangelical churches, which include many Wesleyan communities, is what he calls “centrifugal” and “centripetal” tendencies at work (81). By centrifugal Campbell is referring to the tendencies of first and second generation Evangelicals who distinguish themselves from other groups, mostly through highly particularized doctrine and polity. But centripetal forces—the movement toward the “culture of the broader Christian community”—are also at work, counterbalancing centrifugal tendencies. While Campbell admits that these phenomena are not guaranteed to occur in every church, the erosion of distinctive Wesleyan doctrines such as entire sanctification in many Wesleyan circles makes one wonder if such centripetal tendencies have already taken hold.

While Campbell demonstrates the presence of a shared gospel in the different Christian traditions, pressing questions remain: what does the gospel *mean* for each of these groups? Are the meanings the same or are there significant differences? How would differences affect unity? Campbell is realistic but hopeful. Though differences in what the gospel means do exist, and while meanings interpreted from one cultural, theological

framework to the next cannot be exactly the same, these meanings can be shared and, to a degree, understood. Against some postmodern epistemologies, Campbell believes meanings can be shared across boundaries, and this is certainly the case within the broader Christian Tradition. However, this process only comes about through deliberate and careful dialogue with one another.

The sometimes complex descriptions of the traditions Campbell provides, in addition to the way he tends to jump from one group to the next, might leave some readers a little overwhelmed. However, these are minor weaknesses compared to the overall richness and acuity of this study. I believe Campbell has succeeded in his endeavor to show that the early, basic gospel message is shared among the Christian traditions, and that this is a promising prospect for Christian unity.

Burge, Gary M, Lynn H Cohick, and Gene L. Green. *The New Testament in Antiquity*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009. 479 pages. ISBN-13: 9780310244950.

Reviewed by Terence Paige, Professor of New Testament, Houghton College, NY.

This book is designed as a college-level survey of the New Testament with a special emphasis on the historical context of scripture. The authors write from a perspective that is explicitly evangelical, treating the New Testament as scripture, while seeking to combine this with an academic approach. The graphic design of this text is exceptional. It is replete with pictures that are well chosen and display fine color balance. The pages are scattered with sidebars illustrating a dizzying variety of primary sources, biblical phrases, ancient practices, trades, social phenomena, historical questions, etc. They reproduce to some extent the effect and interest the student would have in looking at a web page. One would almost want to buy this book just for the pictures and the sidebars! The writing is clear and easy to follow, yet manages to introduce numerous literary and historical topics to students in a way that will help them build critical awareness within a faith context. It does not neglect difficult issues such as the genre of Acts, historical problems, or the authorship of specific books.

The first five chapters, one quarter of the book's length, is devoted to introductory material on hermeneutics, historical backgrounds, and critical issues in gospel studies. "The world of Jesus" (chapter 3) covers well the geography of Palestine and Jewish religious culture. One might wish they had emphasized the broader interest of the Pharisees in purity (only food is mentioned). And there is a disappointing lack of any reference to important topics from socio-scientific studies of the past quarter century (shame/honor; limited good; absentee landlords; urban/rural conflict). The same could be said for chapter four, on the world of Paul, except that attention is given to status distinctions. It has good information also on patronage and the imperial cult. The descriptions of Greek and Roman religions get merged (100). And pagan views are described from a Christian perspective when it is said they saw Christianity as an attack on the "worship of idols" (98). Strangely, we are told that the two most prominent philosophies were Epicureanism and Stoicism, and nothing is said about any other views (102). Yet Middle Platonism was far

more influential than Epicureanism in society at large and may have affected the writers of Hebrews and John's gospel.

There are also separate chapters on the "story" and "teachings" of Jesus (chapters 6-7) in addition to the individual gospels. The first gives an outline of major events in his life, combining all four gospels. The second is a good brief overview dealing with Jesus' parables, the kingdom of God, discipleship, ethics, the passion predictions, and Christology. The chapters on the gospels favor very early dating and traditional authorship. Each chapter discusses the historical setting of the gospel, the literary form, summarizes the narrative, then ends with discussion of author and date. The text does not adequately point out the distinctives of each gospel, a serious shortcoming for a contemporary introduction. The student will be left to infer this from the description of contents. Neither is there a section on the theology of the synoptic gospels (though fortunately there are some theological comments scattered through the chapters). For some reason, only the chapter on John has an explicit section on the gospel's theology.

The section on Paul begins with a summary chapter on his life and theology. As a summary it is useful, but one could wish the role of the Spirit in Paul received more than the half-sentence mention (263). In this chapter the "new perspective" receives an overview, a welcome explanation for the novice in this territory. The remaining chapters on the New Testament letters discuss the setting, message, author and date in that order. Special topics particular to a book may be dealt with in a subsection or in a sidebar. There are very good historical-background and cultural notes throughout the Pauline letters, to which this reviewer paid particular attention. The text favors traditional authorship and dates for all New Testament books: the pastoral epistles are Pauline; Hebrews is anonymous; both 1 and 2 Peter are by the apostle; Jude is by the Lord's brother; and 1-3 John and Revelation are all by the apostle John, as is the fourth gospel. Somewhat unexpectedly, though, they identify Gal 2:11-14 with the Jerusalem council of Acts 15 (with mainline scholarship), and so date Galatians around AD 51 (276). The student is generally given a sample of arguments for the contrary positions and reasons for the author's choice. Each chapter ends with "questions for discussion" and a bibliography divided into "introductory" and "advanced" texts. The chapter on Revelation also includes discussion of differing theological positions on the millennium. Unfortunately, it completely identifies "premillennial-

ism” with a pre-tribulation rapture view and does not acknowledge the existence of historical premillennialism without a secret “rapture.” The final chapter discusses textual criticism, the canon, and translation theory.

The noticeable historical errors found in a text specifically devoted to backgrounds are particularly troubling: Herod Agrippa II is mistakenly titled “King of Judea” (38); Julius Caesar did not initiate Roman colonization (96), which began centuries earlier; and there is no such thing as “New Testament Judaism” (172). Paul did not sail from Berea to Corinth, but went to Athens (after traveling overland halfway; 240). The pseudepigrapha in the Charlesworth collection are dated incorrectly (73). The reader is told that those freed from slavery were “often granted citizenship,” but not told that this applied only to slaves of Roman citizens—a small minority of the population in the East (87, 90). The authors seem unaware that the dining rooms in the Demeter temple complex at Corinth were no longer used in Roman times, citing them as an example of temple-dining (305).

Despite these minor flaws, this text is one that will draw students’ attention and provide ample opportunity for talking points in a classroom setting. Compared to other New Testament introductions currently available, this work brings a refreshing faith perspective to the text while showing the value of academic study as handmaiden to the faith, elucidating the significance of scripture. And compared to other evangelical introductions, it provides a far greater range of discussion of primary texts from the New Testament world and historical, literary and cultural information.

McIlroy, H. David. *A Trinitarian Theology of Law: In Conversation with Jürgen Moltmann, Oliver O'Donovan, and Thomas Aquinas*. UK: Pater-noster; Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2009. xxii + 262 pages. ISBN 9781606088777.

Reviewed by Aaron Perry, Pastor of Christian Education, Centennial Road Church, Brockville, Ontario, Canada.

David McIlroy's *A Trinitarian Theology of Law: In Conversation with Jürgen Moltmann, Oliver O'Donovan, and Thomas Aquinas* is academic theology with a heart for the people. McIlroy, a trained lawyer and professional theologian, writes at a high level for academic theologians, but with a long range eye to real legal practice and formulation of law. In this effort, McIlroy engages with the doctrine of the Trinity explicitly, giving special attention to the Holy Spirit, whom McIlroy believes has been ignored in the Western tradition of law.

After addressing key terms, the book converses with Moltmann, O'Donovan, and Aquinas in succeeding chapters. The discussion of each author unpacks the presence of Trinity in each scholar's thought and evaluates the role the doctrine plays in their respective theologies of law. Starting with Moltmann, McIlroy faces the challenge of critiquing a long career of writing. While the early Moltmann was optimistic about the potential in political change, the older Moltmann is more concerned about "excessive deference to legal authorities" (86). McIlroy critiques Moltmann's vision for future possibilities of society as too broad, lacking specific content for human institutions in his desire for peace and justice (84), and thus immune from specific critique.

McIlroy then moves to Oliver O'Donovan, a thinker noted for his commitment to the Christian tradition and his employment of the biblical narrative in political thought. Key to O'Donovan is the kingship of God, the biblical theme that God reigns. As such, the Israelite knowledge of God was political knowledge, and this forms the early church's approach to Jesus (88). Thus, for O'Donovan, the biblical narrative shapes political concepts most clearly in light of the ascended Christ. Because of the work of Christ, the role of government is now limited to what O'Donovan calls judgment. Although McIlroy appreciates O'Donovan's biblical grounding, he believes that the doctrine and person of the Holy Spirit should be employed more rigorously. McIlroy wants O'Donovan to discuss whether the Spirit can enable wise judgment even among those who do not acknowledge the reign of Christ (142).



McIlroy then turns his attention to Thomas Aquinas, seemingly the odd man out of this trio both in chronology and in deficiency as a Trinitarian thinker. McIlroy argues that, if there is a deficiency of Trinitarian thinking in Aquinas, it belongs to his later interpreters. So, McIlroy utilizes Aquinas as a biblical and Trinitarian theologian, especially utilizing his work on the Holy Spirit (152-54). Specifically, the Spirit's presence is the presence of grace understood as an action of God rather than a thing (182). The presence of the Spirit enables sanctification and transformation of people—what McIlroy calls “deep justice.” This category is important as McIlroy appropriates Aquinas' categories of eternal, divine, natural, and human law. Human law, although able to create shallow justice, is unable to enact deep justice.

Finally, McIlroy employs the strengths of each thinker to develop a Trinitarian approach to law. He argues that, although law was present before the Fall, the human institutions which enforce law are fallen (226). Thus, the Holy Spirit works deep transformation and thereby can form a community of justice that law cannot (234). Instead, the work of government is to give temporal judgment to right wrongs; it offers shallow justice. McIlroy draws on O'Donovan, arguing that this work of government is chastened by the ascended Christ and draws on Aquinas by arguing that the work of judgment is enabled by the Holy Spirit, as the true victory of Christ limits the work of government and the gift of the Spirit enables government to act wisely. Yet, it lies beyond the scope of government and outside the ability of government to create a truly just society. In a transformed, sanctified community, no law is necessary as the divine law will be written on the hearts of its citizens.

David McIlroy has written a piece of academic theology that has implications for the church and its mission in the world. His emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit is especially pertinent for Wesleyan political theology, offering implications for how the church acts as a political community, and inviting potential questions: How can the church embody a prophetic community, acting as a challenge to the authorities because of their worship of the ascended Christ? How can the church be a holy community, dedicated to the transforming work of the Spirit to enact deeply the coming future of justice? How can the church reflect the glorious creation of harmony of God the Father in this fallen world? *A Trinitarian Theology of Law*, as a specialized text, appropriate for scholars doing research in political theology or theology of law, will be an aid to those asking these questions.

Smith, James K. A. *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009. 238 pages. ISBN 978-0-8010-3557-7.

Reviewed by Aaron Perry, Pastor of Christian Education, Centennial Road Church, Brockville, Ontario, Canada.

Blending his responsibilities as associate professor of philosophy and adjunct professor of congregational ministry studies at Calvin College, James K. A. Smith argues for a new type of Christian education in the culturally critical, theological anthropology, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation*. Smith believes that the church and Christian university should focus more on *formation* than *information*, molding “people whose hearts and desires are aimed at the Kingdom of God” (18). This argument is grounded and fleshed out over two sections. In Part One, Smith argues that, rather than thinkers, human beings are fundamentally lovers and that liturgies, both explicitly religious and otherwise, shape these loves (or desires). In Part Two, Smith argues that worship is the way to formation and offers reflections on the aims of traditional Christian worship practices. He concludes with a brief vision for Christian universities.

Education is shaped by anthropology, according to Smith (27). In Christian discipleship, the belief that humans are fundamentally thinking things has led to a focus on “worldview,” a collection of doctrines, beliefs, ideas, metaphysical claims, and other things head-oriented (31-32). Some reformers (notably Nicholas Wolterstorff and Alvin Plantinga) have attempted to push this anthropology deeper, arguing that humans are believing animals, but Smith believes this exchange (ideas for beliefs) does not go far enough (43-46). Instead, he proposes that humans are fundamentally lovers who lead with “heart and hands” (47).

One’s aims or intentions, the most fundamental loves, are said to be non-cognitive (50). These aims are expressed through rituals, practices, and liturgies. Some rituals, or habits, are very “thin,” meaning they do not fundamentally shape persons in the world, while others are “thick,” meaning they shape identity (82). These thick habits are liturgies (whether or not they would typically be considered in a religious sense). Liturgies shape worship, the ultimate expression of love, thereby forming a person’s ultimate desires (87). Cultural liturgies shape persons who desire the world (92). Smith deftly unpacks this claim by examining the mall,

the sports stadium, and the university as evidence that desire is central to being human. These contexts, though misdirected, reveal a desire for God (122).

In Part Two, Smith unpacks Part One's implications for the Christian life and spiritual formation. An anthropology of desire suggests that worship *practices* are the primary route of spiritual formation. This approach of Smith takes seriously the full-bodied nature of human beings and better includes children and the mentally handicapped in worship and discipleship than worldview approaches (136). This approach seeks to order and reorder material beings to their proper end (143).

With this in mind, Smith begins an initial examination of worship practices such as the call to worship, passing the peace, singing, reading Scripture, preaching, and eucharist. In each case, he considers not only what these practices *mean* but what these practices *do*. Smith's desire is that Christians have lives with practices that shape their desire for the Kingdom of God, such that not only monks but students, lawyers, and others would daily gather in (forms of) worship and formation (211).

Finally, Smith gives a short encouragement to Christian universities. Rather than giving an education that resembles Ivy League or state schools, Christian universities must shape students with new Christian practices and community (220). Following this advice, the Christian university should aim to connect the classroom with the local church and neighborhood and enable students to see the connection between mind and body. These efforts seek to connect education, spiritual life, and communal living. Thus, students are shaped to have a Christian "social imaginary," not just a Christian worldview. Thus, Christian scholarship should also move toward a full-bodied liturgy that intends the Kingdom of God (230).

*Desiring the Kingdom* aims to "push down through worldview to worship as the matrix from which a Christian worldview is born—and to consider what that means for Christian education and the shape of Christian worship" (11). To this end, Smith offers a coherent and thoughtful picture of the human being as a lover that will challenge other theological and philosophical anthropologies to offer more robust pictures. Yet Smith does not simply write with an eye to the academy. This is theology done in light of the contemporary culture. *Desiring the Kingdom's* style, while not as academically critical or rigorous as Smith's other works, is ideal because it aims to communicate to students (11). Throughout the text,

Smith inserts short engagements with popular culture, including marketing (*Victoria's Secret*), literature (1984), and film (*The Moulin Rouge*, *Spider-Man 2*), which keep the text grounded. It exemplifies what Smith desires in his cultural critique: revealing what is really going on in culture, but in such a way that may yield theological insights.

Throughout *Desiring the Kingdom*, Smith is forced to balance tensions. One tension is the role of conscious reflection in the development of the person. While he believes that the human being is fundamentally a lover rather than a thinker, and that formation is first a matter of the heart, he has *written* a text (a conscious activity) which aims to change (among other things) the reader's *mind*. Smith believes that visions of the good life that aim to capture the person through images and stories are non-cognitive in the person being allured. "Stories seep into us ... more than a report on the facts" (58). Indeed, stories can shape a person without critical reflection, but what of the shadow truth of this idea? What of those doing the *story-telling* and *convincing*? Obviously many images and stories presented are products of cognitive activity. Thus, in the relationality of the human person, cognitive activity, even on the flipside, is a necessary corollary to the human person as lover. Perhaps one could say that the human being is just that sort of lover because the human being is also a thinker. Smith writes, "We don't wake up each day *thinking* about a vision of the good life and then consciously, reflectively make discrete decisions about 'what we'll do today' as penultimate means to our ultimate ends" (56). Yet the boundaries established by the waker's culture are shaped by the cognitive activity of others. Smith affirms that such theoretical "trickle down" happens both culturally and ecclesiologically: reflection forms the social imaginary of its descendants (69, n. 56). So, while Smith usually captures this tension well, he can be too quick to dismiss the role of cognitive activity.

While such reflection was beyond the scope of the current work, Smith's thoughts on properly ordered desires and kingdoms in (potential) *harmony* would have been interesting. Smith hints at such a reflection when he quotes Stanley Hauerwas approvingly that some supporters of the Christian university would be upset should such education put students at a "disadvantage for being a success in America" (223). Perhaps the Christian university could make her students "citizens of the coming kingdom, thereby making them (thankfully) useless and unproductive for what currently passes as 'society'" (223). But is there necessarily such

strong opposition between being a citizen of the Kingdom of God and a citizen of an earthly community? Is it not possible for there to be missional overlap between the Kingdom of God and another kingdom? Perhaps *Desiring the Kingdom* itself is evidence of such overlap as it is devoted to developing the Kingdom of God and yet is also published in the hope of making money, and is therefore an artifact of a capitalist economy. How might the Christian university produce citizens well qualified for more than one kingdom by properly ordering potentially harmonious desires?

These questions are not simply relegated to the academy. They are necessary for churches who wish to develop disciples of Jesus Christ, even while remaining critical of the cultures they inhabit and of the “social imaginaries” these cultures seek to produce. Thus, Smith’s text helps open minds to the world in which Christians live, helps open hearts to desiring the kingdom of God, and encourages further opening by creating and cultivating worship environments that enable the formation of citizens of God’s Kingdom. Both new students and tenured faculty alike will be refreshed and encouraged to seek all that education must entail, and pastors and worship leaders will be energized to create full-bodied worship services that help the participants practice the faith that is gripping their hearts.

Van de Walle, Bernie A. *The Heart of the Gospel: A. B. Simpson, the Fourfold Gospel, and Late Nineteenth-Century Evangelical Theology*. The Princeton Theological Monograph Series. Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2009. 210 pages. ISBN-13: 978-1-55635-940-8.

Reviewed by Andrew C. Russell, Ph.D. candidate, Saint Louis University.

Those familiar with the historiography of American Pentecostalism will immediately recognize the term “Fourfold Gospel”: Christ the savior, Holy Spirit the baptizer, healer, and coming king. Less familiar, however, is the Canadian Presbyterian who coined the term in 1884. A. B. Simpson. In this recent addition to the Princeton Theological Monograph Series, Bernie Van de Walle outlines Simpson’s understanding of the gospel, ultimately claiming that his “Fourfold” paradigm encapsulated “the central theological themes of late nineteenth-century evangelicalism” (22).

Structurally, the monograph begins with a concise survey of Simpson’s life, highlighting his fastidious career as the denominational founder of the Christian and Missionary Alliance (CMA), missionary statesman, publisher, Bible institute founder, and teacher/preacher. Four subsequent chapters—one devoted to each “fold”—comprise the remainder of the work. According to the author, Simpson understood Christ as savior by reconciling humanity to God according to the penal substitution understanding of the atonement. As sanctifier, Simpson taught that the indwelling Christ provided the power for holy living and (to a lesser extent) service, though not necessarily with the evidence of speaking in tongues. He contended that the availability of divine healing is derived from Christ literally bearing humanity’s infirmities on the cross (Isaiah 53:4; Matthew 8:17). Finally, as the coming king, Simpson expected Christ to return *before* rather than *after* the millennium. Thus, Van de Walle concludes that, from a theological perspective, “Simpson’s contribution...lies in his bringing together these four Christological tenets into one larger gestalt and naming it the ‘Fourfold Gospel’” (194).

It is important to note that Van de Walle’s work is not primarily a description of Simpson’s theology *per se*, but rather a comparison of Simpson’s theology with three of his contemporaries. Each chapter seeks to demonstrate that D. L. Moody, A. J. Gordon, and A. T. Pierson all taught and promoted the Fourfold Gospel. To be sure, theological differ-

ences are neither overlooked nor dismissed. For example, the eschatology chapter recognizes that all four men “were at once inconsistent historicists and inconsistent dispensationalists” (191). Nevertheless, the overall picture that Van de Walle paints is that such differences are relatively insignificant. The author notes, “D. L. Moody, A. J. Gordon, and A. T. Pierson gave all four of Simpson’s emphases pride of place in their messages and ministries, and all three men defined them much as Simpson had” (194).

The work raises several controversial issues for those both inside and outside of the CMA. First, Van de Walle breaks ranks with the majority of his fellow CMA historians by insisting that Simpson’s understanding of sanctification is essentially “Keswick,” i.e., consistent with the teaching associated with the annual Keswick convention in England’s Lake District. This contention stands in stark contrast to substantial works by Gerald McGraw, Richard Gilbertson, and Samuel Stoesz that explicitly distance Simpson from a Keswick understanding of sanctification. Second, and somewhat related, is Van de Walle’s claim that Simpson was not theologically innovative. “He merely followed, developed, and further popularized contemporary theological trends and teaching” (193). Adjudicating the validity of both claims is difficult and somewhat dependent on how narrowly one defines the teaching of Keswick or the task of the theologian.

Perhaps the most controversial claim of Van de Walle’s book is found on the final page. “Thus Simpson and the Fourfold Gospel rather than Warfield and Princetonian orthodoxy are the standard by which late nineteenth-century evangelicalism ought to be identified and understood” (196). The statement refers to a much larger debate regarding evangelical historiography. For more than three decades evangelical scholars, particularly Donald Dayton and George Marsden, have debated (among other things) the degree of contemporary evangelicalism’s indebtedness either to a “Holiness” or “Reformed” paradigm. Although neither scholar dismisses either tradition, Dayton privileges the Holiness dimensions over and against Marsden’s more Reformed preferences. Significantly, Dayton, who served as Van de Walle’s dissertation adviser at Drew University, composed the forward.

Although Van de Walle’s work contributes to Dayton’s position, it does not definitively settle the issue. To be sure, the theological commonalities among Simpson, Moody, Gordon, and Pierson reveal that the Four-

fold Gospel was “far from being heterodox and idiosyncratic” within the late nineteenth-century evangelical milieu (196). On this point, Van de Walle’s work is thoroughly convincing. For some readers, however, the stated implication that B. B. Warfield and Princetonian orthodoxy were “beyond the borders of turn-of-the-century evangelical theology” will require evidence beyond what is stated in the book (196).

Regardless of one’s convictions on evangelical historiography, *The Heart of the Gospel* is one of the best available sources for understanding the understudied A. B. Simpson and his theology. Van de Walle writes with organization and clarity, adroitly interacting with both primary and secondary sources. Likewise, numerous footnotes and a substantial bibliography point the reader to the most relevant articles and monographs. The work will complement a variety of libraries, particularly those devoted to the holiness movement, evangelicalism, fundamentalism, and the CMA.



Oord, Thomas Jay. *The Nature of Love: A Theology*. St. Louis, Missouri: Chalice Press, 2010. 195 pages. ISBN 9780827208285.

Reviewed by Rob L. Staples, Professor of Theology Emeritus, Nazarene Theological Seminary, Kansas City, MO.

Among those who have followed the work of Thomas Jay Oord, he has come to be known as a “love theologian.” This has evolved through his dozen or so books and numerous published articles in the past decade. This book will go a long way toward solidifying and broadening this reputation. So move over Augustine, Nygren, Williams, Wynkoop, and all you theologians who write about love. Make room for Oord!

Oord seeks to be biblical, taking with utter seriousness the Johannine declaration that “God is Love,” relentlessly drawing out its implications. He critiques theologians who fail to acknowledge the centrality of love in their theologies, including Barth, Tillich, and Millard Erickson. He asks: “Why has formal theology not placed love at the center of reflection about God?” (7). He holds that no modifier (such as “holy”) is necessary to understand love. Love, as Oord conceives it, already contains all the elements such adjectives would add. He presents his own definition of love in these words: “To love is to act intentionally, in sympathetic/empathetic response to God and others, to promote overall well-being” (17). With the addition of the two qualifiers (“sympathetic/empathetic” and “overall”), this is an improvement over the definition he gave in the 2005 book, *Relational Holiness*, co-authored with Michael Lodahl. Oord joins many others who have faulted Anders Nygren’s views of love as spelled out in the influential work, *Agape and Eros*. He incisively critiques Nygren on biblical grounds, marshalling many biblical references to show that Scripture does not support Nygren’s view of *agape*.

As for *eros*, Oord knows it is not a biblical word, but insists that its meaning is contained in Scripture, along with both *agape* and *philia*. He defines *eros* as “acting intentionally, in response to God and others, to promote overall well-being by affirming and/or seeking to enhance value” (83). While *agape* may be understood as *in spite of* love, *eros* is a *because of* love; it promotes well-being because of the value it encounters. Oord critiques Augustine’s idea of love as incisively as he does Nygren’s. Relying largely on Augustine’s *Teaching Christianity*, he agrees with Eberhard Jungel that Augustine’s Neoplatonism is the problem (74), driving a wedge between God and creation so that relationships of love are impossible.

Though much in sympathy with Clark Pinnock's views of open theology, Oord takes issue with Pinnock at several points, one of the most crucial being that Pinnock's view does not solve the problem of evil. He says: "Pinnock's logic of love breaks down" for "a consistently loving God would prevent evil if able to do so" (96). He also disagrees with Pinnock's acceptance of *creatio ex nihilo*.

Probably the strongest part of the book is Oord's original concept of "essential kenosis," to which he devotes the final chapter. Process theologians conceive of God's power in such a way that God is not culpable for failing to prevent genuine evil, but they tend to say that God is constrained by external forces. To avoid saying this, theologians who emphasize *kenosis* typically hold that God's self-limitation is voluntary. But this fails to explain why God does not sometimes voluntarily become un-self-limited, to prevent evil. Oord sees essential kenosis as solving these issues. As a solution to the problem of evil, it is better than most solutions that have been proposed, given the viability of Oord's view of kenosis.

Oord says that divine kenosis is essential or necessary. That is what it means to be God. If God is Love, God cannot not love, cannot fail to give Godself away. Then does this jeopardize God's freedom? Oord cuts the Gordian knot by saying God loves necessarily but freely chooses how to express love. By nature God *must* love; by action God freely chooses *how* to love.

Oord agrees with the many OT theologians who contend that Genesis 1:1-2 does not teach *creatio ex nihilo*. God created the world by imposing order on something that was already there. But Oord also rejects any kind of ultimate dualism by contending that God as Creator is everlasting, has always been creating, and will create everlastingly. That which was "already there" was something God had previously created. Before this universe that we know, there have been other universes that God created. Genesis 1:1-2 speaks of God's making order out of something created earlier that was formless. Instead of *creatio ex nihilo*, Oord proposes *creation ex creatione a natura amoris* (creation out of creation through a nature of love).

Regarding miracles, resurrection, and eschatology as well as in all aspects of theology, Oord's concept of essential kenosis insists that God never coerces, never acts arbitrarily apart from our participation. Stressing human cooperation in eschatology, which he calls "participatory eschatology," he says, "God's kenotic love invites creatures to participate

in securing victory” (152). This is even the case both in Jesus’ resurrection and our own. The former is plausible; the latter seems a bit of a stretch, although not an impossible one.

Some questions may legitimately be raised about this book. First, if God loves creatures *necessarily* (i.e., if God cannot not love) doesn’t this make God’s love too mechanical? On the human level, one would value a voluntary love above a necessary one. Oord believes in some likeness, some point of contact, between God and humans. Would this not speak for a divine love that is voluntarily given? Second, Oord offers his own definitions of love and its main forms (*agape*, *eros*, and *philia*). Since word meanings are finally determined by their common usage, has Oord set up his definitions (especially of *eros*) to make them fit his overall system, without allowing historical usage to sufficiently shape the definitions? Third, throughout the book Oord sees self-love as good. Like many others, he misinterprets Jesus’ command to “love your neighbor as yourself” as if it said “love your neighbor as *you* love yourself.” But much of historic Christianity has understood *sin* as self-love (as he implicitly admits on p. 46). Thus, Oord creates a conundrum. It is more likely that Leviticus 19:18, the OT text Jesus quoted, means something like “love your neighbor as *one like* yourself” or “as *if the neighbor were* yourself.” That is not self-love; it is self-giving. Would Oord not eliminate the conundrum, and lose nothing essential to his theology, if he would understand the biblical words this way?

Fourth, Oord affirms an immanent Trinity, but this seems extraneous to his main concern. He says God loves necessarily in Trinity and loves necessarily toward creation. It is the latter relation in which Oord is interested, and the former does not seem essential to his theology, merely functioning as a model for *philia* and *eros* forms of creaturely love relations (132). His system would hang together with no tri-unity at all—just God as one undifferentiated Spirit. Since Trinitarian doctrine has been central in Christian tradition, does Oord, with a Trinity that is superfluous to his theology, stick one foot outside the boundaries of Christian orthodoxy? Fifth, Oord speaks of the end of history (156). What does this mean in light of his view that God will always create in the future? Or would Oord hold that the end is merely the end of this present universe, after which others will be created? This could have been made clearer.

Despite these questions, this book is a significant advance in the theology of love, and a highly original contribution to the literature on the subject.

Brown, A. Philip, II and Bryan W. Smith, eds. *A Reader's Hebrew Bible*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008. ISBN-13: 9780310269748.

Reviewed by Dwight D. Swanson, Senior Research Fellow in Biblical Studies, Nazarene Theological College, Manchester, United Kingdom.

*A Reader's Hebrew Bible* (RHB), following Zondervan's 2004 publication of *A Reader's Greek New Testament* (RGNT), answers the silent wishes and prayers of seminary Biblical Hebrew students through the years. It offers a built-in lexicon as a short-cut from the laborious task of figuring out the root of an unknown word, then consulting a large and heavy dictionary to trawl through the various possible usages in order to come up with one word, while hoping not to forget the rest of the verse during the process. Now, even better than an awkward interlinear version, all it takes is a glance to the bottom of the page and one can carry on reading. This is an encouragement to those thousands of former Hebrew students who have never used the language again after taking those classes to pick it up again and recover their lost skills. I have found it convenient to take this volume with me on trips where I need my Hebrew Bible at hand and it is not suitable to bring reference tools with me. An immense amount of hard work has been done on the computers to make this possible.

The RHB is based on the text of Codex Leningradensis rather than the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (BHS). The reason for this, as for most aspects of textual matters that arise in this edition, is pragmatic: it is already readily provided in electronic form by *BibleWorks*. The format is straightforward. Every Hebrew word that occurs less than 100 times, and Aramaic word less than 25 times, has a footnote, with the lexical information appearing at the bottom of the page. Each entry contains the Hebrew lemma and the homonym number from the *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Brown-Driver-Briggs or BDB) for those that have multiple meanings. Translation glosses are included from *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (HALOT) in the new edition by M. E. J. Richardson and BDB. Occasional alternative glosses are included from the *Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* (DCH), edited by David J. A. Clines, and from miscellaneous commentators. Proper nouns appear in gray font color. The "written" form of the text and the "read" form of the Masoretes readings are both included in the text, with superscript Q and K.

These choices are based on the lexicons in the *BibleWorks* 7.0 software. Thus, this text is the result of the application of immense and diligent IT skills to the *BibleWorks* electronic database to create what is, in effect, a hardcopy version of what one would find in an iPad application. The editors follow the decisions of the program, with some exceptions (see below). This is not a standalone edition that offers improved readings based on original scholarship, nor does it claim to do so. Nor is it likely to matter to those who use it.

Opening the Bible presents a neat, clean page presentation that is easy on the eyes. An intention in the design is to make a “relatively smooth” shift from BHS for the reader (xiii). As a life-long BHS user, however, the immediate minor irritant is the numeration of the footnotes. In the BHS, footnotes refer to verse numbers; here, the glosses are numbered consecutively throughout each chapter. Getting accustomed to this change has an effect for this resident of Britain similar to switching from left to right-hand driving upon return from the continent.

Another minor quibble with the format is the use of gray text for proper nouns. It simply has the effect of appearing washed out, and its usefulness is dubious not only because readers with any background in the language should be able to distinguish proper names, but also because of the frequency of un-noted names. My test text for reading of this Bible was from Ezekiel, where I was already working. Samaria is not noted as a proper name in 16:43; and in 21:2,3 *negev* is determined to be the geographic name Negev rather than “south,” despite the latter being first choice in *BibleWorks*. A further random check at this time of writing, the page falling open at Deuteronomy 2, revealed the lack of highlighting on “the Jordan” in verse 29. A project such as this, with so much text and apparatus, is bound to have numerous errors. Although this is relatively minor, it points to the need for vigilance within the lexical material.

Another more substantive quibble with the format is in the presentation of the glosses or lexical choices. The editors appropriately state that this is a tool for reading and not for translating, and so the lexical words chosen are not definitions but glosses (xvii-xviii). They further emphasize that word meaning in one passage cannot be assumed to be the same in another passage or book, so the RBH cannot replace standard lexical and exegetical work, and the reader is left to discern what is appropriate. This is an important caveat, but not easy to fulfil.

This leads to questions about the nature of a Bible like this that did not present themselves at first glance. One question is that of the

value of “convenience” in language tools. The emphasis on convenience comes across much like an advert for a microwave oven. The introduction to the RGNT highlights the time-and-effort saving aspect for pastors and students: “By eliminating the need to look up definitions, the footnotes allow the user to read the Greek text more quickly.” The editors of RHB emphasise the economy of time: “It eliminates the waste of precious time occasioned by thumbing through a lexicon...the inconvenience of using a second volume.” Indeed, it even saves instructors from having to create their own lists for different sections of the Bible. Is the time taken in wrestling with the text through research a waste? In a convenience-store, pre-packaged world, we may have gotten used to cardboard flavoured food. So, too, it seems, our Bible study.

A second, and more serious question, concerns the derivative nature of this project. This text and its helps are based on existing electronic programs, which in turn are based on the BHS text. Questions of text and layout that are raised in the Introduction are related to the relationship between these two. Thus, the paragraph divisions are marked by “s” and “p” as in BHS, which do not appear in Leningradensis (WLC), and without determining whether the BHS correctly transmits these. Poetry is presented on the basis of BHS assumptions, but chooses to distinguish the “editorial” indentation and stichometric spacing of BHS (and comparable texts). Where the WLC, the basis for the *BibleWorks* text, differs from BHS, the WLC is followed as superior, and this is marked by a raised black circle. The effect of these textual decisions is to make this a critical edition of the BHS apparatus, but a strangely selective one.

The editors both indicate that the intention of this edition is to bring together existing resources, and then to allow the reader to make decisions on the basis of lexical glosses. The implicit understanding is that the editors are not involved beyond putting the text and glosses together. There is in this a remarkable confidence that the creation of computer programs is sufficient to the task. However, the editors obviously intervene at times to provide more information and opt out in other cases, and without methodological explanation for these decisions. One might question whether it matters in a tool meant simply to make reading the Hebrew Bible easier for the average person in the study. One might respond that it should matter for people who view the words of the sacred text as important as do the editors (emphatically stated in the prefaces).

Any edition of a text demands critical editorial decisions. This edition attempts to circumvent such decisions in its methodology of using pre-existing tools. Their need to intervene with decisions as to what glosses to include or exclude, and reliance on a particular electronic edition of the biblical text, undercuts the legitimacy of such a methodology. Instead, it reveals rather simplistic presuppositions as to the nature of the biblical text. This Bible is more of a first stage in a serious edition of the Hebrew Bible. It must now engage with text-critical issues on a thoroughgoing basis. There may be short-cuts to learning enough Hebrew to “read” but not translate the Old Testament, but there can be no short-cuts to creating linguistic reference tools.

Coleson, Joseph, ed. *Be Holy: God's Invitation to Understand, Declare, and Experience Holiness*. Wesleyan Theological Perspectives. Indianapolis, IN: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2008. ISBN-13: 9780898273724.

Reviewed by Dwight D. Swanson, Senior Research Fellow in Biblical Studies, Nazarene Theological College, Manchester, United Kingdom.

This book is a collection of articles by scholars and pastor/practitioners in The Wesleyan Church under the editorial pen of Nazarene Theological Seminary Professor Joseph Coleson. The foreword, by Wesleyan General Superintendent Thomas E Armiger, indicates that the intended audience is ministers and lay people in the Wesleyan Church for the purpose of encouraging the church to be true to its calling and identity. The articles span the academic and pastoral disciplines. Each chapter concludes with "Action/Reflection Suggestions," making this a source for both personal and group study.

David W. Holdren (Cypress Wesleyan Church, Columbus, OH) starts the book by acknowledging that the Holiness Movement is dead. The title of his essay, "The Journey," sets out his own proposed metaphor for holiness, as well as the ground for essays that follow.

The biblical approach to the subject is considered in two chapters, a gargantuan task for such little space. Joseph Coleson, on the Old Testament, sketches a broad picture of holiness by reference to three key texts: Isaiah 6, Genesis 1, and Leviticus 19:2. Out of this study, he offers the metaphor of "family resemblance" as the most helpful analogy for holiness today. Terence Paige (Houghton College) gallops through the New Testament via the vocabulary of holiness, emphasizing love as the key to holy living. Where Coleson is narrower in focus than is needed in such an important foundation paper, Paige is too general and therefore diffuse in his scope. Given the space restriction, this reader cannot offer a particular remedy to the problem.

Three chapters approach the subject from historical/theological perspectives. John R Tyson (Houghton College) provides the Wesleyan viewpoint, including the contribution of Charles Wesley. Tyson bases his treatment on illustrations from the written sources: sermons, journals, hymns. The final summary is in the words of *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, with an added note that the Wesleys strongly held that "true holiness is 'social holiness.'"



There is a chapter on "The American Scene" (Clarence Bence, Indiana Wesleyan) that, in the absence of any non-American scene being represented, seems to emphasize the sense of internal dialogue found in this book as a whole. The chapter is a very helpful review of the Holiness Movement and churches, but stops with the latter half of the twentieth century. It is, perhaps, too soon to describe the current "postmodern/emerging" situation, but surely not to consider non-Western expressions of the church. Richard K Eckley (Houghton and local church) turns to "Holiness in Other Christian Traditions." Other than a brief sketch of Reformed teaching, this means Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox. The sympathetic description of each is valuable in light of historic attitudes to "Papism."

Orthodoxy, on the other hand, is the flavour of the era for holiness people (many children of holiness churches finding a home there). The now popular idea that Wesley drew consciously from the East (not borne out in more recent careful studies carried out, e.g., at Nazarene Theological College) is repeated here. The description of what Orthodox Christians know is, perhaps, a bit starry-eyed. The Americo-centric nature of the book is evident here, too. What is written about Catholics and Orthodox would not be of great help to evangelical holiness people living in majority Roman Catholic and national Orthodox countries. Beyond these traditions, there is some haziness of understanding. Holiness "outside the church" refers to Ghandi, but also Asian and African Christianity! Reference to people "outside your own faith background," on the other hand, is a reference to Christian denominations rather than religions. Ideas and practice of holiness in Islam or Hinduism are not included.

The second half of the book turns to the experiential and practical aspects of holiness in America. J. Michael Walters (Houghton College) writes on "Preaching Holiness Today," with the pastoral question, "What is it going to take for people to believe holiness is 'beautiful and vigorous, not ugly and barren'?" The answer emphasizes the journey over the crisis. Keith Drury (Indiana Wesleyan) addresses "Experiencing the Holy Life" by way of explaining the traditional theological language of sanctification. In this respect, the focus is on dealing with sin, with no discussion of the role of the Spirit. "Experience" seems to be short-hand for entire sanctification (128); there is no indication of the Wesleyan concept of "assurance."

By "Practical Holiness," Judy Huffman (pastor, Marion, IN) means "relational" holiness. Hers is the first article explicitly to discuss holiness

in community, taking the model of the Triune God. Robert Black (Southern Wesleyan University) addresses “Social Holiness,” initially using Wesley’s famous quotation correctly in reference to holiness within community, before wandering into the realm of social justice. The latter is the specific remit of Jo Anne Lyon (World Hope International) who recalls past issues addressed by evangelicals—slavery, removal of Native Americans, suffrage—and offers a list of current causes to be addressed, from AIDS to immigration. Tom Kinnan (Overland Park, KS) draws the book to a close with “Holiness at the Grassroots Level.” His concern is to communicate holiness to the people in the churches, choosing four emphases: forgiveness, relationships, service, and lifestyle. In the latter, the problem of legalism is addressed directly for the only time.

At first impression, the book approaches the subject in a fairly traditional manner and vocabulary. Yet, every chapter has both fresh insights and an openness to self-criticism. The diversity of authorship allows a welcome diversity of approach and content, although these are not placed in conversation with each other.

Two things are held in common by virtually every writer. The first is a shared basic definition of holiness as “separation.” Coleson sets the pace by grounding the vocabulary of the holy in its ancient Near East linguistic context. This is repeated as a given, without documentation, by successive authors throughout the book. However, once stated, what follows seldom sheds light on what sort of separation this might mean. Given that the holiness sectarian tendency to separation from the world and all its contamination has not been wholly eradicated from the descendants of the holiness movement, there surely is need to be more coherent about this definition. Current descriptions of a New Testament dynamic of “contagious holiness,” exhibited by Jesus’ constant reaching out to people and making them clean, lead in a more positive and life-affirming picture of the relation of the holy to the profane.

Secondly, there is an overarching assumption of the priority of the individual in the call to holy living. The articles that look specifically at social holiness still work from the basis of the individual. However, the imperative of the title of the book (cf. Lev 19:2) is plural, not singular. In an era when many fear the breakdown of society (for whatever reasons), a non-apocalyptic way to look at the future might be considering how the sanctifying work of the Spirit in the Church may provide answers.

Heath, Elaine A. and Scott T. Kisker. *Longing for Spring: A New Vision for Wesleyan Community*. New Monastic Library. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2010. 104 pages. ISBN 9781556355196.

Reviewed by Joshua R. Sweeden, Ph.D. candidate, Boston University School of Theology, Boston, MA.

Few denominations in the United States can avoid the woes of declining membership, overinflated models of church, and jaded clergy and ministerial students. Amidst the struggles of church institutions in a growing postmodern and post-Christendom context, Elaine A. Heath and Scott T. Kisker shed light on a new vision of ecclesial life: new monastic communities. They argue that the emerging phenomenon called “the new monasticism” has particular resonance with the Wesleyan tradition. The new monasticism “is a holiness movement” and “a lot like early Methodism” (2). Many are recovering a sense of Wesleyan renewal through similar forms of communal and ecclesial life. The question that remains, however, is this. Will church institutions recognize the increasing number of ministers called “to live and serve in this form of community”? In the midst of “full-blown institutional crisis,” can the church welcome these Spirit-facilitated experiments in Christian community? Can structures of ordination and traditional expectations of clergy adapt to the changing tides of ecclesial life? Heath and Kisker explore these questions through the case of the United Methodist Church. They find “like many other mainline and evangelical Christians, Methodists are beginning to ask probing questions about mission and ecclesiology” (1).

Heath and Kisker frame their text autobiographically, beginning with their own faith stories and concluding with experiences of intentional and alternative Christian community. The despair of denominationalism is a prominent theme. “Denominationalism is dead. Self-serving institutionalism is dead. The notion that the church is a bureaucracy . . . is dead. That which John Wesley greatly feared has come upon us” (9). Heath sees the demise of denominationalism as students, former students, and pastors confide in her weekly. “She or he is thinking of leaving the church. Not God, not ministry, not vocation, just the denomination” (8). Kisker recognizes the over-bureaucratic nature of the church. Where again might the church be dependent upon the Trinity for the shaping of community and Christian life? In the midst of institutional crisis, Heath and Kisker remain optimistic, acknowledging the history of renewal that

follows worn modes of church. They find the new monasticism to be a viable movement of renewal for a “post-denominational world.”

Chapters two and three offer a few historical expressions of Christian renewal through intentional community. The chapters provide essential background and “illustrate a pattern of renewal . . . convey[ing] that time and again the church (the “people/laity of God”) is renewed when members of the body begin to live out examples of simple faithfulness that can be seen and imitated by the world around it.” The gentle reminder is that “the history of renewal can repeat itself again. God can do, and is doing, surprising things” (23). Chapter two provides a brief description of the rise of monasticism coinciding with Christianity’s ascent to power under Constantine. Later examples of intentional monastic communities are noted: Benedictine communities, Beguine communities, and the Brethren of Common Life. Chapter three looks more closely at intentional communities following the Protestant Reformation. Anabaptist communities and the rise of Pietism are identified as renewal movements, but the Wesleyan Revival and the later inception of Methodism are the focus of the chapter. Kisker notes how the Wesleyan revival “owed its depth and longevity to intentional semi-monastic community” (32). The history of Christian renewal through intentional community adapted by Anglican societies and the Moravians had direct influence upon John Wesley’s innovative use of communities to sustain the revival. Methodism is later identified as a “lay monastic and preaching order” with the purpose of revival in the larger church (34).

Heath and Kisker go on to explore concerns of a rising generation of Methodist ministers called the “new Methodists.” “Called to rigorous faith, to holiness of heart and life,” new Methodists come to seminary to learn and be prepared for service, but often shun the traditional ordination track (41). Heath notes how new Methodists are “jaded toward institutional politics [and] unwilling to surrender their spiritual passion to what they see as an ordination system that weeds out pioneers and rewards bureaucrats.” She calls them “risk-takers, innovators, [and] a new breed of old-fashioned Methodists” (42). Instead of fleeing from the church or their Wesleyan heritage, they are “longing for Spring, for the rebirth of the best of our tradition. What the new Methodists want is to go the way of early Methodism only retooled for post-modern times” (43). The new monasticism corresponds to the new Methodist’s desire for renewal and community in the spirit of early Methodism. Though the new monasti-

cism is not itself a Wesleyan movement, new Methodists are encouraging the development of new monasticism within the United Methodist Church. Heath affirms this interplay by calling new monasticism “a new holiness movement” and asking “what could be more Wesleyan than that?” (49). But is there a place for new Methodists or the new monasticism in institutions like the UMC?

Heath and Kisker examine possibilities for supporting new-monastic type communities specifically within the United Methodist polity and structure. These include the adaptation of a rule of life through Wesley’s General Rules or United Methodist membership vows, anchoring Methodist new monastic communities in existing congregations, read-dressing the model of itinerant pastor and supporting bi-vocational ministry, and finally, sponsoring new monasticism and hosting new monastic houses through theological education and seminaries. Heath and Kisker call upon the church to be flexible with traditional constructs of church and ministerial leadership. At the same time, they encourage new Methodists to be steadfast, stating that “if enough new Methodists are stubborn about staying in the church but radical about following Jesus...they will bring about systemic change” (43).

The text concludes with concern for asking the right questions. Heath and Kisker push back against the critiques and reservations often directed at new Methodists and the new monasticism. Noting misassumptions of the purpose of these movements, they respond to questions regarding their efficacy to solve the “massive challenges of the church today” or to “create a lasting legacy or a new order that will be around until the eschaton.” Heath and Kisker insist that the real question is, “What is the Spirit saying to the church?” (69).

Readers will find this text very accessible and appropriate for a wide range of audiences. The autobiographical and conversational writing style makes for an easy and inviting read; ministers and future ministers of all levels will find this text to be a helpful in the critical conversation around church institutions and contemporary renewal movements.

Heath and Kisker were clear about their intentions to encourage engagement with the new monasticism movement and help “spark the imagination” of the church (11). This aim is well accomplished within the text; Heath and Kisker even provide three helpful appendices which include an annotated bibliography of complementary readings, a reflection guide, and further description of the role of an “anchor church.”

Although Heath and Kisker successfully promote engagement with the new monasticism movement and new Methodists, they don't readily open doors for *critical* engagement. General engagement and awareness may be the first step to spark the imagination of the church, but some readers may be disappointed by how little this text sets the stage for a richer theological conversation on Wesleyan renewal and monastic-like communities in the contemporary context. The authors' affirmation of the new monasticism and new Methodism as movements of the Spirit may be appropriate, but it certainly does not imply that these movements are free of shortcomings. A more critical evaluation, for example, could take into account the contextual influences of postmodernism, anti-institutionalism, and consumerism (seen, for instance, in eclectic or selective re-traditioning). Engaging the influences and embedded assumptions of these movements would support the necessary critical theological conversation that needs to occur before any church institution—United Methodist or otherwise—is willing to address and change their traditional constructs of church and ministry.

Ultimately, Heath and Kisker offer a timely and essential affirmation of the significance of constant renewal in the church. Through the lens of new Methodism, the new monasticism, and the United Methodist Church, they initiate dialogue between the rising expressions of alternative Christian community and the various church institutions and denominations beleaguered in the growing postmodern and post-Christendom context. For those concerned about the vitality of the church, this text points in the right direction.

Abraham, William J., and James F. Kirby, eds. *The Oxford Handbook of Methodist Studies*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2009. 761 pages. ISBN-13: 9780199212996.

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Of the making of books about Methodism there seems to be no end. However, one should welcome any new book about Methodism that looks at it with a critical historical and theological eye, and on that count this magisterial volume delivers. The editors view it as both a “gathering up” of the research done in Wesley and Methodist studies in the last fifty years and as a potential roadmap for future conversations. It has three main goals: to “locate the center of Methodist gravity in John Wesley,” including “determining how best to characterize his life and work;” to “develop an appropriate set of categories sufficient to permit a fruitful and coherent mapping of Methodist Studies as a whole;” and to “recognize and address the reality that Methodism has become a global expression of the Christian faith” (viii-ix). The contributors include well-known scholars from both inside and outside the Methodist tradition, retired from or currently teaching in colleges and seminaries in the U.S., the U.K., Argentina, Germany, and Russia, as well as several serving in parish ministry or in appointments beyond the local church.

The book has six sections: History of Methodism; Ecclesial Forms and Structures; Worship; Spiritual Experiences/Evangelism/Mission/Ecumenism; Theology; and Ethics and Politics. Each individual essay contains a helpful bibliography for further reading, although these vary in both length and breadth and whether they represent only references used in the essay or other suggested resources. Like many modern academic books the percentage of typographical errors seems surprisingly high, and spellings were sometimes inconsistent throughout the volume. The choice of a modified APA citation style, instead of either of the two citation styles appropriate to humanities scholarship, is also unfortunate, although this likely was the publisher’s decision and not the volume’s editors.

However, these are all minor points; the book’s content is excellent. One can expect in a collection like this that essays will be of varying

quality. Many are groundbreaking, and the percentage of these is high enough to justify buying the book. Most of the rest are serviceable and interesting surveys, and only one seems dramatically out of place—Swee Hong Lim’s essay on “Music and Hymnody,” which is an informative study of the development of indigenous Asian hymnody (both Methodist and non-Methodist) but is utterly baffling as the sole entry in the book devoted to Methodists and song. Granted the editors’ desire to expand the Methodist story beyond conventional narratives and to explore its life as “a worldwide phenomenon that cannot be confined to Anglo-American realities” (ix), one expects the conventional narrative might have been glanced at more thoroughly, especially given the current growth of interest in the life and theology of Charles Wesley (as seen, e.g., in recent works by John Tyson and Joanna Cruickshank.)

If the book has an overarching editorial theme, it is the desire to take Methodism seriously, but not idolatrously. Methodist historiography has often in the past focused on justifying Methodist uniqueness. These essays do not do that, but neither do they dismiss Methodism’s cultural and spiritual influence. The opening section on “History” is excellent throughout as a readable, critical survey of the birth and growth of worldwide Methodism (the essays by Richard Heitzenrater, David Hempton, and John Wigger offer shorter treatments of their fuller arguments published elsewhere). Manfred Marquardt’s essay on “Methodism in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries” clearly situates Methodism as a *worldwide* church and challenges Methodism both to embrace its diversity and to continue its ecumenical participation and social witness. As usual, one might wish for there to be more on the EUB tradition in the rest of the book, but the one chapter devoted to it by J. Stephen O’Malley is thorough, clear, informative, and tinged with a slight nostalgia for a denomination “imbued with a pronounced ‘family’ spirit, which was known for extending hospitality to one another, and to visitors, in ways appropriate to a people grounded in the warmth of a Pietist religious ethos” (119).

The section on Ecclesial Forms and Discipline is also particularly strong, if a bit focused on the American context. Methodists find their polity so constitutive of their identity that it is helpful to see scholars actually take that polity apart and see what it teaches. Russell Richey’s “Connection and Connectionalism” discusses the unresolved conflicts resulting from modern American Methodism’s institutionalizing the



“three dimensions of Wesley’s connexional office into three competing power centers or structures, each with considerable authority: superintending and appointment-making in bishops, legislative decision-making authority in conference, and organizational work in agencies” (217). James Kirby’s “Methodist Episcopacy” is not only a treatment of the evolving powers of American Methodist bishops, but a discussion of the nature of *episkopē* as oversight throughout Methodism, including the British approach where it is “a shared responsibility of conference, circuits, and the local churches, and the district” (235). He explains this in the service of asking, “What kind of leadership does a global church require?” and “Is it possible with our current organization and practices to identify and provide such leaders?” (242). Thomas Edward Frank’s “Methodist Discipline” discusses eight phases of the way Methodism has lived out its disciplinary organization throughout its life: as a common rule of life (where he feels more attention needs to be paid to the General Rules and what it means to organize “the entire church law of a tradition around a rule of life” [248]), as “connexional conversation,” and as successively constitutional, legal (including the growth in size and complexity of the *Discipline*), political, missional, pentecostal, and, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, virtual (with a “‘just in time’ connexionalism infinitely adaptable to changing needs and circumstances” [258]).

Other sections continue the theme of aiming a critical but not malevolent eye towards Methodism’s evolution. In the Worship section, Lester Ruth’s “Liturgical Revolutions” forms a good counterpoint to Karen Westerfield Tucker’s “Mainstream Liturgical Developments.” Where Tucker presents what happened to Methodist worship’s official texts, Ruth focuses on the ethos that surrounded the Methodist worship experience. Ruth argues that, while Wesley’s “breadth in being both Methodist and Anglican in worship” allowed him to keep his varying views about prayer, Scripture, and sacraments in a creative tension, later Methodists, “by marginalizing the Anglican dimension . . . have often tried to resolve the tensions in one direction or another” (327). Whereas Wesley was a “pragmatic traditionalist,” his followers became “traditional pragmatists” (328). The catch-all section on spirituality, mission, evangelism, and ecumenism contains a particularly notable essay by Dana Robert and Douglas Tzan on Methodist missiology, an area worthy of more study due to Methodism’s status as “one of the most vigorous cross-cultural mission movements in the first half of the twentieth century” (445).

The section on Theology is one of the book's high points. All the essays are readable, informative, and fascinating. Two essays in particular stand out: Jason Vickers on "Christology" and William Abraham on "Christian Perfection." Vickers makes the simple but powerful move of situating Methodist reflection on the person of Christ within the tradition of the whole Christian church and the dogmas "embedded in the ecumenical creeds and endorsed repeatedly by the great ecumenical councils" (555). He allows Methodism to stand critiqued by Nicaea and Chalcedon, and finds Methodism wanting in many places—especially in John Wesley's stress on the divinity of Christ as opposed to his humanity (though Charles provided helpful balance here), and in the objections voiced by Boston personalists, process theologians, and Methodist liberation theologians that "the Christ of the ecumenical creeds and councils is either intellectually indefensible, morally suspect, or both" (568). While he allows the validity of these questions, he celebrates the ways that Christological reflection in 21<sup>st</sup>-century Methodism has addressed them by recovering classical Christian emphases.

As for Abraham, anyone who heard his 2004 address to WTS (later published in volume 40:1 of this journal) will not be surprised that the essay begins, "John Wesley's doctrine of Christian perfection is at best a dead letter and at worst a source of political delusion among contemporary Methodists" (587). He roots some of the fault for this in Wesley himself—his "version of biblicism" as an "unstable epistemological experiment" and his "insistence that holiness was the heart and soul of the faith" that "paved the way for a radically anthropocentric turn" (593). But later Methodists do not escape unscathed, either. Abraham's solution, if we do not take the "easy way forward" of admitting that "this element in the tradition is now well and truly dead" is—like Vickers—to root Methodism's proclamation of this doctrine in "the deeper faith of the church; indeed the history of Methodism shows that the doctrine of perfection cannot survive if its anthropocentric tendencies are not healed by radical immersion on the great sweep of Christian thinking embodied in creation, freedom, fall, and redemption" (599).

The final section on Ethics and Politics also contains a number of first-class reflections. D. Stephen Long and Stanley Hauerwas point out that Wesley is "a resource to help Methodists and all Christians recognize that any time a strong distinction between theology and ethics occurs something has gone wrong" (646). Robin Lovin's "Moral Theology" puts

Wesley in the context of philosophical reflections on ethics in his time and our own. Jane Craske and Harold Recinos discuss feminism and racism in the Methodist context, with Recinos reminding us that ultimately we trust “the God who gets trampled with us in order to save” (693).

Believe it or not, this is only a sampling of what awaits in this volume—I am even, at this moment, flipping through the table of contents once again and finding more notable essays to highlight while realizing that this review already too long. Anyone interested for academic or ecclesiological reasons in how Methodism has lived out, or failed to live out, its witness in the past, and how it will live it out, or fail to live it out, in the future will find a wealth of resources in this book to guide their research and challenge their presuppositions. Let it serve as the precursor to many new conversations.

Cruickshank, Joanna. *Pain, Passion, and Faith: Revisiting the Place of Charles Wesley in Early Methodism*. Lanham, NJ: Scarecrow, 2009. 187 pages. ISBN-13: 9780810861541.

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 Wesley, for many years, has suffered historiographically from the shadow of his elder brother. Thankfully, this is changing. On the heels of editions of some of Charles's writings by John Tyson and Kenneth Newport, as well as Tyson's excellent biography of Charles, comes this welcome book on a major theme in Charles' theology: the experience of pain and suffering. In addition to being a primary topic in Charles' hymnody, and one on which he clashed at times with his brother, it is a theme which has cast a long shadow over the Holiness movement ever since.

Cruickshank sets out to assist the "neglected task of historicizing Charles Wesley and his hymns" (4), putting him in dialogue with recent research on eighteenth-century culture and society—including constructs of suffering and pain, which were ever-present factors in daily life. She begins by rehearsing the facts of Charles' life, with particular attention to how he "became so concerned with the experience of overwhelming pain" (17). His lifelong poor health and the deaths of five of his children were chief factors, and Cruickshank notes he was prone to what in his own day would have been termed "melancholy." She then moves into an overview of his hymns: their setting and context, and their particular focus on "the emotional world as a spiritual realm. His poems not only expressed the inner experiences of the believer but also shaped and formed them" (29). The rest of the book addresses different aspects of pain and suffering that Charles treated.

First, there is the suffering of Christ, which is "the basis of much of [Charles'] interpretation of the meaning of pain" (4). Then, there is the "place of suffering in the Christian life," especially on the journey towards sanctification (4). This section deals with both inward and outward suffering and the ways in which suffering sanctified experiences of persecution, execution (Charles wrote a number of hymns for condemned

prisoners), childbirth, and the death of children. Finally, there is “the role of suffering in community formation” (4), especially the construction of a sympathetic community which empathizes with, and works to relieve, the sufferings of others. Cruickshank concludes by “extracting a systematic theology” of suffering from the hymns: “Through the sin of Adam, all humanity is doomed to suffer; through the suffering of Christ, all humanity is offered freedom from sin. Christ demonstrated his perfection through a life of submissive suffering; Christians reach perfection through an imitative life of submissive suffering. In Christ, God is revealed as one who sympathizes with those who suffer; in Christ, the ‘members’ of his body take on his sympathizing character” (169-170).

While exploring these aspects of suffering in Charles’ thought, Cruickshank touches on several important themes. First, while Charles was certainly not the only Protestant to write about Christ’s suffering, his hymns draw deeply on German Pietism in general and the Moravian experience in particular. Cruickshank also notes the similarities of his hymns to the medieval Passion tradition, which had continued in England after the Reformation in such writers as George Herbert and Robert Herrick. Wesley’s hymns steer away from the graphic descriptions of the crucifixion found in Moravian sources, but resemble closely the medieval model in their emphasis on viewing Christ’s “love, innocence, and passivity” that arouses an emotional response of “pity and gratitude” (56). Secondly, Charles’ hymns were criticized in his time and afterward for their “monastic, feminine, and mawkish” style, a spirituality that was “not the Pauline” and was “Romish” to boot (as Congregationalist hymnwriter Josiah Conder put it in an 1838 letter [169]). E. P. Thompson would later call Wesley’s hymns “masochistic” (169) and claim that they encouraged Methodists to bear suffering patiently and thus “respond passively to the social and economic status quo” (97). Even Charles’ own brother was uncomfortable at times with the intensity of Charles’ language and with Charles’s insistence that suffering was not only beneficial to the Christian sometimes, but necessary to the Christian at all times (93).

Cruickshank does not entirely absolve Charles of these criticisms. What she does, however, is argue that the discomfort common to all of them derives from the centrality of suffering to Charles’ spirituality: “While many evangelical hymns (including Conder’s own) depicted the sufferings of Christ, few hymn-writers, apart from the Moravians, described these sufferings so repeatedly, so passionately, and in so much

detail as Charles Wesley. And few evangelical hymns were so insistent that this suffering must be paralleled in intensity by the suffering of Christians” (170-171). By underscoring this feature in Charles’ hymns, she performs several valuable services. First, as she herself observes, she complicates the picture of any unified Methodist “orthodoxy” deriving from the Wesley brothers. Any attempt to understand the intellectual and devotional lives of early Methodists must take into account their differing theologies without reading them into each other—and must take into account the differing ways early Methodists internalized those theologies. As Cruickshank states, “Both John and Charles Wesley taught that suffering would lead to joy, but it was Charles’ hymns that placed this theological conviction in narratives that were repeatedly read and sung by Methodist believers” (97).

But secondly and more importantly, she points out that, while those of us in the Wesleyan tradition have been outwardly deriving our rationally organized theology and pragmatically organized polity from John, we have been inwardly deriving from Charles the model of a passionately anguished devotional life, sensible at every moment to the suffering of Christ, others, and ourselves. While the number of those in the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition who have struggled, worried, and “prayed through”—or examined themselves searchingly to come to the despairing conclusion that they could not—may be decreasing in recent decades, there are still enough of us left that this book explains to us, in detailed historical context and lucid prose, why we felt it was necessary to do so in the first place.

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