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EDITOR'S NOTES

The 48th Annual Meeting of the Wesleyan Theological Society will convene jointly with the Society for Pentecostal Studies on the campus of Seattle Pacific University, Seattle, Washington, on March 21-23, 2013. The overall program theme will be "Holiness."

Our thanks goes to the numerous article writers, book reviewers, and publishing advertisers who have made outstanding contributions to this present journal issue. Particular congratulations goes to Dr. Susie Cunningham Stanley, winner of the Society's 2012 Lifetime Achievement Award (tribute to and response from her are found herein). Also of particular note is the Smith/Wynkoop Book Award for 2012 that went to Dr. Dean Flemming for his volume on Philippians in the New Beacon Bible Commentary series.

The identity of the current officers of the Wesleyan Theological Society and their email addresses are available in this issue. The WTS web site is Wesley.nnu.edu/wts. Available at this site is information about a searchable CD containing the full content of all issues of the *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 1966-2011, and much more information about the Society, past and present.

Efficient communication is important. Therefore, note the following WTS officers to contact for particular needs that you may have:

1. If you wish to apply for Society membership—Dr. Sam Powell
2. If you wish to write a book review—Dr. Richard Thompson
3. If you wish to place a book ad—Dr. Barry Callen
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Beginning with this issue, the format of this journal has changed. While the old format served our readers well for decades, it is hoped that the new will please a fresh generation of readers. Gratitude goes to Bronson Pate of San Diego, California, who provided the new artwork.

Barry L. Callen, Editor
Anderson, Indiana
October, 2012

THE SCOPE OF THE ATONEMENT IN THE EARLY CHURCH FATHERS

by

Christopher T. Bounds

Thomas C. Oden is one of today's most recognized and respected Wesleyan theologians. The stated goal of his systematic theology is to articulate the consensual teaching of Christianity, bridging the divide between Eastern and Western Christianity, between Orthodox, Roman Catholics, and Protestants.¹ To do so, he goes *ad fontes* as the foundation for his work—the Scriptures as interpreted in the first five centuries of Christianity. However, when Oden addresses the scope of Christ's work on the cross, while he teaches unlimited atonement as the historical "tradition," strikingly, there is no appeal to or citation of the early Church fathers.²

Oden's omission is compounded in his *Ancient Christian Doctrine* series. When summarizing the teaching of the fathers on the Nicene Creed's articles "for us men, and our salvation" and "for our sake he was crucified," there is no meaningful discussion of the extent of the atonement, even though it was the subject of significant fifth-century debate, with antecedents in much earlier polemics.³ While the universal scope of atonement is implicit, patristic sources marshaled as commentary on these Nicene statements are ambiguous on the subject when stripped from their larger literary context. In the end, other doctrinal issues rise to the fore and the debate over the limits of Christ's atonement appears to be of little concern.⁴

¹Thomas C. Oden, *The Living God*, Systematic Theology, vol. 1 (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987), ix-x; *The Word of Life*, Systematic Theology, vol. 2 (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1989), ix-xviii.

²Thomas C. Oden, *The Word of Life*, 388-91.

³Mark J. Edwards, ed., *We Believe in the Crucified and Risen Lord*, Ancient Christian Doctrine, vol. 3 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 1-2; John Anthony McGurkin, ed., *We Believe in One Lord Jesus Christ*, Ancient Christian Doctrine, vol. 2 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 79-80, 86-7.

⁴Mark J. Edwards, ed., *We Believe in the Crucified and Risen Lord*, 2-23; John Anthony McGurkin, ed., *We Believe in One Lord Jesus Christ*, 80-5; 87-95.

As a preeminent Wesleyan theologian rooted in Christian antiquity, Oden's neglect here is regrettable. The appeal to early Christian tradition as an arbiter in disputed interpretations of Scripture, such as the extent of the atonement, is a classic Wesleyan approach. John Wesley, when faced with disagreements on biblical exegesis or points of doctrine, often turned to the early church as an initial appeal beyond Scripture for clarification and substantiation of a position.⁵ Others in the Wesleyan theological tradition have followed his example to varying degrees.⁶

The purpose here is to supply what is lacking in Oden's work and that of the larger Wesleyan-Arminian tradition.⁷ I will help ground the Wesleyan belief in unlimited atonement by use of the biblical exegesis and theology of the early church fathers. I will show that there is a strong and persistent understanding of unlimited atonement in the fathers. I also will address how the fathers reconciled their understanding of unlimited

⁵John Wesley, "Farther Thoughts upon Separation from the Church," *The Works of John Wesley*, ed. Thomas Jackson, (London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, 1872; Reprint by Baker Book House, 1978), XIII: 272; "An Address to Clergy," *The Works of John Wesley*, X: 484; John Wesley, "A Letter to the Rev. Dr. Conyers Middleton," *The Works of John Wesley*, X: 79. For an extensive examination of the appeal to the Church fathers as a source for authority in Wesley's thought, see Scott J. Jones' *John Wesley's Conception and Use of the Scripture* (Nashville: Abingdon Press/Kingswood Books, 1995): 81-9, 169-75. See also Ted. A. Campbell, "John Wesley's Conceptions and Uses of Christian Antiquity" (Ph.D. dissertation, Southern Methodist University, 1984), subsequently revised and published as *John Wesley and Christian Antiquity: Religious Vision and Cultural Change* (Nashville: Abingdon Press/Kingswood Books, 1991).

⁶Thomas C. Oden's systematic theology is the most obvious contemporary example, and William Burt Pope's *A Compendium of Christian Theology* (New York: Phillips & Hunt, 1880) is an example from a century earlier. For an overview of the Wesleyan interest in the patristic period, see Ted A. Campbell, "Back to the Future: Wesleyan Quest for Ancient Roots: The 1980s," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 32, no.1 (1997).

⁷Wesleyan systematic theologies lack a serious treatment of this issue and no article has been published in the *Wesleyan Theological Journal* addressing the extent of the atonement, much less the patristic treatment of it. The best Wesleyan examination of the early church's understanding of the atonement's extent is Thomas C. Oden, *The Transforming Power of Grace* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 77-91. However, while Oden's discussion is helpful, the bulk of attention is given to three fathers, while others appear only in footnotes without discussion.

atonement with the reality that not all people will be saved. Finally, I will conclude with a brief summary comment, connecting patristic teaching to a Wesleyan understanding of the atonement.

Patristic Teaching Through the Fifth Century

The heart of early Ante-Nicene theology on this subject of unlimited atonement is expressed well in the teaching of Irenaeus (140-202), Hippolytus (170-235) and Clement of Alexandria (150-212). Irenaeus, in his “Proof of Apostolic Preaching” and “Against Heresies,” teaches that, as a result of the disobedience of Adam and Eve in the Garden, every human being suffers from the consequences of original sin—estrangement from God, death and the threat of eternal corruption. However, through Christ’s obedience in the work of recapitulation, salvation is made possible for “all men.”⁸ He states, “God recapitulated in Himself the ancient formation of man, that He might kill sin, deprive death of its power, and vivify man.”⁹ However, while Christ’s redemptive work is intended for all, humanity has free will to resist the call of the Holy Spirit to salvation, reject God’s grace in Christ, follow false teaching, and experience God’s final judgment of sin.

In his treatise “On Christ and the Antichrist,” Hippolytus speaks of the Son of God as one who enlightens the saints, teaches the ignorant, corrects the erring, acknowledges the poor, and “does not hate the female on account of the woman’s act of disobedience in the beginning, nor does he reject the male on account of man’s transgression, but he seeks all, and desires to save all, wishing to make all the children of God.”¹⁰ Hippolytus then identifies God’s desire to save all men and women as the motivation for Christ’s incarnation and “sufferings on the cross.”¹¹

Clement of Alexandria, in his “Exhortation to the Heathen,” proclaims God’s intention to make redemption possible for every person

⁸Irenaeus, “Against Heresies,” trans. Alexander Roberts and William Rambaut, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1, eds. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885), 3.18.1.

⁹Irenaeus, “Against Heresies,” 3.18.7.

¹⁰Hippolytus, “On Christ and the Antichrist,” trans. J. H. MacMahon, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 5, eds. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1886), 3.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 4.

through the Son. He describes Christ to unbelievers as “the lover of man” and “this, and nothing but this, is his only work—the salvation of man.”¹² Because Christ is the “savior of all men,” the “heathen” can be confident that Christ loves them and uses many different means to bring them to salvation. He concludes his appeal with the exhortation “to become partakers of (Christ’s) grace,” which is available to everyone.¹³

In the early Ante-Nicene period, no respected father can be cited within his literary context as limiting the scope of salvation, or more particularly the atonement. On the contrary, the temptation faced by the fathers was to extend the limits beyond humanity. Origen (185-254) in his “Commentary on the Gospel of John,” writes that, as the “great high priest,” Christ has offered himself not only as a sacrifice for all humanity but every “spiritual being,” including the devil and fallen angels. He states that Christ “died not only for men but also for the rest of spiritual beings . . . he died for all apart from God, for ‘by the grace of God he tasted death for all.’”¹⁴ Origen saw his teaching as the logical extension of the “rule of faith’s” teaching on the redemptive work of Christ.¹⁵

While Origen’s overly optimistic doctrine of the atonement would be rejected by later fathers, the foundational interpretive work of early Ante-Nicene teaching was passed down and developed in various ways by later Ante-Nicene writers. It found fertile ground in theologians like Victorinus (250-303) who explicitly connected Christ’s assumption of human nature and efficacious work to the Platonic understanding of universals. Because Christ assumed the universal nature of humanity, Christ’s human nature is efficacious for all humanity. He teaches, “When he took flesh, he took the universal idea of flesh; for as a result the whole power of flesh triumphed in his flesh . . . similarly he took the universal idea of soul. . . . Therefore man as a whole was assumed, and having been assumed was

¹²Clement of Alexandria, “Exhortation to the Heathen,” trans. William Wilson, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 2, eds. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885), 9.

¹³*Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁴Origen, “Commentary on the Gospel According to John,” trans. Ronald E. Heine, *The Fathers of the Church*, vol. 80 (The Catholic University of America Press, 1989), 1.255-6.

¹⁵Origen, “First Principles,” trans. Frederick Crombie, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 4, eds. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885), Preface, 2.

liberated. For human nature as a whole was in him, flesh as whole and soul as a whole, and they were lifted to the cross and purged through God the word, the universal for all universals.”¹⁶

This same use of Platonic philosophy to understand the unlimited extent of Christ’s redemptive work for humanity became common in later fathers, as clearly seen in Hilary of Poitiers (300-368), who teaches, “He by Whom man was made had nothing to gain by becoming Man; it was our gain that God was incarnate and dwelt among us, making all flesh His home by taking upon Him the flesh of One. For the sake of the human race the Son of God was born . . . so that by becoming man he might take the nature of flesh . . . so the body of the human race as a whole might be sanctified in him through association with this mixture.”¹⁷

While Victorinus represents one interpretive line of earlier Ante-Nicene teaching, Lactantius (260-330) represents another. He continued to develop the earlier fathers’ understanding of the cross as an example of humility for all of humanity. In teaching about the “great force and meaning” of the cross in “The Divine Institutes,” Lactantius argues that because of the humble way in which Christ died, there is “no one at all who might not be able to imitate him.”¹⁸ However, he recognizes that there is more to the cross than moral example. Christ is lifted up on the cross, elevated where everyone can see him, so that his passion might be known to “all” and become the “salvation of all.”¹⁹ Christ’s redemptive work through moral example and sacrificial death is intended for the entire human race.

In the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, the idea of unlimited atonement remains the consistent teaching of the church. Two “Doctors” of the Eastern Church, Athanasius (296-373) and Gregory Nazianzus (329-390), and two Doctors of the Western Church, Ambrose (339-397) and Jerome (347-420) represent well the teaching inherited from earlier fathers. Athanasius in “On the Incarnation of the Word” examines the motivation

¹⁶Quotation taken from J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), 386-7.

¹⁷Hilary of Poitiers, “On the Trinity,” trans. E. W. Watson and L. Pullan, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, vol. 9, edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1899), 2.25.

¹⁸Lactantius, “Divine Institutes,” trans. William Fletcher, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 7, eds. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1886), IV. 26.

¹⁹*Ibid.*

and necessity of Christ's coming. He states, "... the reason of his coming down was because of us, and that our transgression called forth the loving kindness of the Word ... for of his becoming incarnate we were the object and for our salvation he dealt so lovingly as to appear and be born in a human body."²⁰ He makes clear that the "us" and "our" here are in reference to humanity as a whole. Athanasius teaches that all people have died in Adam, but through Christ's incarnation and death on the cross the "ruin of all ... might be undone."²¹ God through Christ intends all of humanity to be redeemed, although this does not mean that all will be saved.

Gregory Nazianzus in his teaching about Christ in the "Fourth Theological Oration" declares, "He is our redemption, because he sets us free who were held captive under sin, giving himself as a ransom for us, the sacrifice to make expiation for the world."²² He argues that the Son of God is able to be a ransom for humanity and make redemption possible for humanity through his full assumption of human nature by uniting "to himself that which was condemned," so that he "may release it from all condemnation."²³ Nazianzus says he does this for "all" who share that nature he assumed.²⁴ Not only is Christ's work on the cross sufficient for the entire human race, it is intended for all humanity.

In a moving section from "Cain and Abel," Ambrose speaks of God's salvific love for all people, as well as the individual person. He writes, "He therefore is the expected who was born of a virgin and who came for my salvation and for the salvation of the entire world. ... He perceived that those who suffer cannot be healed without a remedy. For this reason, he bestowed medicine on the sick and by his assistance made health available to all."²⁵ Because salvation is made available to all, he goes on to say that

²⁰Athanasius, "On the Incarnation of the Word," trans. Archibald Robertson, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, vol. 4, eds. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1892), 4.

²¹*Ibid.*, 6,8.

²²Gregory Nazianzus, "Theological Orations," trans. Charles Gordon Browne and James Edward Swallow, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, vol. 7, eds. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1894), 30.20.

²³*Ibid.*, 30. 21.

²⁴*Ibid.*

²⁵Ambrose, "Cain and Abel," tran. John J. Savage, *Fathers of the Church*, vol. 42, ed. Roy Joseph Deferrari (New York: Fathers of the Church, Inc., 1961), 2.3.11.

whoever suffers God's judgment in the end can "ascribe to himself the real causes of his death, that man was unwilling to be cured, although he had a remedy at hand which could make possible his escape from death. The mercy of God has been made manifest to all."²⁶ Ambrose's teaching here is reiterated in his commentary "On Psalm 39" where he exhorts, "He wants all whom he has made and created to be his; would that you, O man, would not flee . . . for he seeks even those who flee." Ambrose argues that salvation is made available to all and the only reason people are not saved in the end is because of their "unwillingness to be cured."²⁷

Jerome, in a letter to the Roman nobleman Oceanus, explicitly addresses ideas associated with limited atonement—that there are some sins which Christ cannot cleanse and sinners for whom Christ did not die—and treats it as heresy. In refutation of such thinking, he contends, "What else is this but to say that Christ has died in vain? He has indeed died in vain if there are any whom he cannot make alive. When John the Baptist points to Christ and says, 'Behold the lamb of God which takes away the sins of the world,' he utters a falsehood if after all there are persons living whose sins Christ has not taken away."²⁸ Christ died to forgive the sin of every human being.

In the fourth and fifth century, along with asserting that Christ died for all, the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers address more often than earlier fathers why not all people are saved. Jerome in his "Commentary on Ephesians" makes the point that God wills to save all humanity, yet those who are not saved have only themselves to blame. He declares, "He wills all to be saved and to come to knowledge of the truth. But, because no one is saved without his own will for we possess free will, he wants us to will good, so that when we have willed it, he himself may will to fulfill his own counsel in us."²⁹

Jerome's contemporary, John Chrysostom (349-407) in "Homilia de ferendis reprehensionibus" concurs in his understanding, "God never

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Ambrose, *Commentary of Saint Ambrose on Twelve Psalms*, trans. Ide Ni Ri (Dublin: Halcyon Press, 2000), Psalm 39, note 20.

²⁸Jerome, "To Oceanus," trans. H. Fremantle, G. Lewis and W. G. Martley, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, vol. 6, eds. by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1893), Letter 69.

²⁹Jerome, "Commentary on Ephesians," trans. Ronald E. Heine, *The Commentaries of Origen and Jerome on St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 1.11.

compels anyone by necessity and force, but he wills that all be saved, yet he does not force anyone.” Why then are not all saved? Chrysostom answers, “. . . because not everyone’s will follows God’s will.”³⁰ In his “Homilies on Ephesians,” he proclaims that God “greatly longs after, greatly desires our salvation” and the only reason why the wicked are not saved is because this is what they have chosen.³¹ Another contemporary, Theodore of Mopseuestia (350-428), in his “Commentary on the Gospel of John” writes about the cause of God’s judgment on the unrighteous in John 3:17-18: “The purpose established by God is not that someone may be damned, but that all may be saved . . . indeed his grace is offered to all who want it.”³² In the end, those who are condemned are the authors of their own condemnation, not God, because God sent his Son into the world in order that all might be saved.³³

The anonymous Ambrosiaster (4th century) picks up the argument of others in the fourth century. He teaches that Christ died for all and that God “wills all men to be saved.” Salvation in and through Christ is available to all, but only if people want it. He declares, “for God does not wish them to be saved in a way that the unwilling would be saved.”³⁴ He then compares this to a physician who makes a public declaration of his healing profession so that people may know that he wants to heal all. However, the sick must come to him to be cured.³⁵

Cyril of Alexandria (376-444), in his “Commentary on the Gospel of John” (1:29), teaches that Christ is the lamb of God “led to the slaughter for all, that he might drive away the sin of the world . . . for the one lamb died for all. . . .”³⁶ This “all” is clarified even more in his comments on

³⁰John Chrysostom, “Homilies on Certain New Testament Texts,” trans. Gerald Bray, *We Believe in One God*, Ancient Christian Doctrine, vol. 1 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 100.

³¹John Chrysostom, “Homilies on Ephesians,” trans. Gross Alexander, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, First Series, vol. 13, ed. Philip Schaff (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1889), 1.

³²Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, trans. Marco Conti, in *Ancient Christian Texts* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic Press, 2010), 34-5.

³³*Ibid.*

³⁴Ambrosiaster, “1 Timothy 2:4,” J. P. Migne, ed., *Patrologia Latina* (Paris: Migne, 1848), 17.492.

³⁵*Ibid.*

³⁶Cyril of Alexandria, “Commentary on the Gospel of John 2.1,” ed. Joel Elowsky, *New Testament IVa John 1-10*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2002), 68.

John 3:19 when he states, “Jesus says that unbelievers had the opportunity to be illuminated, but preferred to remain in darkness. Such people, in fact, by failing to choose enlightenment, determine their own punishment against themselves . . . which was in their power to escape.”³⁷ Again, in his comments on John 10:27, Cyril teaches, “It might be said that inasmuch as he (Christ) has become man, he has made all human beings his relatives, since all are members of the same race. We are all united to Christ in a mystical relationship because of his incarnation. Yet those who do not preserve the likeness of his holiness are alienated from him.” This is what it means for the sheep to hear the shepherd’s voice.³⁸ All are reconciled to God in Christ, but those who reject or resist Christ’s work will not be in God’s family.

Prosper of Aquitaine (390-455), who followed Augustine’s teaching on predestination but came to reject his limited view of the atonement, writes: “Likewise, he who says that God does not will all men to be saved, but only a certain number who are predestined, speaks more harshly than one should speak about the depth of the unsearchable grace of God, ‘who wills all to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth.’”³⁹ Christ objectively accomplishes the work of salvation for all humanity, but redemption is only applied to those who repent, believe and are baptized.⁴⁰

With few exceptions, the early church fathers present a uniform witness to the unlimited scope of Christ’s salvific work in general, and atonement in particular, across East and West, Latin and Greek, and early to late theologians.⁴¹ Whether addressing this subject directly or indirectly, in different pastoral contexts and controversies, they testify to the fact that Christ died for all humanity, thus making redemption possible for any person.

Debate Over the Scope of Christian Redemption

I have shown through a general survey that the early church fathers through the fifth century held almost universally to an unlimited view of

³⁷Ibid, 128.

³⁸Ibid., 356.

³⁹Prosper of Acquitane, “Answer to the Gauls,” trans. P. De Letter, *Prosper of Aquitaine: Defense of St. Augustine*, Ancient Christian Writers, vol. 32 (New York: Newman Press, 1963), 8.

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹The two primary exceptions are Augustine and early Prosper of Acquitane.

Christ's atonement. At this point, I want to examine the specific debates that forced these fathers to articulate, refine, and develop their understanding, culminating in the fifth century controversy surrounding excesses in Augustinian theology.

1. Struggle With Gnosticism. Debates over the scope of Christ's salvific work had a sporadic, but recurring history in the patristic period. The earliest dispute arose in the church's struggle with Gnosticism. In his second-century refutation of Gnosticism, Irenaeus describes its "limits" on human salvation. Specifically, the Gnostics believed that there are three classes of humanity: (a) the "perfect" who are spiritual and will transition to the Pleroma and incorruptibility, (b) the "psychics" who have the potential through secret knowledge and the appropriate exercise of free will to become perfect, and (c) the "material" ones who are doomed to perish with the physical world and have no chance of achieving salvation in the Pleroma.⁴² Therefore, Gnostics believed that a whole segment of humanity is without hope of salvation. They are doomed to destruction.⁴³ In contrast, Irenaeus argued that, through the life, death and resurrection of Christ and the personal exercise of free will, everyone can be perfected in love and made incorruptible in the world to come.⁴⁴ The redemptive work of Christ is available to all. This is one of the truths distinguishing the church's "rule of faith" from the leading heresy of that time.⁴⁵

Over the centuries, the early Church continued to face the threat of Gnosticism and its teaching on limited salvation. In the fourth century Gregory Nazianzus condemned heretics who taught that humanity is comprised of three different classes. According to Gregory, they interpreted Matthew 19:11, "Not all men can receive this precept, but only to those whom it has been given," to mean that the "spiritual" are determined for salvation, while the "earthly" are incapable because of their nature. Salvation is limited to a certain class of people. In response, Gregory taught that salvation is synergistic. Redemption is made possible through God's grace in Christ and human cooperation with that grace. In the end, because of Christ's coming, no human being is determined for reprobation. If people are lost, they are lost as a result of resisting "the very choosing of the things that should be chosen."⁴⁶

⁴²Irenaeus, "Against Heresies," 1.5-6.1.

⁴³Ibid.

⁴⁴Ibid., 2.22.4. See also 3.18.3-5; 3.19-20; 3.23.1-8; 5.1.1.

⁴⁵Ibid., 3.1.1-2.3.

⁴⁶Ibid., 13.

Similarly, a contemporary of Nazianzus, Cyril of Jerusalem (313-386), refuted the idea that humanity had different natures and that salvation is dependent on which nature a person has. In his lectures to catechumens preparing for baptism, Cyril taught that people become children of God through the exercise of “free will” and not from a particular nature given by God.⁴⁷ He states, “For not by necessity, but from free choice we come to such a holy adoption as sons.”⁴⁸ This adoption is possible for all through the redemptive work of Christ and faith in God exercised in the sacrament of baptism.⁴⁹

2. Struggle With Greco-Roman Philosophies. A second source of debate over the extent of salvation came from the Greco-Roman world, particularly from its fatalistic/deterministic philosophies. Against this context in the third century, Origen was careful to clarify passages of Scripture that could be understood to teach that some human beings were determined by God for salvation, while others were fated for hell. For example, in “First Principles” Origen addressed Paul’s teaching on God “hardening Pharaoh’s heart” (Romans 9:18).⁵⁰ He explains that on one hand, the human heart is hardened by persistent resistance against the will of God. On the other, it is softened by surrendering and accepting God’s grace in life. Both hearts are caused by God’s grace, but it is the human response to grace that determines whether it hardens or softens. Like the ground that receives rain, if appropriately cultivated, it brings forth a good harvest. If not, it brings forth thistles and thorns. The rain caused both, but the ground determines what comes forth from it. So the human will if untrained and uncooperative is hardened by God’s grace.⁵¹

Similarly, in the same section of “First Principles,” Origen examines Jesus’ statement, “That seeing they may see and not perceive, and hearing they may hear, and not understand; lest they should happen to be converted and their sins forgiven them” (Mark 6:12).⁵² Origen recognized

⁴⁷Cyril of Jerusalem, “Catechetical Lectures,” trans. Edwin Hamilton Gifford, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, vol. 7, eds. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1893), 7.12.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*

⁴⁹*Ibid.*

⁵⁰Origen, “First Principles,” 3.1.

⁵¹*Ibid.*

⁵²*Ibid.*

that Jesus' statement appears to show that some are fated for damnation while others are determined for salvation. He responds by arguing that this passage shows Christ as a master physician who knows what precisely needs to be done in order to bring about a cure. It is not necessarily a good thing for a person to be healed too quickly. Some illnesses require greater time for treatment if they are to be remedied. If cured too quickly they may fall into sin again. Origen's point is that God knows best when and how to apply medicine to the sin-sick soul and what works for one, may not work for the other. Thus, this passage in Mark addresses those who are not yet ready to be cured.⁵³

3. Struggle With the Apollonarian Heresy. Another controversy over the scope of Christ's redemption arose in the fourth century in the heat of the Apollonarian controversy. While Apollonarius was rejected primarily for his inadequate understanding of Christ's humanity, teaching that Christ had a human body, but not a human soul, Gregory of Nyssa (335-394) identified other deficiencies in his theology. According to Gregory, Apollonarius used John 5:21, "the Son gives life to whom he will," to argue that Christ did not will to save some people. In response, Nyssa argued that because the Father wills "all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" and that the Father's will is in the Son, then "the Son has the same will to save."⁵⁴ A person cannot say that the Father and Son are divided in will. In regard to why some are saved and others are lost, Nyssa, like the fathers before him, located his answer in the human response to divine grace and not in God's will to save some and "ruin" others.⁵⁵

4. Struggle With Excesses in Augustine's Theology. These debates with Gnosticism, the culture of late antiquity, and Apollonarianism set the context for the fifth century. Here, the dispute came to full expression in the early church and focused on Augustine's doctrine of predestination and his interpretation of I Timothy 2:4, "God wills that all be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth."

Before the heat of the Pelagian controversy, Augustine (354-430) had interpreted this passage within its larger context of Paul's exhortation to

⁵³Ibid.

⁵⁴Gregory of Nyssa, "Against Apollinarius," J. P. Migne, ed., *Patrologia Cursus Completus*, Series Graeca (Paris: Migne, 1866), 60.554.

⁵⁵Ibid.

pray for kings and those in authority, because God desires them to be saved and come to truth. Augustine also taught that God's will "that all be saved" meant God gives opportunities for salvation to all, but it is up to the individual to take advantage of divine opportunities through the exercise of free will. At this point, there was no attempt by Augustine to limit the scope of "all men" in this passage. He essentially follows the teaching found in earlier Ante-Nicene, Nicene, and Post-Nicene teaching.⁵⁶

However, as his understanding of predestination became more settled in the throes of the Pelagian controversy, Augustine reinterpreted 1 Timothy 2:4 in a way that read "God wills" and "all men" in a more narrow sense. First, Augustine interpreted "God wills" to mean that God's desire to save extends only to those whom He in fact redeems. Those not elected for salvation are excluded.⁵⁷ Later, he makes even clearer that "God wills" is an expression of divine omnipotence to save only those whom He has chosen.⁵⁸ Second, as Augustine's understanding of the elect becomes more specific, his treatment of "all men" does as well. "All men" is interpreted as those predestined by God for salvation, representing the various classes of the human race, "kings, private citizens, nobles, ordinary men, lofty, lowly, learned, unlearned. . . ." "All men" means that the whole human race is represented in salvation.⁵⁹

Much of Augustine's theology of grace was favorably received by the church, as seen in the condemnation of Pelagianism at the Council of Carthage in 418, the Council of Ephesus in 431, and the decrees from the Second Council of Orange in 529. However, the extremes of his theology, particularly his doctrine of predestination and his limitation on God's salvific will in 1 Timothy 2:4, became the subject of debate in the fifth century. In the end, both extremes were rejected.⁶⁰

⁵⁶Augustine, *Propositions from the Epistle to the Romans* (Society of Biblical Literature, 1982), 44.2.

⁵⁷Augustine, "On Rebuke and Grace," trans. Peter Holmes and Robert Ernest Wallis, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, First Series, Vol. 5, ed. Philip Schaff (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1887) 14.44.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, 14.45-6.

⁵⁹Augustine, "Enchiridion," 103.

⁶⁰See, for example, Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine: Volume 1, The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1971), 318, and Thomas C. Oden, *The Power of Transforming Grace* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 132-8.

Given the consensual history of received teaching on this subject, the way earlier church fathers refuted any attempts to limit the human scope of salvation, it was not surprising that Augustine's exegesis of this passage was called into question. Specifically, a group of monks and bishops in Southern Gaul led the charge, asserting that Augustine's teaching on 1 Timothy was "new and of no value," conflicting "with the intuitions of the church, with antiquity and the opinions of the fathers."⁶¹ Even Prosper of Aquitaine, who was a devoted follower of Augustinian teaching and initially followed Augustine's exegesis here, came to reject this reading of Timothy.⁶²

More specifically, no earlier church father had interpreted 1 Timothy 2:4 in Augustine's way. Ante-Nicene, Nicene and Post Nicene treatments of this passage followed three main paths. First, and most prominently, the fathers used it as a basis to teach that God desires the salvation of all humanity and makes salvation possible through Christ. For example, Theodoret (393-466) in his reflection on this passage states that, although God has no need of humanity, "He thirsts for the salvation of every man."⁶³ Therefore, through the life, death and resurrection of Christ, God in various ways calls all who do not believe, and all who are his enemies, to salvation.⁶⁴ Similarly, Theodore of Mopsuestia, speaking on this passage in its larger context, states, "Now he gave himself for all does not mean it was for some that he allowed himself to undergo death; rather, it was in his wish to confer benefit on all in common that he saw fit to undergo the passion he suffered. . . . Christ himself likewise plainly drew near to all by his own nature and bestowed benefit on all, since he underwent the passion for all."⁶⁵

⁶¹Augustine, *Letters 211-270, 1-29*, trans. Roland Teske, *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, Part II, vol. 4, ed. Boniface Ramsey (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2005), 226.2; 225. 2, 3.

⁶²Prosper of Aquitaine, *The Call of the Nations*, trans. P. De Letter, *Ancient Christian Writers*, vol. 14, ed. Johannes Quasten and Joseph C. Plumpe (New York: Newman Press, 1952), 1.12.

⁶³Theodoret, "Letter to Uranius, Governor of Cyprus," trans. Blomfield Jackson, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, vol. 3, eds. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1893), LXXVI.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*

⁶⁵Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Theodore of Mopsuestia: Commentary on Minor Epistles*, trans. Rowan Greer (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2010), 553.

Second, fathers used 1 Timothy 2:4 as a “launching pad” to explore the underlying basis of God’s desire to save every human being. For example, Methodius (260-311) relates this verse in the context of God’s creation of human beings. Each person’s soul is directly created by God and is immortal, being sown into the mortal body by God. Because of the worth and value of the soul in the eyes of God, God desires all men to be saved.⁶⁶

Finally, fathers used God’s unlimited salvific intent here as a basis for concrete action. For example, Pope Fabian (200-250) appropriates this passage as a basis for the church to pray for schematics and heretics. Prayers are to be lifted up for God to bring repentance to their hearts and to be reconciled to the church so that their souls may not be lost in the end. God does not want any person to perish.⁶⁷ Similarly, Leo the Great (400-461) uses this passage as his rationale for the church to seek reconciliation with the heretic Eutyches, not to have him cut off from the fellowship of the church, in order that he might be reconciled to God.⁶⁸ John Cassian (360-435) emphasizes this passage as a basis for understanding “thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven” in the Lord’s prayer. The will of God is to pray for the salvation of all humanity, because in heaven all are redeemed, so this is what God desires here on earth and thus we should pray for it.⁶⁹

These early debates over the extent of salvation arose from a variety of sources, from the larger philosophical and religious milieu, from heretical sects in the church, and from one of the early Church’s great “doctors,” Augustine. In every case, where there was an attempt to limit the possibility of salvation for all humanity in general, and to limit the scope of atonement in particular, the fathers moved to confront and reject such teaching.

⁶⁶Methodius, “The Banquet of the Ten Virgins,” trans. William R. Clark, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 6, eds. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1886), 6.2.7.

⁶⁷Fabian, “The Epistles of Pope Fabian,” trans. A. Cleveland Coxe, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 8, eds. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1886), 1.

⁶⁸Leo the Great, “Letters of Leo the Great,” trans. Charles Lett Feltoe, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, vol. 12, eds. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1895), XCVIII.3.

⁶⁹John Cassian, “Conferences,” trans. C. S. Gibson, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, vol. 11, eds. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1894), 11, 20.

The Fathers' Reconciliation of Unlimited Atonement with the Reality That Not All People Are Saved in the End

The question brought to the fore by Augustine in the fifth century was, "If God wills all to be saved, why are some redeemed and others not?" Augustine gives a clear answer: God wills omnipotently the elect to be saved and wills the rest to reprobation.⁷⁰ However, while Augustine's reply was rejected as a whole by the fathers, he forced them to clarify the church's historic position.

At this point, I want to offer a brief survey of the patristic response to this question and the development that takes place in their understanding. Foundational to their teaching is the belief that reprobation is the result of human failure to cooperate with God's grace and not any divine decision or lack of intention to save people through the work of Christ. Justin Martyr (103-165) states the consensus of the fathers, "But if the word of God foretells that some angels and men shall be certainly punished, it did so because it foreknew that they would be unchangeably wicked, but not because God had created them so. So that if they repent, all who wish for it can obtain mercy from God"⁷¹

Similarly, Clement of Alexandria explains why some who hear the Gospel do not believe. In 1 Corinthians 1:24 the Apostle Paul writes, "but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ is the power and wisdom of God."⁷² Clement teaches that "all men are called," but this Scripture has reference specifically to those "who willed to obey."⁷³ While all are called to salvation in a general sense, only those who obey are "called" in this particular sense. In the end, the reason why some do not come to Christ is because they are unwilling. The cause for reprobation is found in humanity and not in God, because "there is no unrighteousness with God" and "it lies in us to accept or to turn aside."⁷⁴

⁷⁰Augustine, "Enchiridion," trans. J. F. Shaw, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, First Series, vol. 3, ed. Philip Schaff (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1887), 97-8.

⁷¹Justin Martyr, "Dialogue with Trypho," trans. Marcus Dods and George Reith, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1, eds. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885), 141.

⁷²Clement of Alexandria, "Stromata," trans. by William Wilson, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 2, eds. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885) I.18.

⁷³Ibid.

⁷⁴Ibid.

Directly addressing this issue, John Chrysostom writes, "But he [the apostle Paul] says that all have sinned and need the glory of God. If, then, all have sinned, how is it that some are saved, but others perish? Because not all willed to draw near. For as His part, all have been saved. For all were called."⁷⁵ This foundation informs the fathers' interpretation of God hardening Pharaoh's heart. Jerome places the blame on Pharaoh and not God. Following the earlier interpretation of Origen, Jerome compares the action of divine grace to the heat of the sun, and as such is always good. The fact that some are hardened by that grace, while others are not, flows directly from the human response to grace in attitude and action. The disposition of humanity determines the type of reception grace receives, and God enables humanity to determine for themselves what that reception will be.⁷⁶

Taking a slightly different approach, but making the same basic point, John of Damascus (676-749) teaches that "it is customary of Scripture to speak of what God allows as his action."⁷⁷ Statements in the Old and New Testaments that attribute evil to God must be understood as God allowing it to happen, not because he caused the evil. Saying that God hardened Pharaoh's heart is acknowledging simply that God allowed it to happen. Reprobation is not a result of the limits of atonement or God's will to save, but the response of humanity, recognizing that God permits people to reject the grace given to all in Christ.

Next, the fathers moved to clarify potential misunderstandings of the relationship between God's foreknowledge of reprobation and the divine will. Specifically, they taught that divine foreknowledge of people in final reprobation did not imply that God determined them to be in that state. John Chrysostom writes, "But if the word of God predicts that angels and men are going to be punished, it predicts these things because He foreknows that they are going to be unchangeably wicked, but not because God made them such."⁷⁸

Irenaeus, in refuting the Marcionite charge that Scripture teaches that God is evil because he hardened Pharaoh's heart, argues that in divine fore-

⁷⁵John Chrysostom, "Homilies on the Epistle to the Romans," trans. George B. Stevens, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, First Series, vol. 11, ed. Philip Schaff (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1887), Homily 16.

⁷⁶Jerome, "Letter to Hedybia" in *Letters of Jerome*, trans. Andrew Cain (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 120.10.

⁷⁷John of Damascus, "On the Orthodox Faith," 4.19.

⁷⁸John Chrysostom, "Homilies on the Epistle to the Romans," 8.30.

knowledge God “has handed over to their infidelity as many as He knows will not believe, and has turned His face away from such ones, leaving them in the darkness which they chose for themselves.”⁷⁹ The general principle at work in Pharaoh and in all unrepentant sinners is that God hands them over to their wickedness because He knows they will remain recalcitrant in their sin. Again, Pharaoh is the source for his hardening, not God.

Next the fathers addressed the relationship of God’s foreknowledge with predestination. Cyril of Alexandria confronts an excuse made by some unbelievers. He states their position: “Some make a ready excuse for their lack of faith . . . saying ‘if they are called whom God foreknew according to his previous choice, there is nothing those who have not yet believed can do. For we have not been called or predestined.’”⁸⁰ In response, Cyril teaches that no person can come to God without being called of God. All people are dependent on God for this call and cannot come in their power. However, Cyril makes clear that all are given this call. The reason why some come and others do not is because of their decisions and choices. In the end, all who do not come to God do so because they “did not will to come.”⁸¹ Predestination is based upon God’s foreknowledge of those who in fact accept the divine invitation.

Key to the fathers teaching on predestination is their synergistic understanding of salvation and the role that humanity plays in God’s work of predestination. Hilary of Poitiers (300-368) makes this case. In his discussion of Psalm 64:5, “blessed is he whom you have chosen and taken up,” and Jesus’ words, “Many are called, but few are chosen,” Hilary teaches that those chosen by God are chosen based on their own actions and reception of the Gospel. It is not “a matter of random judgment,” but is based on their own choices in response to divine grace.⁸²

Chrysostom elaborates further, teaching that Christians have been predestined by God in love.” Thus, predestination does not happen as a result of any human good works, but from the love of God. However, he clarifies, it is not by divine love alone, but from “our virtue” as well.⁸³ He

⁷⁹Irenaeus, “Against Heresies,” 4.29.2.

⁸⁰Cyril of Alexandria, “In Epistolam ad Romanos,” *Patrologia Cursus Completus*, Series Graeca (Paris: Migne, 1866), 74.828-29.

⁸¹Ibid.

⁸²Hilary of Poitiers, “In Psalmum,” *Patrologia Latina* (Paris: Migne, 1848), 9.415.

⁸³John Chrysostom, “Homilies on Ephesians,” trans. George B. Stevens, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, First Series, vol. 11, ed. Philip Schaff (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1887), Homily 1.

states, "For if it were from (His) love alone, it would be necessary that all would be saved. But again, if it were from virtue alone, His coming would be superfluous, and all that He did through dispensation. But it is neither from love alone, nor from our virtue, but from both."⁸⁴ Chrysostom makes clear that the only cause for reprobation and not election is found in humanity and not in God.

John of Damascus teaches that no human being can merit salvation and that without divine grace "it is impossible for us to will . . . good. However, it is our power either to remain in virtue and to follow God who called us to it, or to depart from virtue."⁸⁵ Regarding the reprobate, he teaches, "Total desertion happens when, after God has done everything to save, the man remains unreformed and not cured, or rather incurable."⁸⁶

Finally, the fathers made a distinction between God's antecedent and consequent will. John of Damascus culminates the fathers' reflection here by making this distinction, teaching that God wills all to be saved in His antecedent will, but in his consequent will, taking into account the "wills" of humanity, God condemns those who have rejected His grace.⁸⁷ He states, "But the total desertion happens when, after God has done everything to save, the man remains unreformed and not cured, or rather, incurable, as a result of his own resolve. Then he is given over to complete destruction, like Judas. . . . It is necessary to know that God antecedently wills all to be saved and to reach His kingdom, for he did not make us to punish, but to share in His goodness, because He is good. But He wills that sinners be punished, because He is just. Now the first (will) is called antecedent will, and will of good pleasure, but the second (will is called) consequent will and a giving way (and it comes) from our fault."⁸⁸

While the fathers as a whole believed that God wills to save all, they recognized through Scripture and experience that not all humanity will be saved in the end. People are condemned in the end because of their own refusal to cooperate with the grace of God in Christ, which they could have done. As the church fathers addressed the doctrine of predestination, they linked it to God's foreknowledge of a person's response to

⁸⁴Ibid., 2.30.

⁸⁵John of Damascus, "On the Orthodox Faith," 2.29.

⁸⁶Ibid., 2.29.

⁸⁷Ibid.

⁸⁸Ibid.

grace, recognizing its foundation in a divine and human synergism, with priority given to God's grace. Finally, they clarified their understanding of why not all are saved by making a distinction between God's antecedent and consequent will.

Conclusion

In conclusion, while Thomas Oden in his systematic theology does not substantiate unlimited atonement in the early consensual tradition of the church, the foundation is clearly there. Our confidence as Wesleyans in "unlimited atonement" is grounded not only in our interpretation of God's Word, the Scriptures, but also in the earliest reflection and interpretation of the Scriptures in the church. Our belief in unlimited atonement was the consensual exegesis and understanding of the first 500 years of Christianity.

SUBORDINATION OF ECCLESIOLOGY AND SACRAMENTAL THEOLOGY TO PNEUMATOLOGY IN THE NINETEENTH-CENTURY HOLINESS MOVEMENT

by

R. David Rightmire

The development of ecclesiological thinking is a modern phenomenon. Although implicit throughout church history, theological attention was sparingly given to the church itself. Even during the late Middle Ages and Reformation, any serious examination of ecclesiology was restricted to sacramental concerns. This is particularly true for the free-church Protestant view of the late nineteenth century holiness revival. In contrast to the Catholic view with its emphasis on the given continuity of the church and the classical Protestant view with its stress on the nature of the church as called from above through the preached Word and administered sacraments, the free-church places its emphasis on the “free response of believers in the Spirit and upon the possibility that Christ will call out new forms of faith and obedience in apparent disregard of visible continuity.”²

The Teaching of John Wesley

Although John Wesley would fit into the “classical” group with its emphasis on Christ’s continuous calling of the church into existence through Word and sacrament, the nineteenth-century holiness movement emphasized a pneumatological ecclesiology that needed little continuity with historical institutions. The shifting emphases between Wesley and the holiness revival of the nineteenth century involved more than differ-

¹For the author’s further exploration of this topic in relation to the 1883 decision of William Booth to abandon sacramental practice, see: R. David Rightmire, *Sacraments and the Salvation Army: Pneumatological Foundations* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1990).

²Colin Williams, *The Church*, vol. 4: *New Directions In Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1968), 53.

ing ecclesiologies. There also were shifts from Christocentricity to pneumatocentricity; from an understanding of history as divided into two covenants to a trinitarian dispensationalism; from the goal of sanctification as Christian perfection to an emphasis on the event of a "second blessing"; toward a greater exegetical dependence on the book of Acts than previously stressed by Wesley; and toward an emphasis on the "assurance" or "evidence" of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.³

Wesley's doctrine of Christian perfection was intimately connected with his view of the synthesis of both imputed and imparted righteousness. The initiative for holiness is from God, first in the atonement of Christ, and second through prevenient and subsequent grace. Holiness is a gift; it is imputed to humanity. Wesley taught that the righteousness of Christ is imputed to all believers, but that it was not his "divine righteousness"; rather, it was his "human righteousness." The holiness which an individual receives through union with Christ is possessed by the individual, yet it is still Christ's. It is imparted, yet still imputed. Through union with Christ, the individual becomes holy to a degree and lives in a deified state, which is a supplement to human nature. Imparted righteousness is sustained moment by moment by the influence of the Holy Spirit on the human soul. Therefore, growth in holiness and perfection is a daily communion with the Spirit of Christ. It is important to note, however, that Wesley taught that there was no perfection in this life that permitted the abstention from all the ordinances of God.⁴

The Shifting Emphases: Finney, Mahan, Caughey

The shift in ecclesiological and sacramental emphases between Wesley and the nineteenth-century holiness movement must be viewed in relation to changing contexts of religious life in America. Nineteenth-century American religion was marked by an empiricism that reflects an exaltation of the place of experience in attaining spiritual truth. As such, its

³Donald Dayton, "The Doctrine of the Baptism of the Holy Spirit: Its Emergence and Significance," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 13 (Spring 1978): 114.

⁴John Wesley, *Letters*, ed. John Telford, 8 vols. (London: Epworth Press, 1931), 3:380; *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection: As Believed and Taught By the Reverend John Wesley From 1725-1777*, Reprint of 1872 authorized text of the Wesleyan Conference (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 1966), 87; *Standard Sermons*, ed. E. H. Sugden, 2 vols. (London: Epworth Press, 1961), 1: 234, 428; *The Poetical Works of John and Charles Wesley*, ed. G. Osborn, 13 vols. (London: Wesleyan Methodist Conference Office, 1868-72), 2: 46.

roots go back to Continental Pietism and New England Puritanism, while being influenced by frontier revivalism. This experience was the basis of corporate worship as individuals witnessed to a common personal faith. Certain patterns of the conversion experience became the liturgy and sacrament of revivalism, "the very enactment of the drama of salvation."⁵

The camp meetings of the Second Great Awakening (c.1800), although mostly remembered for their emotional manifestations in praying, singing, exhorting, and preaching, were (like the Methodist camp meetings of the late eighteenth century) first formed for the purpose of celebrating the Lord's Supper. What started out to be sacramental preparation soon took on a life of its own, the solemn exhortation and searching of conscience necessary for sacramental participation, resulting in sometimes extreme physical and emotional manifestations. The revivalistic forms of early camp meetings, although clearly linked with sacramental concerns (i.e., the making available of the means of grace on the frontier), rapidly gained a dominant and independent role in nineteenth-century American revivalism.⁶

These forms naturally made their way into the nineteenth-century holiness revival, as both Oberlin and Wesleyan perfectionists incorporated revivalistic "new measures" with a radicalized pneumatological emphasis. For Charles Finney, sacramental concerns were subordinated to a position of pragmatic means, as illustrated in his sermon "Hindrances to Revivals":

The church always felt it necessary to have something of the kind [anxious seat] to answer to this very purpose. In the days of the apostles baptism answered this purpose. The Gospel was preached to the people, and then all those who were willing to be on the side of Christ were called on to be baptized. It held the precise place that the anxious seat does now, as a public manifestation of a determination to be a Christian.⁷

⁵Daniel D. Williams, "Tradition and Experience in American Religion," in *The Shaping of American Religion*, ed. James W. Smith and A. Leland Jamison (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961), 443.

⁶Catherine C. Cleveland, *The Great Revival In the West, 1797-1805* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1916), 63, 77; Robert Davidson, *History of the Presbyterian Church In the State of Kentucky* (New York: Robert Carter, 1847), 134.

⁷Charles G. Finney, *Finney On Revival*, ed. E. E. Shelhamer (London: Marshall, Morgan, and Scott, nd.), 60. Note the subjectivity of Finney's sacramental theology.

Stressing the priority of conversion, Finney opposed any sectarian controversy. In his "Instructions to Sinners," this emphasis is applied to baptismal controversies:

Young converts should not be made sectarian in their feelings. They should not be taught to dwell on sectarian distinctions. . . . When I hear them asking: "Do you believe in sprinkling?" or: "Do you believe in immersing?" I feel sad. . . . Their sectarian zeal soon sours their feelings, eats out all the heart of their religion, and moulds their whole character into sinful, sectarian bigotry. They generally become mighty zealous for the traditions of the elders, and very little concerned for the salvation of souls.⁸

Implicit in Finney's objection to the "traditions of the elders," and his development of "new measures," was a fear of formalism.

Asa Mahan provides further evidence for the subordination of ecclesiological and sacramental concerns to the pneumatological hermeneutic of Oberlin perfectionism. Basic to Mahan's understanding of sacramentality and ecclesiology was his emphasis on the restoration of the age of the Spirit. He said, "In no era of church history, since the primitive age passed away, has the mission and 'promise of the Spirit' occupied so much attention among all classes of believers as now. We regard this as a glorious sign of the times. We pray that the results of this attention may be a Pentecostal baptism of the Holy Ghost upon all the churches throughout the Christian world."⁹ This restored dispensation was thought not only illumine the old, but to reveal new truths "which have power before unknown, for conversion, sanctification, consolation, and fullness of joy." The new dispensation of the Spirit was strong in the early church, evidenced in "power, unity and boldness." Once the "martyr age" came to a close with Constantine, the age of the Spirit went into decline, only to be resuscitated in the Reformation, Wesleyan revival, Edwardsean awakening and Oberlin perfectionism.¹⁰ Definite eschatological patterns emerge in Mahan's dispensationalism. He judged that, had this divine baptism continued in the church, long before the first thousand years of the Christian era had passed away "the kingdoms of this world would have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ."¹¹

⁸Ibid., 93-94.

⁹Asa Mahan, *The Baptism of the Holy Ghost* (London: Elliot Stock, 1876), 10-11.

¹⁰Ibid., 78, 79-91.

¹¹Ibid., 82-83.

In dealing with the preparation of the believer for the baptism of the Spirit, Mahan refers to the dangers of “formalism.” The church, perceiving that the reception of this spiritual baptism often accompanied the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper, soon began to stress the ordinances as preconditions and guarantees for the baptism of the Spirit. Mahan contends that the sacraments are divine ordinances, appointed by God, mediating a “spiritual presence,” but that they are empty and devoid of efficacy apart from proper heart preparedness. The restoration of the age of the Spirit allows those within the church to “go farther” than the ordinances, and to approach them by faith, thus receiving by means of the sacraments, “the baptism of this heavenly gift.” Although Spirit baptism does not preclude the sacraments, the latter are viewed as means to a greater end. This greater end is the personal, permanent presence of the Holy Spirit, making possible fellowship with the Godhead. “It is not with the Spirit that the soul has direct intercommunion; but, through the Spirit, with the Father and with Christ.” Mahan repeatedly distinguishes between the temporary bodily presence of Christ and the permanent presence of the Holy Spirit in the experience of entire sanctification. The “permanence and power” of the “divine baptism” is implicitly contrasted with the temporary nature of sacramental life.¹²

The Wesleyan perfectionists likewise found room for a sacramental theology, but with the passing of time, lost their founder’s sense of balance between ecclesiological and pneumatological concerns. James Caughey’s mission to Ireland and England between 1841 and 1847 reflects this transition.¹³ Wherever Caughey went, he preached the priority of full salvation, presently received by faith. His meetings emphasized the relationship of holiness doctrine to the atonement of Christ: “The blood of Christ! Holiness cannot dissolve your dependence upon it. You will need its merit and cleansing efficacy from moment to moment. . . . None makes more constant use of the blood of Christ than he who is truly sanctified.”¹⁴ Viewing the Lord’s Supper as a commemoration of the atonement, Caughey failed to come to grips with Wesley’s synthesis of imparted and imputed righteousness. Instead, imparted righteousness is

¹²Ibid., 23, 29-30, 47, 50-52, 99, 143.

¹³Caughey claimed 22,000 converts, 10,000 of which experienced full salvation in this mission. *Earnest Christianity Illustrated* (Boston: J.P. Magee, 1855), 18.

¹⁴Ibid., 393-94.

stressed to the exclusion of imputed righteousness. Thus, the Lord's Supper is understood as merely commemorating that which is applied to the believer moment by moment by the indwelling Holy Spirit in entire sanctification. Rather than viewing the sacrament as the promise of the forgiveness of sins, received by faith in Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit, the Lord's Supper was thought to point beyond itself to a spiritual communion with Christ.

The effect of American holiness revivalism in Victorian England was greatest among the Methodist bodies. Reawakened to their Wesleyan holiness heritage, many Methodists responded to the pneumatological emphases of the late nineteenth century holiness movement. Not all Methodists were enamored with the methods employed by frontier evangelists. The holiness revivalists, however, found fertile ground within Methodism and communicated their theological emphases to those willing to hear. The ecclesiology and sacramentality of Methodism had drifted away from Wesley's understanding of the church and its ordinances. Although maintaining sacramental practice, the Wesleyan Methodists held a subjectivistic sacramental position, conditioned by scripture, reason and experience.

A quotation from William Cooke's *Christian Theology* (the standard Methodist theological textbook of Victorian Methodism), bears out these emphases: "Religion is always described as an experimental blessing, realized in the heart, by the agency of the Holy Ghost; and therefore to make its essence consist in any external forms, is once to deny the most explicit testimony of scripture, and to contradict the most obvious principles in the philosophy of the human mind."¹⁵ Cooke and other "orthodox" Methodists of the Victorian era sought to maintain sacramental practice. By stressing a figurative interpretation of the sacraments, and emphasizing the pneumatological priority of entire sanctification, however, the environment was created for the further subordination of sacramental concerns to the revivalistic "new measures" of the holiness movement.¹⁶

Influence of Phoebe Palmer and Others

As the leading advocate of "full salvation" in the late nineteenth-century holiness revival, Phoebe Palmer's influence was immense. Her views

¹⁵William Cooke, *Christian Theology* (London: Partridge and Oakey, 1853), 439. The context of this statement was Cooke's attack on Pusey's position on baptismal regeneration.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 442-43.

shaped the theology of the movement in a way that would be unparalleled. Thus, it is crucial to examine her writings for evidence of the subordination of ecclesiology and sacramental theology to pneumatological concerns. Melvin Dieter notes that Mrs. Palmer's theology was dominated by a "biblio-centricity" that rooted experience in scriptural authority. As the holiness movement became increasingly institutionalized, biblical interpretation took the form of proof-texting. Such holiness biblicism, however, did not extend to matters beyond specific pneumatological concerns. In other theological areas there were characteristically a variety of interpretations. Sacramental theology is one such case in point. The whole gamut of sacramental practice was observed by holiness advocates, from realistic to spiritualistic ends of the spectrum. Dieter views this phenomenon as a result of the variety of sacramental concerns in the different traditions.¹⁷ The mutuality of pneumatological expression and biblical interpretation, however, served to subordinate interest in and concern for sacramental issues.¹⁸ "Organic union" was not accomplished, but neither was it sought after in sacramental theology.

Phoebe Palmer criticized those who neglected the "stated means of grace" as those who are out of fellowship with God. What the phrase "means of grace" refers to in her theology is identified as preaching, prayer, and class meetings. These forms are occasions for meeting with Christ. They are "special seasons" and appointed times. Although they reflect Wesleyan influences, Palmer's "means" obviously lack the sacramental dimensions of Wesley's theology. She quotes Wesley in his equation of the voice of the church with the voice of God, and calls on Christians to regard the church's "appointments as heaven-directed," but fails to develop this beyond her own stated "means." The one exception is the "full baptism of the Holy Ghost," which she regards as "the act of ordination on the part of God, by which he empowers his disciples with the might of his Spirit." This Spirit baptism is the source for revival within the church. The corporate gathering of believers is the appointed time for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit "in his reviving influences." Although Palmer sees scripture as the "voice of the Spirit," serving as the vehicle

¹⁷Melvin E. Dieter, *The Holiness Revival of the Nineteenth Century* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1980), 45.

¹⁸Paul Meredith Bassett, "The Interplay of Christology and Ecclesiology In the Theology of the Holiness Movement," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 16 (Fall 1981): 79.

and guideline for faith in Christ and divine communion, she emphasizes the “eternal Spirit” as the sole agent of full salvation and communion with God, mediating the bodily presence of Christ (which she equates with scripture) to man.¹⁹

Such pneumatologically-conditioned sacramental theology was further perpetuated by Mr. and Mrs. Robert Smith, Thomas Upham, and W. B. Godbey. The perfectionism of George Fox and Robert Barclay found expression in the holiness writings of Robert Pearsall Smith and Hannah Whitall Smith. These Quakers, influenced by Methodism, had been prepared by their heritage, not only for the doctrine and experience of holiness but also for the de-emphasis of sacramental and ecclesiological concerns.²⁰ Thomas Upham, influenced by the mysticism of William Law, developed a perfectionism that bordered on quietism. He viewed the ultimate goal of life “under the dispensation of the Holy Ghost” to be union with God: “all moral and accountable beings, just in proportion as they are freed from the dominion of sin, have a natural and inherent tendency to unite with God.”²¹ Holiness is the basis by which real communion and divine union take place.

The spiritualism of reality inherent in much of holiness doctrine is most explicit in the writings of W. B. Godbey. Although not normative for the movement as a whole, his theology bears witness to the dangers inherent in an exaltation of pneumatology: “You see from the scriptures, that while we were created with material bodies, they are destined to spiritualization; originally the tenement of the immortal soul . . . divested of all ponderous matter.”²² The baptism of the Holy Spirit and fire, which Christ makes possible, enables such “spiritualization” to be realized in the present. The Holy Spirit as the “excarnate Christ,” makes available the benefits of redemption through baptism, which Godbey understands as the spiritual application of the blood of Christ. In contrast to the incarnation of Christ, the “incarnation of the Holy Ghost in human bodies” is not

¹⁹Phoebe Palmer, *Faith and Its Effects*, 152, 188, 201-202, 245.

²⁰Benjamin B. Warfield, *Perfectionism*, 2 vols. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1931), 2: 337-41.

²¹Thomas Upham, *Inward Divine Guidance* (Syracuse, NY: Wesleyan Methodist Publishing Association, 1905), 123.

²²W. B. Godbey, *Baptism Paganized and Demonized* (Greensboro, NC: Apostolic Messenger Office, n.d.), 4.

temporary, but permanent.²³ Water baptism is a mere symbol of the baptism of the Holy Spirit by blood and fire. "Jesus pours on you the Holy Ghost, who baptizes you with the blood and the fire. The baptism is the purification, which the Holy Ghost administers by the blood."²⁴

Conclusion

Regardless of the specific sacramental expressions within the nineteenth-century holiness movement, the emphasis on Christian perfection caused an imbalance in the theology of holiness advocates. Ecclesiological and sacramental concerns were generally subordinated to pneumatological priorities. The end result was a straying from the "Protestant principle" inherent in Wesley's theological method. The "quadrilateral" of scripture, tradition, reason, and experience, which served as Wesley's source of authority and interpretation, was side-stepped in the movement's attempt to express and understand the doctrine and experience of entire sanctification. Chief among the omissions of holiness theology was an appreciation for the living tradition of the church. The liturgy of the church was, for Wesley, the drama of redemption communally acted out. Thus, experience is not only an individualistic concern but has corporate and historical dimensions. The nineteenth-century holiness movement, however, had a diminished view of the importance of tradition, breaking with the historical continuity of the church and emphasizing a restorationist ecclesiology along lines of experiential pneumatology.²⁵

²³Ibid., 4, 8; W. B. Godbey, *Psychology and Pneumatology* (Cincinnati: God's Revivalist Press, n.d.), 30; W. B. Godbey, *The Incarnation of the Holy Ghost* (Louisville: Pentecostal Publishing Co., n.d.), 39-40, 41.

²⁴W. B. Godbey, *Baptism* (Cincinnati: God's Revivalist Press, n.d.), 16.

²⁵Bassett, "Interplay of Christology and Ecclesiology," 79-94; Paul Meredith Bassett, "The Holiness Movement and the Protestant Principle," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 18 (Spring 1983): 7-29.

SANCTIFICATION, SCIENCE, AND THE SPIRIT: SALVAGING HOLINESS IN THE LATE MODERN WORLD

by

Amos Yong

The thesis to be argued here is that, while Christian holiness ought to be understood predominantly in theological rather than scientific terms, there are resources from the theology and science dialogue that can also shed light on the Christian experience of and quest for sanctification. The three parts to follow unfold this thesis with the help of three interlocutors. First, Mark Mann's anthropological study provides a broad platform for a current understanding of holiness in light of advances in the social, psychological, and cognitive sciences. Next, Thomas Jay Oord's theory of "kenotic" divine action is engaged to explore the possibility of measuring God's sanctifying activity in human lives. Finally, in conversation with Robert John Russell's quantum mechanical model of divine action, I propose what might be called a quantum-pneumatological framework for thinking about holiness that is consistent with modern science and also resolutely theological.

My one caveat is that I approach the topic from a pentecostal rather than holiness perspective and I do so as a theologian rather than a scientist. Even so, there is sufficient overlap between concerns that have animated my previous work at the intersection of pentecostal theology and the sciences that I will manage to navigate through important questions about sanctification in our late modern context.¹

Science and Sanctification: The Anthropology of Holiness

While norms of holiness in the Wesleyan tradition have surely changed over time, the doctrine itself has evinced staying power since

¹ One of my most recent books is *The Spirit of Creation: Modern Science and Divine Action in the Pentecostal-Charismatic Imagination*, Pentecostal Manifestos 4 (Grand Rapids and Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2011).

John Wesley's classical formulation.² This is not to say that each generation of Holiness theologians has not confronted significant challenges in rendering a plausible and yet faithful reformulation of the doctrine. The present time is no exception. One of the more creative and significant recent dissertations on the topic is by Mark Mann, currently director of the Wesleyan Center, Point Loma Press, and Honors Program at Point Loma University in San Diego, California.³

Mann's *Perfecting Grace* does for Wesleyan scholarship what Mildred Bangs Wynkoop's *A Theology of Love* did for Wesleyan pastors and church leaders and what Michael Lodahl and Thomas Jay Oord's *Relational Holiness* is doing for Wesleyan laypeople, present a winsome case for a rethinking of the Wesleyan doctrine of holiness within a relational framework for the late twentieth and early twenty-first century context.⁴ As a piece of scholarship intended for the broader theological academy, however, Mann's book also advances the discussion in two significant ways. On the one hand, he reconstructs the theology of holiness in dialogue with the anthropological sciences (i.e., the cognitive, sociological, and psychological sciences). On the other hand, he presents a very convincing theological anthropology to the wider academy. Mann's Wesleyan perspectives and commitments are plausible as a model for doing theological anthropology across the ecumenical spectrum of the church catholic in the present time.

What do the sciences contribute to Mann's formulation? Beginning with the cognitive sciences, Mann realizes that advances in this field continue to accelerate so that it would be hazardous to draw any firm theological conclusions from even the present consensus. Nevertheless, he suggests two fundamental sets of implications for thinking about holiness when considering the state of the neuro-scientific question. The first, consistent

²John Wesley's *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* has been published in many forms and editions. My own copy, which I originally read as a young divinity student at Western Evangelical Seminary (now George Fox Seminary), was edited by J. Fred Parker (1872; reprint, Kansas City, Mo.: Beacon Hill Press, 1971).

³Mark H. Mann, *Perfecting Grace: Holiness, Human Being and the Sciences* (New York and London: T & T Clark International, 2006). All further references to this book will be made parenthetically in the text by page number.

⁴Mildred Bangs Wynkoop, *A Theology of Love* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1970); and Michael Lodahl and Thomas Jay Oord, *Relational Holiness: Responding to the Call of Love* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 2004).

with what the Holiness tradition has affirmed about Christian perfection—that it is as much a matter of what Wesley called the heart as it is a matter of the mind—concerns the embodied character of human consciousness and volition. The lines between neurology, neuro-physiology, and neuro-psychology are not hard and fast. Rather, human thinking is intertwined with and informed both consciously and subconsciously by the feelings, emotions, and affections that constitute human embodiment. The dualistic construal of the spirit/soul and the body needs to be reconsidered, so that holiness is fully a matter of the heart, which means it is also a matter of the mind, the soul, and the body. I would urge that there is a social dimension to the mind that is foundational for what it means to be human.⁵ Human consciousness, thinking, and rationality develop not just biologically but socially, in interaction with others. Mann expands on this facet in his chapter on sociology (to which I turn in a moment), but I want to register this not just as a sociological but as a bio-cognitive consideration.

The second set of neuro-scientific implications for the doctrine of holiness has to do with how our cognitive hardwiring predisposes human beings to “create myths and rituals with particular patterns and structures and therefore to find certain kinds of myths and rituals both meaningful and transforming” (68). Holiness, in other words, does not just happen. Rather, as intuited by those in the Wesleyan tradition, there is a synergistic dimension to the *means* of sanctifying grace that involves human responses to divine initiative. Humans can thereby participate in God’s perfecting work by developing more potent and transformative myths and rituals about holiness.

This leads naturally to the sociological sciences. Here, drawing most significantly and substantively from the collaborative legacy of Peter Berger and Thomas Luckman,⁶ Mann extrapolates two sets of implications consistent with the proposals developed in conjunction with cognitive scientific perspectives. First, human beings are thinking animals that

⁵I discuss this in my essay, “The Virtues and Intellectual Disability: Explorations in the (Cognitive) Sciences of Moral Formation,” in James Van Slyke, et. al., eds., *Theology and the Science of Moral Action: Virtue Ethics, Exemplarity, and Cognitive Neuroscience* (New York and London: Routledge, 2012), forthcoming, esp. at the end of the section titled, “The Cognitive Sciences of Morality: An Emerging Consensus.”

⁶See Berger and Luckman, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966).

are nevertheless socially, historically, and communally located and formed. This, however, does not reduce humans to a socio-historical determinism. Each person is still unique, albeit shaped by the very real traditions and possibilities of their upbringing. Mann concludes: “Holiness could [would] therefore look quite different for a welfare mother living in Brooklyn from what it would look like for a corporate executive working in Manhattan, an illiterate hunter-gatherer in Brazil, or an educated, Western suburbanite” (86).

On the other side of the Berger and Luckman thesis, however, is this. The social construction or projected can also be understood theologically as reflections—through human hearts created in the image of God—of what is divinely elicited. In theological key, then, any kind of sociological reductionism is resisted; but, simultaneously, there is also no need to deny the social implications of the Christian pursuit for holiness. Christian perfection involves communities of transformation holding forth ideals of the holy life in accordance with the vision of God that inspires and animates their aspirations. If the cognitive sciences indicate that human beings are hardwired to form myths and rituals that interface with the divine, the social sciences hold forth possibilities for how we might envision more effective transformational communities and institutions of faith.

Last, but not least, psychologists like Erik Erickson have opened up the developmental shape of human nature as well as the dynamic shape of religion and ritual across the life cycle. While there are important distinctions between the Wesleyan *ordo salutis*⁷ and Erickson’s stages of ego-psychological development, the latter call attention to the fact that different symbols of holiness are more or less useful and engaging at different stages of life. There are other considerations Mann uncovers, but space constraints prohibit any further exposition. What emerges is a theological anthropology that is complex (rather than unambiguous about the nature of religious life or holiness), multi-dimensional (rather than dualistically framed), social (rather than individually attuned), dynamic (rather than statically divided into two or three basic religious states), and involving freedom and responsibility (rather than being deterministic either scientifically or theologically).

⁷I prefer to talk about the Holiness *via salutis* in order to emphasize the more dynamic character of the Wesleyan “way of salvation” when contrasted with the more static (at least on the surface) implications of the *ordo salutis*; see my *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), §2.2.3.

These science-informed articulations are set against the backdrop of and therefore enable comparisons and contrasts with the theological anthropologies of major Wesleyan theologians.⁸ More relevant to our purposes, Mann also shows how holiness doctrines like original sin and the fall can be retrieved (not as biogenetically mediated but as part of the socio-historical matrix of human formation), how the Christian symbols of perfection can be understood (as appropriate to the developmental and contextual nature of human life), how sanctification and its means might be effective in the contemporary world (through means of grace capable of engaging people with different histories and in different contexts), and how assurance and the means of discernment amid the ambiguities of life might yet be accomplished. This synthesis is valuable not just for Wesleyans looking to preserve their understandings of holiness, but for all who believe that holiness remains essential to Christian faith.

Critics looking to nit-pick will have to fall back on the expected criticisms that not enough science has been factored in or that important ideas of other holiness theologians ought to have been more substantively engaged than they have been. But to do so would miss what is accomplished in this reconstruction: that no matter which scientific theories or theological proposals are consulted, the end result will only complement and enlarge the vision for holiness presented in the pages of this volume. All who do not want to give up on a theology of holiness will be grateful for such a comprehensive, vigorous, and intelligent restatement of this important doctrine.

This revisioning of theological anthropology highlights the various ways available to human beings to respond to the divine call to holiness. Human beings participate in God's sanctifying work—this is the traditional Wesleyan doctrine of salvation that emphasizes synergistic cooperation with the divine initiatives⁹—so that, while it is God who purifies

⁸Mann compares and contrasts with Wesley's dispositional and affective views (although Wesley was more a pastor than he was a systematician about his ideas), with nineteenth-century holiness leader Phoebe Palmer's rationalistic doctrine of assurance (wherein conviction about sanctification is received by faith), with late nineteenth-century holiness theologian Daniel Steele's eradicationism (and its concomitant denial of gradualism in the experience of holiness), and with Mildred Bang Wynkoop's relational model (to which his book provides scientific scaffolding for a deeper appreciation for her achievements).

⁹Barry L. Callen, "Soteriological Synergism and Its Surrounding Seductions," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 46:2 (fall 2011): 25-40.

imperfect creatures, the latter have some responsibility in the process. As St. Paul admonished the Philippian Christians: “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure” (Phil. 2:12b-13).¹⁰ Thus, the means of sanctifying grace include the classical disciplines of scripture reading, prayer, and the sacraments within the fullness of ecclesial life.¹¹ Communities of faithful Christians yearning after holiness now have compelling reasons to be sensitive to the socio-historical, contextual, and personal factors that shape their religious lives.

Sanctification and the Spirit: Scientific Measurements of Divine Perfecting Action?

Within this matrix, however, can we still talk about sanctification as divine activity in human lives? After all, while human beings are urged to partake of the means of grace and to pursue holiness “without which no one will see the Lord” (Heb. 12:14b), how exactly does God purify and perfect unholy creatures? Does sanctification just happen, somehow automatically, as human beings avail themselves of the traditional means of grace, perhaps in a way similar to how Augustine understood the sacraments to function *ex opere operato*, that is, as being efficacious simply because they were performed in obedience to God who promised to accomplish the divine purposes through them? Yet the latter explication would probably move Wesleyans too uncomfortably close to the monerism characteristic of the Augustinian tradition. How else might it be possible, then, to discursively conceptualize the sanctifying activity of God through the Holy Spirit in the lives of those seeking after holiness?

Recently, an intriguing proposal has appeared on the Wesleyan horizon that presents first steps toward a research program designed to measure scientifically divine action.¹² In his 2009 Presidential Address to the

¹⁰Unless otherwise noted, all scripture references are to the New Revised Standard Version.

¹¹Henry H. Knight III, *The Presence of God in the Christian Life: John Wesley and the Means of Grace*, *Pietist and Wesleyan Studies* 3 (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1992).

¹²The “Divine Action Project” has been ongoing in the theology and science arena for over twenty years, organized conjointly by the Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences (Berkeley, California) and the Vatican Observatory; for an overview, see my article, “The Spirit at Work in the World: A Pentecostal-Charismatic Perspective on the Divine Action Project,” *Theology & Science* 7:2 (2009): 123-40, esp. 124-27.

Wesleyan Theological Society, Thomas Jay Oord urged his colleagues to reconsider how the Wesleyan emphasis on the love of God, and on the God of love, could serve as a methodological and metaphysical hypothesis for a specifically Wesleyan theological engagement with science.¹³ Three aspects to Oord's proposal are relevant to thinking about the science of divine action in relation to sanctification. First, given the premise that the divine nature is characterized most centrally by love,¹⁴ Oord hypothesizes that divine activity is essentially kenotic in the sense that it makes room for, invites, and even requires creaturely response. Thus, nothing that happens is caused entirely by either by God or by creatures. What we can say as a matter of theological conviction is that "love always characterizes God's causal activity" (97), by which Oord means that God's causal activity is intended always "to promote overall well-being" (98).

Following from this, Oord postulates an oscillation theory of divine action. His thesis is presented in an important section that deserves to be quoted at length:

Essential Kenosis proposes that God's causal efficacy varies from event to event. Divine causation oscillates in the sense that God's will is more or less expressed as creatures respond well or poorly to God's freedom-providing activity. God's activity is most clearly expressed when an event profoundly promotes overall well-being. God's activity is less clearly expressed when an event profoundly undercuts overall well-being. In other words, the presence or absence of creaturely love indicates the degree to which God is active (96).

While the above seems straightforward, Oord immediately clarifies:

To say that divine causation oscillates does not mean that God chooses sometimes to be more influential and other times to remain relatively uninfluential. Instead, God's nature as love prompts God to exert the most influence possible in any situa-

¹³Thomas Jay Oord, "Love as a Methodological and Metaphysical Source for Science and Theology," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 45:1 (spring 2010): 81-107; all other references to page numbers of this article in this section will be made parenthetically in the text.

¹⁴Oord has done more than almost any other theologian to develop this vision of God as love; see among his various books, *Defining Love: A Philosophical, Scientific, and Theological Engagement* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2010), and *The Nature of Love: A Theology* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2010).

tion. To use an engine metaphor, God always runs at full throttle. Divine oscillation occurs as creatures cooperate in greater or lesser degrees (96).

The above suggests that what oscillates is less divine action—"God always runs at full throttle"—and more creaturely response.¹⁵ Yet Oord seems to be of two minds since he insists that what is being proffered is a theory regarding the "causal efficacy" of divine activity. The question is: does the oscillation pertain to divine or human action?

But, thirdly, Oord is even more obscure when he then also posits that divine love can be scientifically tested and measured.¹⁶ He grants that within his Essential Kenosis theory, God is a necessary but insufficient cause for every event. So, while science cannot empirically determine whether God acts in the world, it can test "the degree to which divine causation is effective" (100). The measurement criterion is love, so that "divine causation is most evident in those events or things that express love, in the sense of promoting overall well-being. Divine causation is less effective and therefore God's causal efficacy is less observable in those events or things that undermine overall well-being" (100). If such "experimentation" could be successfully operationalized, Oord may yet be right in his proposal that "God's causal efficacy varies from event to event" (96).

Oord recognizes that some will object to his suggestion regarding the testability of divine causal efficacy on the basis that it "requires research on creaturely causal action" (103). His response reiterates that the Essential Kenosis theory presumes "an interrelated universe of multiple causes," but is justified nevertheless in attributing "more causal responsibility to one agent or some agents than others" (103). The analogy Oord provides involves our assigning responsibility to a boy whose thrown ball goes through a window, even if we recognize that "wind, gravity, the hardness

¹⁵These points are tied together, however. For Oord, the diversity of divine activity is also present in the diverse "calls" or "forms" God offers creatures. These calls and forms are tailored to the capabilities of the individuals and the circumstances and forces in each situation.

¹⁶Oord has also worked at the theology and science interface from his Wesleyan perspective, in particular as regards his research on love; see among his various books, *Science of Love: The Wisdom of Well-being* (West Conshohocken, Penn.: Templeton Foundation Press, 2004), and *The Altruism Reader: Selections from Writings on Love, Religion, and Science* (West Conshohocken, Penn.: Templeton Foundation Press, 2008).

of the ball, the thickness of the glass, and a host of other factors played contributory causal roles" (103). Oord concludes: "saying that divine action is more prevalent in the world when creatures respond appropriately in love is compatible with saying that divine action is the primary cause of this love" (103).

The question arises in Oord's analogy is that, while we ought to acknowledge the primacy of divine causal efficacy when creatures do respond in love, we are also right to reject assigning similar primacy to God when creatures fail to respond in love. In the latter cases, of course, we usually say that the primary responsibilities rest on fallen human creatures. This is naturally a cause for worry since it implies that even God's acting at "full throttle" is unable to accomplish God's purposes. Here is where the weaknesses of this metaphor show up most forcefully. Wesleyans may be more comfortable saying that God has created a world in which creaturely freedom and responsibility is possible, and that when creatures respond in love, that happens because creaturely goals and actions have aligned with God's prevenient and initiating grace. What otherwise transpires, however, is the result of mis-alignment, for which creatures are responsible and blameworthy.

It is along these same lines that elsewhere I have raised other questions about the coherence of Oord's claim that causal efficacy of divine love is scientifically measurable.¹⁷ At this juncture, let me summarize the problematic issues in relationship to a Wesleyan theology of sanctification. First, it seems to me contradictory to say both that "God always runs at full throttle" and that "God's causal efficacy varies from event to event." In terms of the doctrine of sanctification, it would be akin to saying, simultaneously, "God always works to sanctify his creatures at full throttle" and "God's sanctifying activity varies from event to event." What Oord should say is that the efficacy of God's perfecting actions varies depending on creaturely responses,¹⁸ and if that is the case, then what science observes is not divine action but human response.

¹⁷See my "Conclusion," in Matthew T. Lee and Amos Yong, eds., *The Science and Theology of Godly Love* (DeKalb, Ill.: Northern Illinois University Press, 2012), 217-32, which responds to Oord's chapter in the same book, "Testing Creaturely Love and God's Causal Role."

¹⁸In personal conversation, Oord has since acknowledged that this rephrasing better expresses that the efficacy of God's actions vary based on creaturely responses, not God's voluntary choices to be more or less effective.

This leads to a revision of Oord's oscillation theory. My recommendation is that Oord should not talk about divine oscillation or claim that "divine causation oscillates" since this suggests that there is a variation to divine activity and, by inference, to God's intentions. The results would be especially problematic for the doctrine of sanctification. God always intends to sanctify creatures, and God's actions to bring about holiness do not vary. Instead, what oscillates is the response of frail human creatures to God's purifying work. Experimental observations of how well creatures respond in loving ways tell us nothing about divine causal efficacy. But we can learn about the efficaciousness of the various means of grace, those activities that enable more positive responses to the loving divine action intended to purify the people of God and make them holy.

Mann's focus on theological anthropology and Oord's overarching theological vision are complementary, with the recommended revisions. In particular, Oord's *Essential Kenosis* provides a metaphysical framework for understanding how the sciences—from neuroscience to sociology and psychology, etc.—can shed light on the human quest for holiness. What empirical observations measure are creaturely variables, with necessary even if insufficient causal power to effect holiness, all of which are made possible by a God who loves and who in love has created a world with free creatures. Yet our conversation with Oord has indicated that, while the "science of holiness" can focus on creaturely responses to the various means of grace available to them, it also can only presume certain theological understandings rather than otherwise engage with any of the theological questions framing the discussion in this section. So I repeat: can science help us say anything else about divine action in general and about the activity of the Spirit of God to sanctify human lives? Or is science simply limited to talking about creaturely responses and practices directed in faith toward holiness?

The Spirit and Science:

A Quantum-Eschatological Model of Sanctification

I now suggest a pneumatological theology of divine action and sanctification, one that can further complement the preceding proposals. On the one hand, such an approach explores the possibility of how a quantum theory of divine action might undergird not only the theological anthropology of holiness suggested by Mann but also a theologically informed social scientific enterprise as a whole. On the other hand, it also suggests an eschatological theology of holiness that provides a more robust teleo-

logical framework both for Oord's Essential Kenosis theology and for the Wesleyan theology of holiness. My primary dialogue partner for at least the first part of this quantum-eschatological model of sanctification is Robert John Russell, who for almost thirty years has been at the forefront of the theology and science dialogue in general and of a research project dedicated to understanding divine action in a scientific age in particular.

I come to Russell's work having spent some time studying the divine action project that he has helped organize and been a central contributor.¹⁹ Russell has long advocated what he calls a quantum mechanical theory of non-interventionistic but objective special divine action (QM-NIOSDA). I have been sympathetic to his overall project, although previously a bit pessimistic that it tells us much about how God acts in the world beyond what Christians already affirm in faith.²⁰ My interactions with Oord's ideas have led me to revisit Russell's work and I now think that it is suggestive for thinking further about Essential Kenosis and divine action. The following briefly considers what Russell is working toward, his own constructive proposal, and how it can be supportive of an Essentially Kenotic theology of sanctification, albeit with a pneumatological twist.

There is no space here to do justice to the richness and intricacy of Russell's argument. Allow me instead to explicate his theory in terms of three interrelated features. First, as one also trained in and committed to the methodological naturalism of the sciences,²¹ divine action cannot be conceived as intervening in the order of the world as if from without.

¹⁹See Robert John Russell, *Cosmology from Alpha to Omega: The Creative Mutual Interaction of Theology and Science* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), which includes (though revised, updated, and in various places, significantly expanded) much of his previous work, while also referencing and interacting with other sources. In what follows in this section, all other references to page numbers of this volume will be made parenthetically in the text.

²⁰Besides my book and previous article (nn. 1, 12), see also Yong, "How Does God Do What God Does? Pentecostal-Charismatic Perspectives on Divine Action in Dialogue with Modern Science," in Amos Yong and James K. A. Smith, eds., *Science and the Spirit: A Pentecostal Engagement with the Sciences* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 2010), 50-71.

²¹For a defense of methodological naturalism in science, which is distinct from an ontological naturalism that insists that matter is all there is, see James K. A. Smith, "Is the Universe Open for Surprise? Pentecostal Ontology and the Spirit of Naturalism," *Zygon: Journal of Science and Religion* 43:4 (2008): 879-96.

Thus, any viable theory of God's action in creation has to be *non-interventionistic*. Russell suggests that this is possible if we assume that, apart from God's initial act of creating *ex nihilo*, divine action is mediated otherwise through creaturely materials, things, and events.

Yet, second, Christian orthodoxy has to affirm divine action in the *objective* critical realist sense that things exist and events happen quite apart from human knowledge of them. It is not an option to reduce God's activity to merely epistemic human states or to subjective interpretive accounts. Third, then, divine action is not only providentialistic in the general sense that God creates and upholds all things, but Christian faith also affirms special acts of God apart from which things would be otherwise. So the question arises: how can God act objectively and specially so as to make a difference in the affairs of the world, but yet do so non-interventionistically? Russell answers in this way: "The God who acts truly acts not by intervening in but by acting with and in addition to the open causal processes of the natural world which God has transcendently created *ex nihilo* and with which God continuously and providentially acts as the immanent, ongoing Creator" (140).

But are there any actual "open causal processes of the natural world"? Russell hypothesizes yes, and points to the quantum mechanical level of reality, understood as ontologically *indeterministic*, at least according to one form of the Copenhagen interpretation.²² While not without detractors, there is widespread recognition among physicists that this indeterministic view of the quantum realm is at least plausible, if not true. By definition, if quantum processes are indeterministic, then God's activity in that domain would not be interventions, properly considered, in the natural order of things. This is because, within the scope of this indeterministic interpretation of quantum mechanics, "there are no efficient natural causes for a specific quantum event" (169). If this is the case, then God can act with nature at the quantum level to bring about the outcomes that God desires. Russell puts it this way:

God indirectly creates order in the classical [macro-level] realm by (1) directly creating a quantum mechanical universe with

²²This ontological indeterminism is crucial to Russell's NIOSDA; claims about quantum indeterminism are not just epistemological since that leads to a "God of the gaps" that would be increasingly closed up by the advances of science.

[Fermi-Dirac/Bose-Einstein] statistics²³ that give rise to the classical world and (2) by acting directly in time as the continuous creator in, with, and through the indeterminism of quantum events to bring about novelty in the classical world (183).

More precisely, with regard to the long-debated measurement problem related to the collapse of the wave function that constitutes quantum events, Russell argues:

God knows the probabilities predicted by orthodox quantum mechanics, since these after all describe what are ultimately the acts of God, and that rather than unilaterally controlling nature God acts with nature—since this is mediated divine action—to bring about the outcomes of particular measurements consistent with the probabilities given before the event occurs and consistent with the fact that specific outcomes might have an indirect effect at the macroscopic level which God wants to bring about and which those of faith would take correctly as act of God's special providence (205, n. 44).²⁴

For Russell, then, divine action is hidden in the quantum mechanical realm, except through the eyes of faith (169-70). His model also leads him to suggest that God acts in all quantum events until the evolution of organisms with increasingly sophisticated levels of consciousness so that “God then increasingly refrains from determining causality in conscious and self-conscious creatures” (189), thus leaving room for creaturely freedom and responsibility.

I hope enough has been said so far for us to see how such a quantum theoretical model of divine action allows for and even encourages the ongoing work of science. The many levels of scientific explanation,

²³Russell clarifies how these quantum statistical formulations are indeterministic when compared and contrasted with classical statistics that are deterministic. Yet the former “are foundational for the ordinary properties for the everyday world and they allow for individual quantum events to trigger irreversible and significant effects in that world. . . . This in turn opens up the possibility both for non-interventionist general divine action (‘general providence’), which indirectly results in creating and sustaining the world, and for non-interventionist special divine action (‘special providence’), which can indirectly result in special events in the world” (158-59).

²⁴Put pointedly with regard to biological evolution, for instance, “God acts directly at the level of the genotype, and the sequence of events so initiated may result in an effect in the phenotype” (224n8).

including those of the social sciences, all have their place, without denying that God continues to act specially, albeit non-interventionistically, in each of those levels.²⁵ Mann's theological anthropology thus can draw from the neuro-, sociological, and psychological sciences, and doing so carefully will not compromise but actually enhance our understanding of how God acts—for the purposes of this essay: sanctifies—in a complex and multi-dimensional world.

The one major problem that persists, however, is not unique to Russell's QM-NIOSDA proposal. It concerns theodicy or the problem of evil, especially that related to natural evil that preceded the emergence of *homo sapiens*.²⁶ Russell is working on a book-length response to this issue, although he has preliminarily suggested that the final answer to this matter has to be resolutely theological (science does not and cannot address this matter), by which he means focused on the cross and resurrection of Christ. In particular, God is not aloof from the suffering of the world (hence the cross) even while the salvation of the world from suffering is eschatological: the new creation, with its new laws, of which the resurrection of Jesus is a proleptic anticipation and instantiation.²⁷ Only

²⁵Put another way, the "freedom of creation" justifies scientific rigor and the methodological naturalism of the various disciplines, as explicated by Lou Ann Trost, "Non-interventionist Divine Action: Robert Russell, Wolfhart Pannenberg, and the Freedom of the (Natural) World," in Ted Peters and Nathan Hallanger, eds., *God's Action in Nature's World: Essays in Honour of Robert John Russell* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2006), 205-16. I have provided, from my pentecostal perspective, what I deem to be a theological argument complementary to Russell's for the validity of scientific research at their various levels of explanation as captured in the metaphor "many tongues, many disciplines"; see Yong, *The Spirit of Creation*, ch. 2.

²⁶A new proposal by Martin Rice suggests viewing the Big Bang in terms of quantum entanglement so that the human fall into sin has retroactive effects on the evolutionary history of the world; for an overview of the argument, see Martin J. Rice, "Universal Processes as Natural Impediments to and Facilitators of Godly Love," in Matthew T. Lee and Amos Yong, eds., *Godly Love: Impediments and Possibilities* (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2012), 171-94.

²⁷E.g., Robert John Russell, "The Bodily Resurrection of Jesus as a First Instantiation of a New Law of the New Creation: Wright's Visionary New Paradigm in Dialogue with Physics and Cosmology," in James Haire, Christine Ledger, and Stephen Pickard, eds., *From Resurrection to Return: Perspectives from Theology and Science on Christian Eschatology* (Hindmarsh and Adelaide, S. Australia: ATF Press, 2007), 54-94, and in many other articles, essays, and book chapters.

God's eschatological intentions to save the world, manifest most concretely in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, can provide an ultimate and satisfactory response to the problem of evil.

My own contribution to this discussion has been to emphasize the pneumatological dimensions of divine action. Not only is the resurrection achieved in the power of the Spirit (Rom. 1:3-4), but the Day of Pentecost has also inaugurated the "last days" of the Spirit (Acts 2:17). For purposes related to the topic of sanctification at hand, the Spirit is also the purifying and perfecting Spirit. The overall answer to the problem of evil is if and how God will bring about a new creation, one that is imbued with God's holy love, and one in which fallen and imperfect creatures are redeemed and sanctified. The sanctification of human beings is hence simply an essential part of the solution to the cosmic problem of evil (Rom. 8:18-28). Accomplishing all of this involves the activity of God's *Holy Spirit*.

I propose, then, what I call a pneumatological theology of divine action and sanctification that presumes something like Russell's QM-NIOSDA for the purposes of understanding sanctification in dialogue with the sciences.²⁸ True, quantum mechanical theories are being adjudicated and there is no guarantee that our current understanding of it will last beyond our generation. However, engaging with contemporary culture, including the sciences, includes such risks, even as it brings about opportunities for developing our self-understanding. Mann's proposals can be understood as providing a hypothetical elaboration based on the current state of scientific understanding. Similarly, my pneumatological theology of divine action and sanctification asks: what are the implications of Russell's understanding of the Copenhagen interpretation if it were true?

If I (following Russell) am correct, Mann's project makes eminent sense. Mann asks: given what we know about the neuro-, social, and psy-

²⁸I now see that because in my first reading of Russell I saw my own ideas as complementary with and presuming his, I underestimated in my initial assessments of the Divine Action Project the degree to which his work had actually laid the groundwork for my own philosophy and theology of science and, especially, my own constructive theological claims. In short, my own proposals make sense if we assume that the work of Russell points the theology and science dialogue in the right direction. I am now happy to acknowledge the ground-breaking character of Russell's QM-NIOSDA, although that does not mean that he would agree with each of the directions my own pentecostal intuitions are headed.

chological sciences, what can we say about holiness, the sanctifying work of God, and the means of perfecting grace? Further, Oord's metaphysical instincts about Essential Kenosis would be consistent within such a quantum mechanical framework,²⁹ although scientific and empirical observations would tell us first and foremost about creaturely (in this case, those of human beings) activity rather than about divine action. Yet from a posture of faith informed by various theological presuppositions—what drives Oord's proposals ultimately are his Wesleyan commitments—we may be able to say something to the effect that our scientific research illuminates the greater or lesser effectiveness of the various means of grace at work in different times, places, cultures, and ecclesial traditions.

Put in terms of a pneumatological theology of sanctification, we can affirm in faith that God intends to redeem and sanctify the world, including human beings, and that it is the work of the Spirit to bring creation toward that end. Within this theological framework, we can draw from and appeal to science to help us understand what we are and how we are formed and transformed. Science can in that sense illuminate how, given human cooperation with and response to the divine initiative (presumed theologically in faith), God is effective in perfecting those who desire to be conformed to the image of his Son. So, where the methodological naturalism of science can only see anthropological, neurological, sociological, or psychological events, the eyes of faith can affirm that God is at work in this or that situation, in accord with the teleological intentions desired for the world.³⁰

Transitions

Dialogue with the sciences, especially as Mann has modeled for us, can be beneficial for understanding the doctrine of holiness in the twenty-first century. Our discussion has shown, however, that the "science of holiness" (Mann) invites reflections on what might be called a "metaphysics of holiness" (Oord). Within this broader scheme of things, we must work with care to distinguish what science can and cannot tell us

²⁹Oord's concerns about protecting human freedom are a given a boost by Russell's QM-NIOSDA model. But overall, Oord's Whiteheadian metaphysical sympathies invite further consideration and conversation given Russell's own critical engagement with the process metaphysics of scholars like Ian Barbour (see *Cosmology from Alpha to Omega*, passim), but that has to be reserved for another discussion.

³⁰This is a thesis that I argue in *The Spirit of Creation*, chs. 3-4.

about holiness in particular, and about God's activity in general. These matters will surely be contested, not because we are disagreeable creatures (although we are sometimes surely that!) but because "now we see in a mirror, dimly" (1 Cor. 13:12a).

Our brief considerations, however, are encouraging in terms of considering the fortunes of the doctrine of holiness in the late modern world. Mann's work is, in this regard, helpful in terms of pointing the way forward for understanding the processes of transformation and perfection. The gradualism more prominent in Mann's account, however, can also be complemented by a more substantive consideration of how crisis experiences shape human thinking, feeling, and acting. The neuro- and social-scientific literature can also be called upon in this regard to help us understand how the Spirit can effect human sanctification through palpable, vivid, and defining personal experiences.³¹

The key for maintaining theological authenticity in the encounter with science is to present our ideas self-critically, provisionally, and dialogically. Given the current state of the sciences, what can we say theologically? Of course, theology itself will be critical of any scientific claims which are metaphysical or which exceed the limitations that science imposes upon itself. Yet good science sheds light on the nature of the world that God has created. While the overarching framework will continue to shift and expand, given the advances of science, there is reason to think that genuine truth is attained along the way, even if such truth will need to be further refined in light of future discoveries. The "science of holiness" therefore ought not to be avoided. Assuming we retain a robust yet appropriately humble theological foundation, science should not scare us off. Our pastoral expertise can be positively impacted by greater scientific literacy integrated with theological scholarship. May the conversation continue. . . .³²

³¹I have thus urged that we need to retain both crisis and process perspectives on God's salvific work, which includes, in my view, the sanctifying work of the Spirit; see *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh*, ch. §2.2.

³²Thanks to Mark Mann and Michael Lodahl for their invitation to Point Loma Nazarene University where a previous version of this essay was initially intended to be given at a lecture there in April, 2012. Both Mann and Lodahl also gave me helpful feedback on an early draft, as did Thomas Jay Oord and my graduate assistant Vincent Le. None of the above, however, is responsible for any of the errors of fact or interpretation that may remain.

JOHN WESLEY'S DOCTRINE OF SIN REVISITED

by

Mark K. Olson

In any study on Christian perfection, no matter whose perspective is under the microscope, the definition of sin becomes central. In regard to John Wesley's doctrine of perfect love, the entire edifice hinges on how he *structurally organized* his doctrine of sin. The purpose of this paper is to detail this structural organization, chart its basic parameters, and thereby clarify its imprint on his theology of holiness and the soteriological tension his doctrine of sin created for his message of full salvation. This study is necessary because Wesley left us no systematic statement to lean on. His views on sin, like his views on Christian perfection, evolved over time, and this shaped his expectations at any given time as to when and how the gift of perfect love is received. Therefore, before we can elaborate on Wesley's doctrine of sin, we must first look at the theological path he traversed beginning in the 1720s.

Chronological Perspectives

With the decision to enter holy orders in 1725 and the spiritual awakening that accompanied it, John Wesley's interest in the subject of sin intensified.¹ This was a natural corollary to his single intention to attain Christian perfection. If the goal is to be "perfect, as our Father in heaven is perfect," then the seeker must be "cleansed from sin, 'from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit.'"² In keeping with his Anglican heritage, Wesley described sin as moral and spiritual corruption deeply implanted in fallen human nature. Labeled in his first manuscript sermon the "tyranny of sin," he linked inbred sin to our "infirmities" that become the

¹In his Aldersgate Memorandum (§§1-3) Wesley acknowledged that before 1725 he only had a casual concern with sin. Cf. *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984-Present, 18:242-43 (hereafter *Works*).

²"The Circumcision of the Heart" I.1 (*Works* 1:402-03); cf. Matt. 5:48; 2 Cor. 7:1.

“law of our members,” continually waging war against the “law of our mind.”³ These infirmities were later called our “corrupted nature,” the “sinfulness and helplessness of our nature,” and “inbred pollution.”⁴ Thus, the early Wesley held to a robust doctrine of original sin, but he failed to make any distinction between infirmity and indwelling sin.

Yet his doctrine of sin was not limited to the sub-volitional. From his reading of Anglicans Richard Lucas⁵ and Richard Kidder,⁶ Wesley’s well-known definition of sin as a “voluntary breach of a known law” was first expressed in a letter during his Oxford period.⁷ At the time, voluntary sin was divided into the subcategories “habitual” and “single acts.” Regarding the former, perfection is available in this life; but concerning the latter even the Apostle Paul had to trust in the gospel promise of moment-by-moment forgiveness.⁸ Interestingly, Wesley linked these “single acts” to “all that is done amiss.” This meant that apart from God’s mercy no one could abide God’s holy judgment. Here is the beginning of what will later become the categories of voluntary and involuntary sin. Wesley grounds sin as deliberate volition in Adam’s innocence. The human race was created good but had the capacity to make moral choices. Along with the wicked angels, Adam abused his liberty and willfully sinned against his Creator.⁹ His posterity, inheriting a fallen Adamic nature,¹⁰ have followed suite. Just as there can be no virtue without voluntary choice,¹¹ so there

³“Death and Deliverance” §14 (*Works* 4:212); cf. Rom. 7:23.

⁴“The Circumcision of the Heart” I.2, 11 (*Works* 1:403, 407).

⁵Richard Lucas (1648/49-1715) was Prebend of Westminster Abbey and wrote *Enquiry of Happiness*, the third part deals with religious perfection. Lucas speaks of original sin, willful sin, and infirmities as a mean between the two. Lucas was read avidly by Susanna Wesley. Randy Maddox informed me (via email) that John probably began to read Lucas in 1730.

⁶Richard Kidder (1633-1703) was a noted theologian and Bishop of Bath and Wells. Wesley read Kidder’s *Discourse Concerning Sins of Infirmity and Willful Sins* in 1733. Kidder defines willful sin as deliberate and with full knowledge.

⁷Letter to Ann Granville, 10/3/31 (*Works* 25:318).

⁸JW’s words are, “He knew who had promised to forgive these, not seven times but seventy times seven (Matt. 18:22). Nay, a thousand times a thousand, if they sincerely desire it, shall all sins be forgiven unto the sons of men.”

⁹“The Image of God” Preamble §4 (*Works* 4:293).

¹⁰For a thorough discussion on Wesley’s views on original sin as inbred sin, see Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994, 74-81.

¹¹“On Guardian Angels” I.5 (*Works* 4:228).

can be no sin, “strictly speaking,” without the engagement of the will.¹² Therefore, the early Wesley summarized sin primarily as (1) disease of nature and (2) willful act,¹³ with the former category serving as the controlling motif. This explains why the early Wesley did not believe that Christian perfection was fully attainable in this life.

When we move to the Aldersgate era, sin becomes more carefully nuanced. This is evident in his new gospel manifesto *Salvation By Faith*. Wesley divides sin into two main categories: guilt and power.¹⁴ Sin's power is further subdivided into habit, willful, desire, and infirmity (II.6). Wesley's perfection views come into play at this point. Those born of God do not sin habitually since to do so means that sin still reigns—a definite mark of the unbeliever. Neither does the Christian sin willfully since the will is now set on living for Christ. Last, the believer does not sin by desire because the heart has been thoroughly transformed to desire only God's perfect will.

Wesley then addresses “sin by infirmities.” Since infirmities involve no “concurrence of (the) will,” such deviations, whether in word, thought, or deed, are not “properly” sin. Wesley confidently concludes that those born of God do not commit sin, having been saved from “all their sins,” both actual *and* original (II.2, 7). Though still rudimentary in organization, Wesley's doctrine of sin is set on a definite trajectory. Central to his doctrine of sin is the plumb line of human volition and the core conviction that our innate perversity is due to original sin. The theological premises of *Salvation By Faith* are two-fold: first, Adam's sin entails on his posterity both sinful desire and human infirmity. Second, our personal sinfulness leads to bondage by choice and habit. The fact that Wesley links original sin to both sinful desire and to infirmity will shape his doctrine of sin over the next three decades.

Moving to the winter of 1739, we find a similar distinction made between infirmity and volition in his doctrine of sin:

What do you mean by the word “sin?” those numberless weaknesses and follies, sometimes (improperly) termed sins of infirmity? If you mean only this, we shall not put off these but with

¹²Letter to Ann Granville, 10/3/31 (*Works* 25:318).

¹³Concerning disease of nature, see *The Trouble and Rest of Good Men* II.5 (*Works* 3:539).

¹⁴“Salvation By Faith” II.3, 5 (*Works* 1:122, 123). JW also addresses the subject of fear due to sin's guilt. Though the context makes it clear that he does not view this as another category.

our bodies. But if you mean, "It does not promise entire freedom from sin, in its proper sense, or from committing sin," this is by no means true, unless the Scripture be false; for thus it is written: "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin;" (unless he lose the Spirit of adoption, if not finally, yet for a while, as did this child of God;) "for his seed remaineth in him, and he cannot sin, because he is born of God." He cannot sin so long as "he keepeth himself;" for then "that wicked one toucheth him not." (1 John iii. 9; v. 18.).¹⁵

Although Wesley here draws a clear line of demarcation between infirmity and volition, his linking "entire freedom from sin" to the promises of 1 John 3:9 and 5:18 essentially collapsed Christian perfection into the new birth. This led to dire consequences in his spiritual equilibrium, for Wesley continued to struggle with doubt and even denied at the time that he was a Christian.¹⁶

The solution to Wesley's struggles was found by making a sharper distinction between volition and desire in his doctrine of sin. Coupled with his belief that a pure heart is now received in a second moment, Wesley began to use the categories of *inward* and *outward* to define the level of deliverance from sin in the gifts of justification and sanctification.¹⁷ These categories inform his landmark sermon *Christian Perfection* (1741). Outward sin refers to the outward act and serves as a synonym for committing sin.¹⁸ Inward sin lies deeper in human nature and

¹⁵*Preface to An Extract of the Life and Death of Mr. Thomas Halyburton* §5; Works J 14:212.

¹⁶"Journal & Diaries" 1/4/39 (Works 19:29). Both the quote above and his denial of being a Christian were written during the same period.

¹⁷It appears that Wesley was exposed to these terms by the Moravians. When Wesley was in Germany (summer 1738) he recorded several testimonies, two of which used the terminology of inward and outward to describe their deliverance from sin (David Schneider and Arvid Gradin). This same language was used next by Wesley in his "Rules of the Band Societies" (Works 9:77). The terminology seems to have been next used in his letter to Dr. Henry Stebbing in mid-summer 1739. Wesley describes the new birth by contrasting outward change to inward transformation (Journal 7/31/39). Such language is next put to use in early October (Journal 10/9/39). Wesley's first use of the categories inward and outward in relation to sin was in January 1740 (Journal 1/25/40).

¹⁸Cf. II.4, 7, 20 (Works 2:106, 107, 116). By 1741 Wesley used 1 John 3:9 to refer to the level of deliverance from sin found at justification (i.e., the power of outward sin).

refers to sinful attitudes and dispositions, like pride, self-will, and anger.¹⁹ Wesley utilizes the language of 1 John 2:12-14 to proclaim that “children” know firsthand salvation from outward sin, but only “fathers” know by personal experience complete deliverance from inward sin.

The basic stages in Wesley's *ordo salutis* are now set in place. Another important step Wesley took at the time was to relegate infirmity to a completely separate section in the sermon, thereby driving an even deeper wedge between infirmity and volition in his doctrine of sin. Whereas before he had placed infirmity and volition (along with habit and desire) under the single category “power of sin,” the two are now permanently severed and placed in separate categories. By moving infirmity to a separate section, Wesley raised the expectation that full salvation is attainable in this life.

Five years later Wesley categorized sin under five headings: *past* (guilt), *present* (outward sin), *inward* (corruption of nature), *infirmity* (involuntary failings), and *sins of surprise* (impulsive or reactive responses).²⁰ Essential to his discussion is the concurrence of the will:

We cannot say, either that men are, or that they are not, condemned for sins of surprise in general: But it seems, whenever a believer is by surprise overtaken in a fault, there is more or less condemnation, as there is more or less concurrence of his will. In proportion as a sinful desire, or word, or action, is more or less voluntary, so we may conceive God is more or less displeased, and there is more or less guilt upon the soul.²¹

So central is the concurrence of the will in the commission of sin that in 1748 Wesley repeated his now famous definition of sin as an “actual, voluntary transgression of the law . . . acknowledged to be such at the time that it is transgressed.”²²

More needs to be said about the relationship between outward and inward sin in Wesley's soteriology. In *The Great Privilege of Those that are Born of God* (1748), Wesley explains through a nine-step process how sin can once again gain dominion over a Christian. Sin begins with tempta-

¹⁹Cf. II.21-26 (*Works* 2:117-19).

²⁰“The First-fruits of the Spirit” II. 1-13 (*Works* 1:237-43). Wesley probably first learned about “sins of surprise” from Richard Kidder, whom he first read in 1733. Cf. note 6 above.

²¹*Ibid.*, II.11 (*Works* 1:242).

²²“The Great Privilege of Those that are Born of God” II.2 (*Works* 1:436).

tion; the Spirit warns, but the believer succumbs. If the choice to sin persists, then the Spirit is grieved and the believer's faith is weakened. Love for God then grows cold. The Holy Spirit convicts and draws the wayward believer to repentance. A critical decision is made at this point. If the Christian rejects this inner voice, "evil desire begins and spreads" until the light of divine faith and love flickers out. At this point God's power departs and the person becomes "capable of committing outward sin."²³ Outward sin here refers to the commission of habitual sin—the mark of the non-Christian.²⁴ The loss of saving faith begins with an outward sin, that is, a deliberate choice; yet the backsliding continues because of inward sin, finally to issue in habitual sin: sin as *choice* leads to sin as *desire* resulting in sin as *habitual*.

For the most part, Wesley's vocabulary on sin is now set in place. His often-used terms are outward, inward, habitual, commission (committing), infirmity, voluntary, involuntary, and willful. In relation to personal guilt, the plumb line is the engagement of the human will. While the early Wesley worked with two basic categories of sin (disease of nature and willful act), the middle Wesley diversified and expanded his doctrine of sin. Sin is now viewed as more complex and requiring more nuance, thus reflecting development in Wesley's diagnosis of the human condition. Of course, the bedrock of this diagnosis is his doctrine of original sin, inherited from his Anglican tradition but central to the revival's message of salvation by grace alone. On this point, Wesley never budged an inch: in Adam, "we are all born with a sinful, devilish nature."²⁵

The final steps in the maturation of Wesley's doctrine of sin came a decade or so later (1760s). The perfection revival and ensuing schism compelled Wesley to qualify his doctrine of sin in a couple ways. First, in response to the perfectionists Wesley introduced the language of "being" to describe inward sin.²⁶ This made the bond between inward sin and original sin even more organic and explicit. The bond had always been there, but Wesley now conjoined the two more tightly to counter the Zinzendorffian claim that in the new birth all sin—outward, inward, and original—is vanquished. This was necessary because in the revival atmo-

²³Ibid., II.9 (*Works* 1:440).

²⁴Or the nominal Christian; cf. "Salvation by Faith" II.6 (*Works* 1:124); Letter to Samuel Wesley, 10/30/38 (*Works* 25:575).

²⁵"Conference Minutes" 1744, Q. 15 (*Works*, Jackson, 8:277).

²⁶"On Sin in Believers" I.5, IV.4 (*Works* 1:319, 328).

sphere immature believers were tempted to overinflate their spiritual attainments and thereby inadvertently succumb to the temptations of inward sin, especially pride and self-will. Wesley had faced a similar situation in the summer of 1739.²⁷ Reaching back to the teachings of Christian David,²⁸ Wesley reaffirmed that sin no longer *reigns* in the immature Christian, but it does *remain* as a “corruption of the nature of every man.”²⁹

Second, Wesley gave his doctrine of sin structural organization in the tracts *Thoughts on Christian Perfection* (1759) and *Farther Thoughts on Christian Perfection* (1763). By 1758 several young preachers were telling people they must be entirely sanctified to be eternally saved. This called for correction by Wesley, reminding everyone that all believers, even the “most perfect,” need daily forgiveness.³⁰ The next year Wesley published *Thoughts* and formally categorized his doctrine of sin under the headings “voluntary” and “involuntary” to guard against certain revival excesses that were erupting in the societies. Four years later Wesley published the sequel *Farther Thoughts* in which he grounds his doctrine of sin on the Reformed concept of two covenants (law of works and law of faith).³¹ The concept of covenants gave Wesley two distinguishable standards by which to define sin in his theology of holiness. *Farther Thoughts* was a response to the enthusiasm of George Bell and Thomas Maxfield. Their wild claims of angelic perfection compelled Wesley to underscore the limitations of attainable perfection. This required Wesley to define more precisely the level of deliverance from sin experienced in the gift of perfect love. Therefore, by the mid-sixties Wesley attained maturity in his doctrines of sin and holiness, and these doctrines did not materially change thereafter.

²⁷“Journal & Diaries” 7/23/39 (*Works* 19:82).

²⁸Wesley first learned of the distinction between sin reigning and sin remaining from Moravian evangelist Christian David in the summer of 1738 (*Works* 18:274).

²⁹Church of England's Ninth Article, ‘Of Original Sin or Birth Sin,’ cf. “On Sin in Believers” I.2 (*Works* 1:317); regarding sin reigning and remaining, cf. “On Sin in Believers” I.6, IV.3 (*Works* 1:319, 327).

³⁰Mark K. Olson, *John Wesley's 'A Plain Account of Christian Perfection': The Annotated Edition*. Fenwick: Alethea In Heart, 2005, 116 (hereafter, *Plain Account*). Cf. Albert Outler, *John Wesley*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1964, 177.

³¹*Plain Account*, 176-79. Cf. Scott J. Jones, *John Wesley's Conception and Use of Scripture*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995, 58.

Charting Wesley's Doctrine of Sin

Charting Wesley's doctrine of sin can prove helpful to contemporary Wesleyans. It will visually bring out the organic relation sin has to spiritual growth in Wesley's teachings on discipleship and holiness. To appreciate Wesley's blueprint of intentional discipleship, we must first grasp the variegated nature of sin and its workings in human behavior. In this way, we can see the logic of Wesley's *ordo salutis* in fulfilling the gospel promise of full salvation. This logic can then be applied to develop strategies for spiritual growth in our contextual settings, empowering dynamic renewal in the lives of believers. Below, the following five classifications are used to chart Wesley's doctrine of sin: category, standard, subcategory, time of deliverance, and stage of renewal.

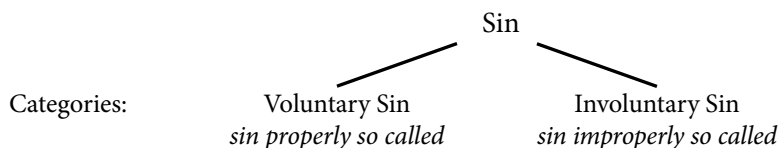
To begin, we turn to *Thoughts on Christian Perfection* and note how Wesley categorized his doctrine of sin:

1. and 2. Not only sin, properly so called (that is, a voluntary transgression of a known law,) but sin, improperly so called (that is, an involuntary transgression of a divine law, known or unknown) needs the atoning blood, and without this would expose to eternal damnation.
3. I believe there is no such perfection in this life as excludes these involuntary transgressions which I apprehend to be naturally consequent on the ignorance and mistakes inseparable from mortality.
4. Therefore "sinless perfection" is a phrase I never use lest I should seem to contradict myself.
5. I believe a person filled with the love of God is still liable to these involuntary transgressions.
6. Such transgressions you may call sins, if you please. I do not for the reason above mentioned.³²

What divides these categories is the plumb line of human volition. For Wesley, voluntary sin is intentional; involuntary sin is not. His reason for this distinction is that these transgressions are "inseparable from mortality" that is, beyond the scope of human volition. Even though Wesley referred to such transgressions as "sin, improperly so called," he did maintain these transgressions violate the divine standard and therefore need the atonement of Christ to save from "eternal damnation." Obviously, these involun-

³²Outler, *John Wesley*, 287.

tary transgressions are no trivial matter! Accordingly, Wesley taught that even the “most perfect” are “still liable to these involuntary transgressions” and need daily forgiveness. This will be explained in further detail below. We, then, can begin to chart Wesley’s doctrine of sin as follows:



One of the marked differences between these two categories is the standard each references. Scott Jones explains, “Wesley’s dispensational view is in keeping with traditional Reformed interpretation. . . . There the Puritan divines distinguish between two covenants, a covenant of works which applies to before the Fall and one of grace which applied after Adam’s sin.”³³ In the tract *Farther Thoughts*, Wesley taught that the law of works was “given to Adam in (his) innocence.” Having been “created free from any defect,” Adam’s “body was then no clog to the mind; it did not hinder his apprehending all things clearly, judging truly . . . reasoning justly.” Adam was expected to “always think, always speak, and always act precisely right, in every point whatever.”³⁴ This view of humanity’s original perfection remained a constant in Wesley’s theology.³⁵

With the coming of Christ, another law essentially replaced the law given to Adam. The law of faith says, “not everyone that doeth, but everyone that believeth, now receiveth righteousness . . . he is justified, sanctified, and glorified.”³⁶ Instead of being fulfilled by perfect performance (i.e., works), this law is satisfied by love: “Faith working or animated by love is all that God now requires of man. He has substituted love . . . in the room of angelic perfection.”³⁷ Of special interest is how Wesley integrates these two standards in his doctrine of holiness:

³³Scott Jones, *John Wesley’s Conception and Use of Scripture*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992, 58.

³⁴*Plain Account*, 176-77.

³⁵Cf. the sermons *The Image of God* (1731); *Justification by Faith* (1746); *Original Sin* (1759); and *The Fall of Man* (1782).

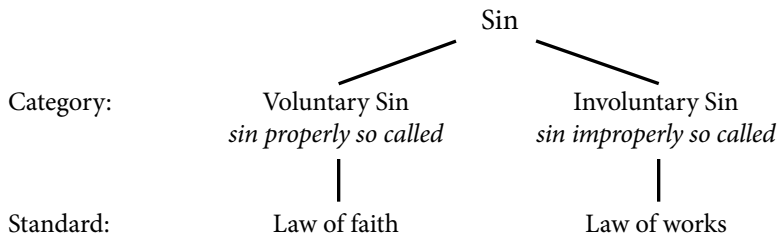
³⁶*Plain Account*, 179.

³⁷*Ibid.*, 181.

Q. 13. But if Christ has put an end to that law, what need of any atonement for their transgressing it?

A. Observe in what sense he has put an end to it, and the difficulty vanishes. Were it not for the abiding merit of his death, and his continual intercession for us, that law would condemn us still. These, therefore, we still need for every transgression of it.³⁸

What Wesley means is that the Adamic law, the law of works, is still in *full force*. The coming of Christ did not abolish this law; instead, by his death Christ covers the believer's transgressions so that this law no longer condemns. The Christian, even the "most perfect," lives on the basis of God's forgiveness imparted daily through the perpetual intercession of our high priest Jesus Christ.³⁹ Before the divine tribunal, every person is accountable to both laws, the law of works and the law of faith. Voluntary sin pertains to the law of faith, involuntary sin to the law of works:



We can now take a deeper look at these two foundational categories. In the sermon *On Sin in Believers*, Wesley further categorized voluntary sin: "The *guilt* is one thing, the *power* another, and the *being* yet another."⁴⁰ These three subcategories match up to his earlier groupings of the guilt of sin, outward sin, and inward sin.⁴¹ For the immature Christian, sin no longer *reigns* but it does *remain*. Only in spiritual adulthood is the "being" of sin (inward sin) removed and the believer taste full salva-

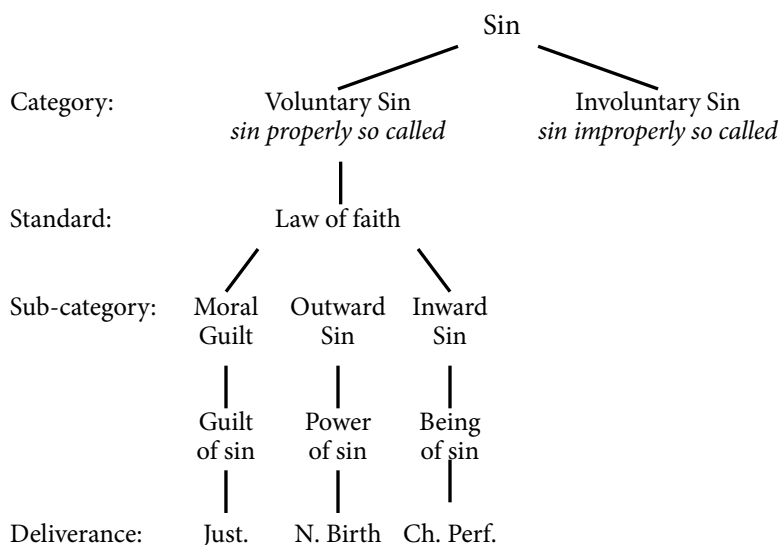
³⁸Ibid., 189.

³⁹By stressing the importance of Christ's *continual intercession*, Wesley links the resurrection of Christ to our justification (cf. Rom. 4:25b). In his death, Jesus Christ provided atonement, in his resurrection he forever lives to intercede for our voluntary and involuntary sin (*Plain Account*, 124-25, 189).

⁴⁰"On Sin in Believers," IV.4 (*Works* 1:328).

⁴¹Cf. footnotes 18 and 19.

tion. The time of deliverance becomes clear: justification removes sin's guilt; the new birth breaks sin's power; perfect love vanquishes sin's being:



We see a marked difference when we turn to the subcategories of involuntary sin. Wesley consistently referred to these transgressions as weakness, folly, mistake, even ignorance.⁴² To explain himself more fully, "By 'sins of infirmity' I would mean such involuntary failings as saying a thing we believe true, though in fact it prove to be false; or hurting our neighbor without knowing or designing it, perhaps when we designed to do him good."⁴³ This gives insight into Wesley's meaning, for even the "most perfect" believer falls short of the absolute standard of God's holiness when they inadvertently hurt another person. These "mistakes in practice" bring legal guilt and expose to divine judgment, requiring Christ's atonement and intercession. All believers, says Wesley, even the entirely sanctified, need to pray for daily forgiveness in regard to these transgressions.⁴⁴

⁴²"Preface to the Life and Death of Mr. Halyburton" §5 (*Works*, Jackson, 14:212); "Christian Perfection" I.4, 7 (*Works* 2:101, 103).

⁴³"The First-fruits of the Spirit," II.8 (*Works* 1:241); cf. "The End of Christ's Coming" III.3 (*Works* 2:482); "On the Fall of Man" II.2 (*Works* 2:406).

⁴⁴*Plain Account*, 116; "Journal" 7/24/61 (*Works* 21:336-37).

Wesley's philosophy of intentional discipleship (*ordo salutis*) comes into play because a correlation exists between the subcategories of voluntary and involuntary sin and the stages of renewal. Beginning in the mid-1760s, Wesley began to temporally separate justification from the new birth. Drawing on Acts 10:35, Wesley argued that God-fearing believers who lacked the direct witness of the Spirit (i.e., new birth) are accepted (i.e., justified) by God.⁴⁸ Wesley called this stage the *faith of a servant*.⁴⁹ Then from 1 John 2:12-14 he identified three other stages: children, young men, and fathers.⁵⁰ Wesley consistently linked the stages of childhood and adulthood to the new birth and full salvation (Wesley associated young men with the abiding witness of the Spirit⁵¹). Finally, Wesley held that involuntary sin expires at physical death. Since this dimension of sin persists throughout this life, he counseled every believer to pray for forgiveness each day. For contemporary Wesleyans, an important insight on discipleship emerges at this point: Wesley joined specific thresholds of spiritual growth to definite God-moments of deliverance from sin: sin's *guilt* at justification, sin's *power* in the new birth, sin's *being* in Christian perfection, and sin's *presence* at physical death and the resurrection.⁵²

What, then, can we conclude about Wesley's theology of perfect love, especially in relation to his mature doctrine of sin? It is evident that he believed in two *kinds* of perfection. When asked if those perfect were still

⁴⁸For a full discussion of this controversial point see the author's articles, "Aldersgate II and the Birth of the Servant State," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 43:2 (2008): 154-76; "The Roots of John Wesley's Servant Theology," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 44:2 (2009): 120-141. Cf. Wesley's sermons "On Faith" I.10-11 (*Works* 3:497).

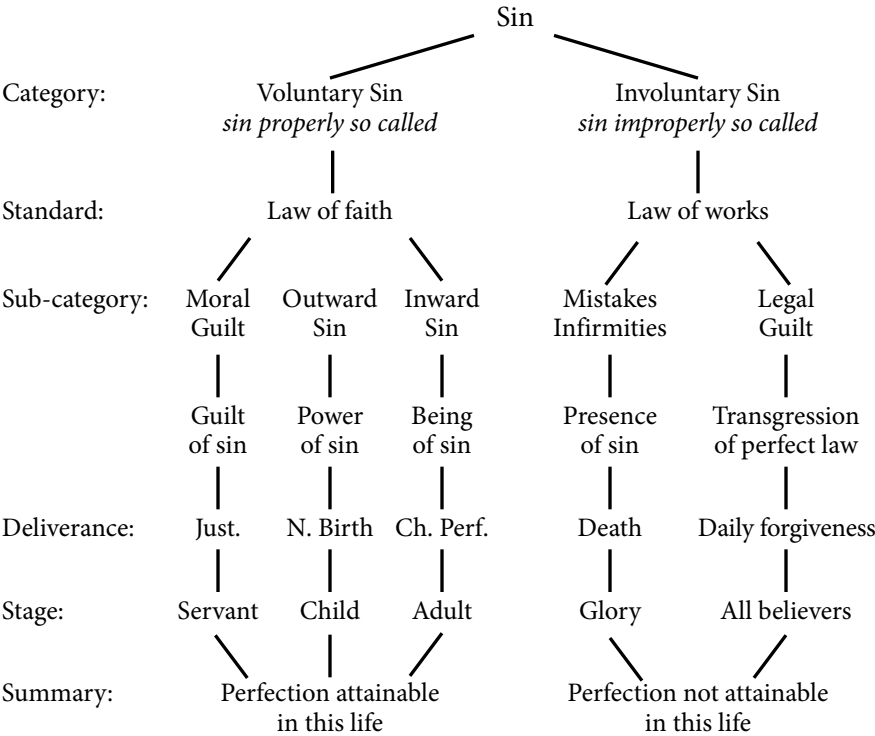
⁴⁹Letters to Ann Bolton, 4/7/68, 8/12/70, 11/16/70 (John Telford, ed. *The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.* 8 Vol. London: Epworth Press, 1931, 5:86, 197, 207; hereafter, Telford).

⁵⁰"Christian Perfection" II.1-2 (*Works* 2:105); *NT Notes* 1 Jn 2:12-14; *Plain Account*, 56, 61; "On Sin in Believers," IV.2-3 (*Works* 1:326-27).

⁵¹"Christian Perfection" II.1 (*Works* 2:105); *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament*, 1 John 2:12-14; cf. "Preface to Hymns and Sacred Poems II" §11 (*Works*, Jackson, 14:327) for an early description of the stage of full assurance. Wesley did not identify this stage with spiritual adolescence until May/June of 1740 when he began to use 1 John 2:12-14 to categorize the stages of renewal in the Christian life ("Journal & Diaries" 5/5/40, 6/22/40, *Works* 19:148, 154).

⁵²The term "presence" comes from Randy Maddox's classic *Responsible Grace*, 143, but used here in a more specified sense (the effect of involuntary sin). In regard to full assurance and the stage of adolescence in Wesley's *ordo* (i.e., "young man" in 1 Jn. 2:12-14), this quasi-stage answers sin's *fear* (cf. prior note).

sinners, Wesley once answered, “Explain the term one way, and I say, Yes; another, and I say, No.”⁵³ In regard to voluntary sin, Wesley confidently affirmed the attainability of perfection; in regard to human infirmity, he denied any possibility of attaining perfection:



Original Sin and Full Salvation

How do Wesley’s views on inbred sin fit into the above structure? What is the relationship between original sin to voluntary sin and involuntary sin? Is inherited sinfulness removed in the gift of perfect love? Or, is deliverance from inbred sin only realized at physical death? How Wesley answered these questions differed from one period to another.

The early Wesley believed our innate corruption was eliminated only at death.⁵⁴ Since this was the controlling motif of his early soteriology, he

⁵³Letter to Samuel Furly, 9/15/62 (Telford 4:190).

⁵⁴“Death and Deliverance” (1725, *Works* 4:206-14) and “The Trouble and Rest of Good Men” (1735, *Works* 3:531-41).

naturally concluded that perfection is not fully attainable in this life. At Aldersgate, he swung the pendulum to the opposite extreme: freedom from original sin begins in the God-moment of conversion.⁵⁵ Although he soon shifted this deliverance to a second, post-justification gift, the polarity of these two convictions helped to guide Wesley in the development of his doctrine of holiness over the next several decades. When Wesley began in the late fifties to teach that perfect love could be lost, the implication was that the gift of perfection is not as transformative as he formerly believed. In other words, the remains of Adam's fall are more tenacious than was earlier assumed.

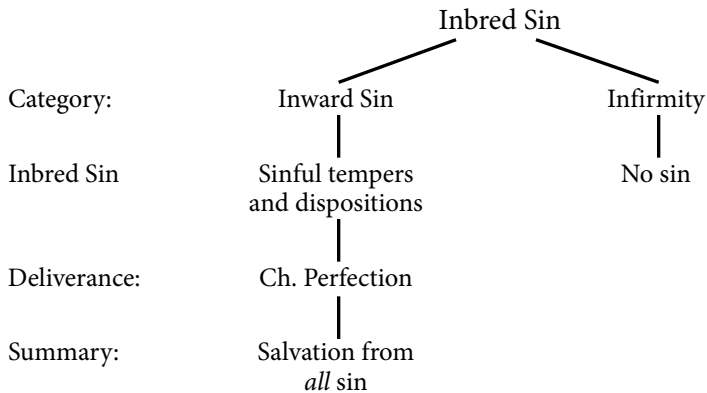
These changes in Wesley's perspective were influenced by many factors,⁵⁶ but one that is little noticed is how Wesley related original sin to infirmities and inward sin at different periods. We saw that the early Wesley closely associated original sin with human infirmity and weakness. This meant that any deliverance from inherited sinfulness could not be attained apart from freedom from these infirmities. Hence, full salvation was found only at the threshold of death. However, the early Wesley also joined original sin to inward sin. Throughout his early sermons, inbred sin is the source behind sinful dispositions and tempers.⁵⁷ Yet any hope of full salvation was dashed because the early Wesley made no clear demarcation between inward sin and infirmity.

In 1738 a fundamental shift took place. Wesley began to draw a sharp distinction between infirmities and sinful desire, along with a much stronger emphasis on the present power of grace to transform the will and human desire (tempers). At the time, infirmity was demoted in Wesley's soteriology as present salvation ascended to prominence. The more Wesley downplayed infirmity as sin, the more optimistic his theology of perfection became. With the proclamation that inward sin can be removed in this life, it followed that original sin is also eliminated in the fully sanctified Christian. In this scenario, a belief in salvation from *all* sin makes sense:

⁵⁵"Salvation by Faith" II.2, 7 (*Works* 1:122, 124); "Journal & Diaries" 12/5/38, 1/4/39 (*Works*, 19:23-26, 29-31).

⁵⁶Cf. Maddox's discussion in *Responsible Grace*, 75-81.

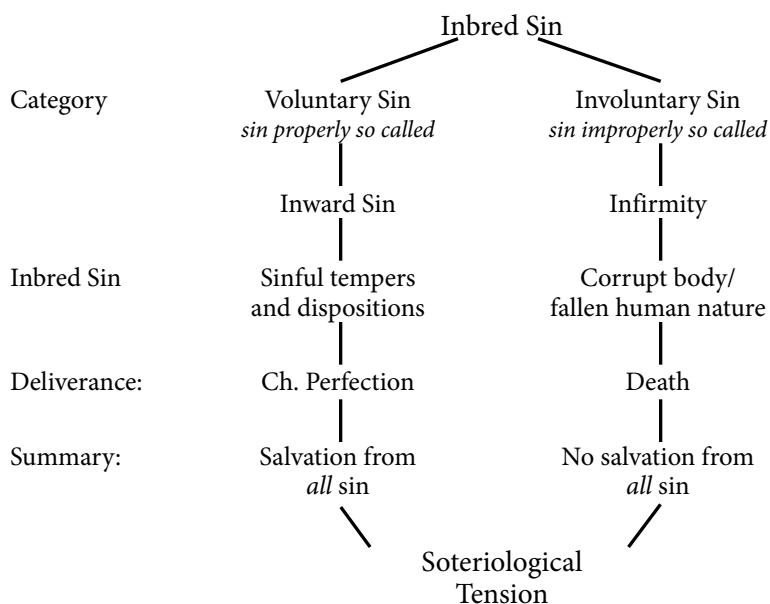
⁵⁷"Death and Deliverance" §14 (*Works* 4:212); "The Circumcision of the Heart" I.1-2, 4, 10, 11 (*Works* 1:402-03, 404, 407); "The Trouble and Rest of Good Men" Preamble; II.5 (*Works* 3:533-34, 539-40); "The Single Intention" II.9 (*Works* 4:377).



However, by the late-fifties Wesley began to stress once again the tenacious reality of involuntary sin as infirmity.⁵⁸ As we saw above, this was to correct certain excesses in the societies due to the perfection revival and schism. But, with this admission, the necessary implication was that original sin must persist in some form throughout this earthly sojourn. That is, there is no deliverance from *all* sin in this life. Since Wesley maintained that inward sin can be removed in this life, but involuntary sin cannot, this inferred that inbred sin is simultaneously removed and not removed in the adult Christian. In other words, Wesley's mature doctrine of Christian perfection holds that fully sanctified believers are free from inbred sin in one sense but not in another. Of course, this led to confusion as to what he believed and taught, then and now. Still, to his death Wesley affirmed both truths: adult believers are free from *all* sin, yet needing *daily* forgiveness for their involuntary transgressions.⁵⁹ This created a soteriological tension in his doctrine of holiness that he never resolved.

⁵⁸"Thoughts on Christian Perfection" (*Plain Account*, 115-20).

⁵⁹That Wesley repeatedly claimed a deliverance from *all* sin is easy to show. In the *Plain Account* (1766), which was published several times during his lifetime, Wesley quotes from several writings spanning three decades. He repeatedly used adjectives like "all" to define the degree of deliverance: "*all* sin," "*all* unrighteousness," "*all* iniquity," a "*total* death to sin" (65, 86, 132). When we turn to the sermon *On Perfection* (1785), Wesley's claims follow the same pattern. Perfection entails the "*whole* disposition" of Christ, possessing "*all* his affections, *all* his tempers, both toward God and man" (1.5). It entails salvation from "*all* sin" as its "lowest branch" (I.12). To conclude, Wesley believed and taught a sanctification that is complete and entire, even absolute, despite his qualifications. Yet, his doctrine of involuntary sin explicitly denies that sin is ever completely removed in this life. This creates a soteriological tension that cannot be resolved unless serious adjustments are made in definitions and terminology.



Make no mistake; this soteriological tension carries serious consequences for Wesley's doctrine of holiness. What Wesley claimed in his doctrine of Christian perfection he unwittingly denied in his full-orbed doctrine of sin. If the "best of men still need Christ in his priestly office, to atone for their omissions, their shortcomings, their mistakes in judgment and practice, and their defects of various kinds . . . all deviations from the perfect law," then who is free from *all sin*? Call these sins "involuntary," "sin, improperly so-called," or by some other name, the consequence is the same: if these "deviations" need the atonement of Christ, then we must confess them as *sin* before the tribunal of God. Moreover, according to Wesley, no Christian is ever free from these transgressions in this life. Therefore, there is no salvation from *all sin* in this life, no matter what Wesley claims to the contrary. There remains an eschatological tension between the "already" of present salvation and the "not yet" of full salvation, as Wesley openly acknowledged at times:

But it may be observed that the Son of God does not destroy *the whole work of the devil in man*, as long as he remains in this life. . . . He does not destroy all that weakness of understanding which is the natural consequence of the soul's dwelling in a corruptible body; so that still *Humanum est errare et nescire*: both

ignorance and error belong to humanity . . . till the sentence takes place, "Dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return!"⁶⁰

The deliverance Christ works in the sanctified believer is truly life changing, and includes salvation from pride, self-will, love of the world, and other inward sins;⁶¹ but even Wesley acknowledged that our deliverance from the "whole work of the devil" awaits the time when we "depart and be with Christ."⁶² There is no salvation from *all* sin in this life.

What Wesley bequeathed to his posterity is a theology of holiness bound with unresolved tensions. Given his categories and definitions of sin, what he claimed for the experience of perfect love and the disclaimers he made, only two options remain tenable to construct a consistent doctrine of holiness today. We can either (1) narrow the definition of sin to voluntary transgressions, or (2) give up the claim of salvation from *all* sin. The first option allows for a message of full salvation to be proclaimed, but only in a very limited sense. The existential and corporate dimensions of sin must be jettisoned, along with the voice of the catholic (universal) church about our innate corruption.⁶³ The question becomes whether this narrow claim will be convincing, even to Wesleyans.

On the other hand, in keeping with the second option, we can affirm Wesley's full doctrine of sin, which takes into cognizance the broader dimensions of Adam's fall, but surrender the central claim Wesley made in his doctrine of holiness: present salvation from *all* sin. We can proclaim salvation from all *voluntary* sin, from its guilt, power, and being, and follow Wesley's example and develop models of discipleship that join specific thresholds of spiritual growth to definite God-moments of deliverance from sin. Nevertheless, we will need to remind our people that our salvation from sin is never complete, nor *entire* in this life. Only when the Lord returns, "we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." In the

⁶⁰"The End of Christ's Coming" III.3 (*Works* 2:482, emphasis mine). Note Wesley's admission in *On Perfection* I.3 (*Works* 3:73). The "best of men" need "every moment" Christ's atonement to cover their inadvertent wrong judgments, words, and actions toward other people, yet he denies these are not really sin. The reader should read carefully Wesley's arguments in this sermon about salvation from all sin (II.7).

⁶¹*Ibid.*, III.2 (*Works* 2:481).

⁶²Philippians 1:23 (NIV).

⁶³Wesley was an ardent supporter of Article IX of the Church of England: "Of Original or Birth Sin" (cf. "On Sin in Believers" I.3, *Works* 1:317).

meantime, we must teach, “Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure.”⁶⁴ The call to purify ourselves is ongoing and is never a finished work in this life. As long as we remain in the body, we will need to pray daily, Father “forgive us our trespasses.”⁶⁵

⁶⁴1 John 3:2-3 (NIV).

⁶⁵“Journal & Diaries” 7/24/61 (*Works* 21:367); cf. *Plain Account*, 116, note 12. Wesley is quoting the Lord’s Prayer.

POLEMICAL SOLIDARITY: JOHN WESLEY AND JONATHAN EDWARDS CONFRONT JOHN TAYLOR ON ORIGINAL SIN

by

Andrew C. Russell

For historians of Evangelicalism, Jonathan Edwards and John Wesley represent two of the more important figures of the eighteenth century.¹ Born in 1703, both men have become synonymous with the revivals that punctuated Great Britain (the Evangelical Revival) and the American colonies (the Great Awakening) throughout the 1730s and 1740s. As the pastor of Northampton's Congregational Church, Edwards not only preached numerous revival sermons, but also provided the most thorough and substantial defense of the awakening. Across the Atlantic, Wesley likewise participated in and promoted revival activities, at times scandalizing the Church of England by preaching beyond the confines of church walls. Three centuries later, scholars, clergy, and lay people continue to examine and implement the thought and methods of both men.

At the same time, Edwards and Wesley represent a number of perennial tensions within theology. Although drawing on the contemporary philosophy of his day, Edwards is often seen as the champion of many cherished beliefs within Reformed theology.² In a letter to John Erskine in 1757, he wrote, "I think the notion of liberty, consisting in a contingent self-determination of the will, as a necessary to the morality of men's dispositions and actions, is almost inconceivably pernicious."³ By contrast,

¹For one of numerous examples, see Mark A. Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism: The Age of Edwards, Whitefield, and the Wesleys* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2003).

²Note, however, that at times Edwards significantly departed from his Reformed roots. See Michael McClymond and Gerald R. McDermott, "Edwards and the Catholic and Orthodox Traditions," in *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

³Jonathan Edwards, Letter to John Erskine, 3 August 1757, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 3 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), 719.

Wesley is the quintessential evangelical Arminian, the defender of conditional election and resistible grace.⁴ Even when encouraging revival activity, Wesley felt compelled to excise “much deadly poison” from Edwards’s *Religious Affections* before publishing the work for his Methodist preachers.⁵ Although united in concern for revival and true religion, each conformed to his own Calvinistic or Arminian predilections.⁶

Despite such differences, significant theological commonality can be found in Edwards and Wesley, especially when comparing their responses to the rapidly growing influence of the Enlightenment. Within a three-month time period, both men completed rebuttals to John Taylor’s *The Scripture-Doctrine of Original Sin Proposed to Free and Candid Examination*, a work which radically altered how the relationship between Adam and his offspring is understood.⁷ A comparison of these two responses reveals that, not only were both men troubled by Taylor’s ideas, but both were convinced that a full-length systematic response was necessary to defend the attack on one of Christianity’s indispensable theological tenets. I will argue here that, despite different contexts and theological convictions, both Edwards and Wesley crafted rebuttals to Taylor’s work by appealing to a variety of similar arguments. After surveying the context and content of Taylor’s *Scripture-Doctrine of Original Sin*, I will examine five of

⁴For a complete account of Wesley’s controversies with Calvinism, see Herbert Boyd McGonigle, *Sufficient Saving Grace: John Wesley’s Evangelical Arminianism* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2001).

⁵John Wesley, Preface to *A Treatise on Religious Affections: In Three Parts*, 1773. Quoted in *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 14 (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2002), 270. Wesley’s abridgment was ultimately one-sixth the length of the original.

⁶For a brief contrast in approaches, see Michael McClymond and Gerald R. McDermott, “Edwards and the Revival Tradition,” in *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

⁷John Taylor, *The Scripture-Doctrine of Original Sin Proposed to Free and Candid Examination*, 3rd ed. (Belfast: J. Magee, 1746); John Wesley, *The Doctrine of Original Sin: According to Scripture, Reason, and Experience* (Bristol: E. Farley, 1757). Subsequent references (hereafter WJW) refer to the Baker edition. Jonathan Edwards, *The Great Christian Doctrine of Original Sin Defended; Evidences of Its Truth Produced, and Arguments to the Contrary Answered. Containing, in Particular, a Reply to the Objections and Arguings of Dr. John Taylor, in His Book, Intituled, The Scripture-Doctrine of Original Sin Proposed to Free and Candid Examination* (Boston: S. Kneeland, 1758). Subsequent references (hereafter WJE) refer to the Yale edition.

those arguments, ultimately concluding that the thought of Edwards and Wesley converged in a remarkably similar way in their responses to Taylor. For reference purposes, I have titled these arguments: the historical argument, the probability argument, the best-case-scenario argument, the happiness/misery argument, and the dispositional argument.

Original Sin Attacked

The controversy arising from Taylor's book on original sin cannot be appreciated without being situated within the broader Enlightenment context. The eighteenth century witnessed a number of intellectual shifts that had been nascent in the previous century, including a cosmology that imagined the universe as a giant machine, fully functional without the constant intervention of a God in the heavens. The world was inherently harmonious, orderly, and knowable. As such, revelation was gradually eradicated to allow reason to fully blossom, to illuminate natural laws and liberate them from the chains of superstition.

Religion was not impervious to these changes. If Christianity was to be preserved, then it was necessary to shed the layers of dogma so that humanity could become the reasonable, autonomous individuals they were intended to be. Dismissed as superfluous, historic Christian beliefs in miracles or a Trinitarian God were gradually jettisoned by the hand of rationality. To be sure, God existed as the source of causality in the world, but he was heard through the right use of reason found within each individual. The genuine Christian life was an ethical life moving along the path of progress. It was within this burgeoning and thriving movement that John Taylor's beliefs were formed and articulated.

John Taylor of Norwich.⁸ John Taylor was born in Lancaster in 1694. Although he was the son of an English churchman, the dissenting background of his mother led to a formal education beginning in 1709 at Whitehaven, an academy for Presbyterian and Congregational clergy. After studying under Thomas Hill, Taylor was ordained and appointed to a Presbyterian church at Kirkstead in 1716. Married the following year, he struggled on a poor stipend until he was called to a Presbyterian congregation in Norwich in 1733. There he served as co-pastor with Peter Finch

⁸The most complete (and sympathetic) biography of Taylor is found in G. T. Eddy, *Dr Taylor of Norwich: Wesley's Arch-Heretic* (Werrington: Epworth Press, 2003). For a helpful contextualization of Taylor within the broader milieu of non-conformity, see Alan P. F. Sell, *Philosophy, Dissent and Nonconformity* (Cambridge: James Clarke, 2004).

until 1754 when his colleague died at the age of 91. A gifted Hebraist, the first volume of Taylor's *Hebrew Concordance* was published in 1754, a work which led the University of Glasgow to award him the Doctor of Divinity Degree in 1756.⁹ Shortly afterwards, he preached the inaugural sermon of Norwich's famous Octagon chapel.¹⁰ Taylor finished his career as an instructor of moral philosophy at the Warrington Academy, a post he accepted in 1757.¹¹ He is probably most remembered for his attack on the doctrine of original sin. First appearing in 1740, *The Scripture-Doctrine of Original Sin* was revised and expanded until the third edition was published in 1746.¹² Popular on both sides of the Atlantic, the work was influential on the burgeoning Unitarian movement, especially within American Congregationalism.

The Scripture-Doctrine of Original Sin. Taylor's work is composed of three major parts. In the first part, he examines what he considers to be the five most common passages of Scripture used to defend the traditional understanding of original sin: Genesis 2:17, Genesis 3:17-24, Romans 5:12-20, 1 Corinthians 15:21-22, and 1 Timothy 2:14. In the second part, he considers the additional passages that are cited in the *Larger Catechism* of the Assembly of Divines. In each case, he argues that, when properly interpreted, neither guilt nor punishment is ever said to be passed from Adam to his progeny. For example, in his consideration of Romans 5:19, he states: "It seems then confirmed and cleared to me beyond all doubt, that, 'By one man's disobedience many were made sinners,' the apostle meaneth neither more nor less, than that by Adam's offense, the 'many,' that is mankind, were made subject to death by the judgment of God."¹³ Only *physical* death, in other words, is actually trans-

⁹John Taylor, *The Hebrew Concordance, Adapted to the English Bible; Disposed after the Manner of Buxtorf* (London: J. Waugh and W. Fenner, 1754).

¹⁰The sermon text can be found in John Taylor and Taylor Philip Meadows, *The Principles and Pursuits of an English Presbyterian Minister of the Eighteenth Century Exemplified in a Selection from the Writings of John Taylor of Norwich, Including the Sermon Preached by Him in 1756 at the Opening of the New Presbyterian Chapel in That City* (London: 1843). The Octagon Unitarian Chapel of Norwich continues to hold services. Its website is located at <http://www.ukunitarians.org.uk/norwich/>.

¹¹For information on the Warrington Academy, see P. O'Brien, *Warrington Academy, 1757-86: Its Predecessors and Successors* (Wigan: Owl Books, 1989).

¹²The second edition was published in 1741.

¹³Taylor, *The Scripture-Doctrine of Original Sin Proposed to Free and Candid Examination*, 35.

ferred from Adam to his descendents. In this sense only does humanity suffer on account of Adam. However, such suffering is not a form of inherited punishment. On the contrary, death is “no small benefit” to humanity since it increases the vanity of earthly things, excites sober reflection, tempers the appetites, mortifies pride, and increases the sense of dependency on God.¹⁴ As such, the sorrows of death are “turned into great advantages, as to our present spiritual improvements.”¹⁵ In short, Scripture reveals that only physical death is inherited from Adam, a form of suffering that is used to benefit humankind.

In the third part, Taylor expands his polemic beyond exegetical arguments to consider the reasonableness of original sin. Central to his argument is the conviction that both vice and virtue are derived from an autonomous human will, a sentiment increasingly common in the Enlightenment context. “For nature cannot be morally corrupted, but by the will, the depraved choice of a moral agent. Neither can any corrupt my nature, or make me wicked, *but I myself*.”¹⁶ To suggest otherwise is to undermine any sense of morality. “We cannot, as moral agents, observe what is right and true, or be righteous and holy, without our own free and explicit choice.”¹⁷ Both Adam and all of his posterity were created with the same fundamental ability to use their rational faculties to choose either righteousness or wickedness. The very concepts of either Adam’s original righteousness or his offspring’s original sin are absurd. Both righteousness and sin require action, and action requires choice.

Not only is the concept of original sin unreasonable, but also a determinant to the pursuit of holiness. After all, “If we believe that we are by nature worse than the brutes, and this doctrine represents us as such, what wonder if we act worse than the brutes?”¹⁸ The belief that human nature is necessarily corrupted only encourages people to neglect the responsibility for their actions. He asks, “Doth not the doctrine of original sin teach you to transfer your wickedness and sin to a wrong cause?”¹⁹ The answer, of course, is affirmative. “Whereas in truth you ought blame or condemn *yourself alone* for any wicked lust, which prevail in your

¹⁴Ibid., 67.

¹⁵Ibid., 63.

¹⁶Ibid., 188; emphasis in original.

¹⁷Ibid., 180.

¹⁸Ibid., 259.

¹⁹Ibid., 257.

heart, any evil habit you have contracted, any sinful actions you commit, you lay the whole upon *Adam*.²⁰ Simply put, nothing is “more destructive of virtue” than the assumption that sin is necessary for all people.²¹

Ultimately, however, the doctrine of original sin is most deleterious to the glory of God. To believe that God transfers the guilt of one man to another is tantamount to ascribing to him the attributes of injustice, deceit, and delusion.²² Furthermore, original sin underscores the corruption we bring upon ourselves and thereby distracts us from extolling the goodness of God’s creation. He asks:

Is it not highly injurious to the God of our nature, whose hands have fashioned and formed us, to believe our nature is originally corrupted, and in the worse sense of corruption too? And are not such doctrines (which represent the divine dispensations as unjust, cruel, and tyrannical) the source of those gloomy and blasphemous thoughts that infest and distract many good and honest souls?²³

Both Scripture and reason confirm that the answer is yes. To suggest otherwise harms both creator and the created.

In summary, Taylor’s *Scripture-Doctrine of Original Sin* limits the effects of the first sin to physical death. In no way did Adam’s sin transfer guilt or punishment to his progeny. God endowed each human being with the natural ability to choose between virtue and vice. Although the later is common, it is not necessary. Original sin is not only contrary to Scripture and reason, but also a hindrance to piety and a severe diminution of God’s Glory. Wesley and Edwards vehemently disagreed.

Original Sin Defended

Critiques of Taylor’s work were released as early as 1740 by David Jennings and Isaac Watts.²⁴ Taylor provided lengthy responses to both

²⁰*Ibid.*, 257-58; emphasis in original.

²¹*Ibid.*, 259.

²²*Ibid.*, 14.

²³*Ibid.*, 256.

²⁴David Jennings, *A Vindication of the Scripture-Doctrine of Original Sin, from Mr. Taylor’s Free and Candid Examination of It* (London: Printed for R. Hett and J. Oswald, 1740); Isaac Watts, *The Ruin and Recovery of Mankind: Or, an Attempt to Vindicate the Scriptural Account of These Great Events Upon the Plain Principles of Reason* (London: Printed for R. Hett and J. Brackstone, 1740).

books, publishing them as part of the third edition of *The Scripture-Doctrine of Original Sin*.²⁵ Other rebuttals were given by Samuel Hebden, Thomas Boston, and John Hervey in 1741, 1744, and 1755.²⁶ But John Wesley was not satisfied that the dangers of Taylor's work had been fully understood or appreciated. In 1756, he justified his own rebuttal of Taylor in the preface of *The Doctrine of Original Sin, According to Scripture, Reason, and Experience*. To quote Wesley at length:

For this is not a small point of importance; a question that may safely be determined either way. On the contrary, it may be doubted whether the scheme before us be not far more dangerous than open Deism itself. It does not shock us like barefaced infidelity. . . . One who would be upon his guard in reading the works of Dr. Middleton, or Lord Bolingbroke, is quite open and unguarded in reading the smooth, decent writings of Dr. Taylor: one who does not oppose (far be it from him!) but only explain the Scripture; who does not raise any difficulties or objections against the Christian Revelation, but only removes those with which it had been unhappily encumbered for so many centuries.²⁷

In other words, Wesley was not simply bothered by what Taylor said, but the way in which he said it. The work was insidious, an "old Deism in a new dress."²⁸ Taylor was dangerous because he appeared so innocuous. In reality, however, if "we take away this foundation, that man is by nature foolish and sinful, 'fallen short of the glorious image of God,' the Christian system falls at once."²⁹

²⁵Both Wesley and Edwards read Taylor's third edition.

²⁶Samuel Hebden, *The Doctrine of Original Sin as Laid Down in the Assembly's Catechism Explained: Proved to Be Agreeable to Scripture and Reason and Vindicated as a Truth of the Greatest Importance: With Some Plain Express Testimonies of Christian Writers before Augustin* (London 1741); Thomas Boston, *Human Nature in Its Fourfold State of Primitive Integrity, Entire Depravation, Begun Recovery, and Consummate Happiness or Misery, Subsisting in the Parents of Mankind in Paradise, the Unregenerate, the Regenerate, All Mankind in the Future State. In Several Practical Discourses* (Edinburgh: R. Drummond and Company, 1744); James Hervey, *Theron and Aspasio or, a Series of Dialogues and Letters, Upon the Most Important and Interesting Subjects*, 3 vols. (London: Charles Rivington, 1755).

²⁷WJW 9: 193.

²⁸Ibid., 193-194.

²⁹Ibid., 194.

The preface to Edwards' *The Great Christian Doctrine of Original Sin Defended* is remarkably similar to Wesley's. Writing from Stockbridge in May, 1757, Edwards revealed that he was "especially" motivated to compose the treatise after reading Taylor's *Scripture-Doctrine of Original Sin*. He writes:

According to my observation, no one book has done so much towards rooting out of these western parts of New England, the principles and scheme of religion maintained by our pious and excellent forefathers, the divines and Christians who first settled this country, and alienating the minds of many from what I think are evidently some of the main doctrines of the Gospel, as that which Dr. Taylor has published against the doctrine of original sin. The book has now for many years been spread abroad in the land, without any answer to it, as an antidote; and so has gone on to prevail with little control.³⁰

Edwards was dissatisfied with the earlier responses to Taylor and unaware that Wesley was contemporaneously writing his own polemic. Therefore, he penned his own response under the impression that Taylor's work was not only enjoying undeserved success, but was not being checked effectively. There had been responses by Watts, Hebden, and Boston, and Edwards had "heard" that Jennings had published a rebuttal. Wesley, who did not correspond with Edwards, was contemporaneously writing his own polemic. Like Wesley, Edwards found Taylor to be a "specious writer" and was determined that "no one thing there said, of any consequence in this controversy, should pass unnoticed, or that anything which has the appearance of an argument in opposition to this doctrine should be left unanswered."³¹ After all, the doctrine of original sin was of "great importance" since "the whole Gospel or doctrine of salvation must suppose it; and all real belief, or true notion of that Gospel, must be built upon it."³²

In short, the prefaces of Wesley and Edwards reveal that both men reacted to Taylor out of the same conviction. To obviate the doctrine of original sin was to undermine the entire Gospel. Taylor's argument, which was growing in popularity throughout both Great Britain and the colonies, was dangerous because it was disingenuous. A thorough response was crucial. When Wesley and Edwards' rebuttals are combined,

³⁰WJE 3: 102.

³¹Ibid., 102-03.

³²Ibid., 103.

the doctrine of original sin is vindicated with more than six hundred pages of arguments.³³ Many of these arguments are exegetical, at times quibbling with Taylor over the interpretation and significance of Greek and Hebrew syntax. Although an exegetical juxtaposition between Wesley and Edwards reveals numerous commonalities, for the remainder of this essay I will focus on five distinct non-exegetical arguments made by both men in their attempts to stem the momentum of Taylor's influence.

1. The Historical Argument. The first section of Wesley's treatise begins with a survey of humanity's virtue and vice throughout history. Beginning with Genesis, he argues that history reveals ubiquitous wickedness in all people and in all places. Central to his argument is the claim that even the best of pagan cultures recognized the pervasiveness of humanity's wickedness. Quoting approvingly from the Roman poet Horace, he writes:

The human herd, unbroken and untaught,
For acorns first, and grassy couches fought;
With fists, and then with clubs maintain'd the fray,
Till, urged by hate, they found a quicker way,
And forged pernicious arms, and learn'd the art to slay.³⁴

For Taylor to suggest that humans are naturally capable of rationally choosing "good" over "evil" is not only contrary to historical reality, but contrary to what humanity has known about itself from the very beginning.

Wesley then surveys his own world, dividing the globe up into thirty different parts, nineteen of which are heathen, six "Mahometan," and five Christian. He searches for examples of true virtue among the Native Americans, the Africans, the Chinese, and the Mahometans, but finds nothing but greed, aggression, and hypocrisy. Even the Chinese, usually praised for their intellect, are condemned as "the greatest hypocrites on the face of the earth."³⁵ Yet Wesley's anthropology does not make exceptions for Europe or even his own England. On the contrary, the peasant, the sailor, the tradesman, the lawyer, and the nobleman alike, "the least to the greatest," are thoroughly corrupt. Perhaps the greatest evidence of a

³³Page total refers to the Baker edition of Wesley (274) and the Yale edition of Edwards (336). The page length of Wesley's first edition is 522; the pagination of Edwards's first edition was erroneous.

³⁴WJW 9: 200.

³⁵Ibid., 215.

universal and natural degradation is found in war. "If then, all nations . . . do in fact make this their last resort, what farther proof do we need of the utter degeneracy of all nations from the plainest principles of reason and virtue? of the absolute want, both of common sense and common humanity, which runs through the whole race of mankind?"³⁶ For Wesley, history alone is "demonstrative proof" that original sin exists "in every nation under heaven" both in the past and in the present.³⁷

In Edwards's first chapter, he also considers Taylor's understanding of human nature in the light of historical evidence. Although providing fewer examples than Wesley, he nevertheless argues that "a view of several successive periods of the past duration of the world, from the beginning to this day, shews, that the wickedness has ever been exceedingly prevalent, and has had vastly the superiority in the world."³⁸ Like Wesley, he suggests that one of the strongest pieces of evidence for universal corruption found throughout history is the brutality of humanity.

"Many kinds of brute animals are esteemed very noxious and destructive . . . but have not mankind been a thousand times as hurtful and destructive as any one of them, yea, as all the noxious beasts, birds, fishes and reptiles in the earth, air and water, put together?"³⁹ From Edwards's perspective, such animal-like behavior throughout history is "strange indeed" if Taylor's anthropology is correct and "men, as they come into the world, are in their nature innocent and harmless, undepraved and perfectly free from all evil propensities."⁴⁰ Simply stated, the consistent behavior of people throughout the whole of history "clearly determine the point" that human nature is corrupted with a tendency toward sin.⁴¹

2. The Probability Argument. Taylor was aware that history was problematic for his argument. "So far as we can judge from history, or what we know at present, the greatest part of mankind have been, and still are, very corrupt, though not equally so in every age."⁴² However, he argued, it is a mistake to assume that such corruption is *caused* by human

³⁶Ibid., 222.

³⁷Ibid., 238.

³⁸WJE 3: 167.

³⁹Ibid., 168.

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Ibid., 167.

⁴²Taylor, *The Scripture-Doctrine of Original Sin Proposed to Free and Candid Examination*, 168.

nature. To be sure, many people are corrupt, “but this is not the fault of their nature, no more than Adam’s first sin was the result of his nature; but occasioned, as his transgression was, by the abuse of it, in prostituting reason to appetite. . . .”⁴³ Therefore, Taylor reasoned, corruption is common, but not necessary. Sin emerges only because individuals allow their appetite to dominate their reason.

Wesley directly responded to this reasoning with an appeal to probability. He argued that history was simply too skewed toward wickedness rather than righteousness to reject belief in a naturally corrupted human nature. Pressing Taylor’s logic, he states:

How came all nations thus to “abuse their nature,” thus to “prostitute reason to appetite?” . . . How came it, that half of them, at least, if their nature was uncorrupt, did not use it well? Submit appetite to reason, and rise while the other sunk? “Process of time” does not help us out at all; for if it made the one half of mankind more and more vicious, it ought, by the same degrees, to have made the other half more and more virtuous. If men were not more inclined to one side than the other, this must absolutely have been the event. Turn and wind as you please, you will never be able to get over this. You will never be able to account for this fact, that the bulk of mankind have, in all ages, “prostituted their reason to appetite,” even till they sunk into “lamentable ignorance, superstition, idolatry, injustice, and debauchery,” but by allowing their very nature to be in fault, to be more inclined to vice than virtue.⁴⁴

The pervasiveness of corruption is simply too overwhelming to be the result of a human nature without a necessary propensity to sin. If human nature was not inherently corrupt, then probability would eventually produce a world in which vice was equally balanced with virtue.

Edwards found Taylor’s scheme improbable as well, responding with a discussion of “tendency.” He argues that “a common and steady effect shews, that there is somewhere a preponderation, a prevailing exposedness or liableness in the state of things, to what comes so steadily to pass.”⁴⁵ In other words, steady effects are derived from steady causes. For example:

⁴³Ibid.

⁴⁴WJW 9: 289.

⁴⁵WJE 3: 121.

If a die be one thrown, and it falls on a particular side, we don't argue from hence, that that side is heaviest; but if it be thrown without skill or care, many thousands or millions of times going, and constantly falls on the same side, we have not the least doubt in our minds, but that there is something of a propensity in the case, by superior weight of that side, or in some other respect.⁴⁶

The same principle of tendency applies to humanity's repeated sinfulness as well. "In the case we are upon, the human nature, as existing in such an immense diversity of persons and circumstances, and never failing in any one instance of coming to that issue . . . is as the die often cast." Taylor's willingness to concede that "the greatest part of mankind have been, and still are very corrupt" ultimately undermines his entire argument; probability is against it.

3. The Best-Case-Scenario Argument. Even if Wesley and Edwards had not found Taylor's belief in an uncorrupted human nature improbable, it was still problematic. After all, numerous individuals and people groups plummeted into sin when either context or privilege would suggest the opposite. Wesley challenged Taylor's anthropology by considering the nation of Israel. "The lineal children of Abraham, who had unspeakable advantages over the rest of mankind" would be most likely to live according to reason and "therefore, we may reasonably expect to find the greatest eminence of knowledge and virtue."⁴⁷ Yet Israel, according to Wesley, never became the paragon of virtuous living. "If these then were so stupidly, brutishly ignorant, so desperately wicked, what can we expect from the heathen world, from them who had not the knowledge of either of his law or promises?"⁴⁸ Even given the best case scenarios, humanity always sinks into corruption.

Edwards agreed. After Cyrus' destruction of the Babylonian kingdom, philosophy, instruction, and a general promotion of reason prevailed, yet without the results one would expect from Taylor's denial of original sin. Instead of "reformation, or any appearance or prospect of it, the heathen world in general rather grew worse. . . . Abominable vices prevailed, not only among the common people, but even among their

⁴⁶Ibid., 121-22.

⁴⁷WJW 9: 202.

⁴⁸Ibid.

philosophers themselves.”⁴⁹ Israel fared no better than pagan Babylon even though they were the recipients of “peculiar privileges.” Although God had faithfully provided for Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, often separating their posterity from the wickedness all around them, “yet in about 200 hundred years after Jacob’s death . . . the people had in great measure lost the true religion and were keeping pace with the heathen world.”⁵⁰ In short, neither Wesley nor Edwards could populate even a short list of examples or instances in which Taylor’s views were sustained. Even when humans are placed in the best circumstances with the best advantages, appetite always overcomes reason. The best case scenarios simply do not produce righteous results.

4. The Happiness/Misery Argument. A fourth argument for the reality of original sin is derived from a particular assumption about the source of human happiness and misery. Wesley maintains that the ultimate cause of all misery is sin. “Men are unhappy (how very few are the exceptions) because they are unholy.”⁵¹ The poet Horace was not merely stating a general observation but rather a universal principle when he wrote, “Pain accompanies and follows sin.”⁵² All people experientially or intuitively know that happiness is antipodal with envy, malice, pride, or covetousness. Rather than generating contentment, vice inevitably torments a man “as if a vulture was gnawing his liver.”⁵³ Universal misery “is at once a consequence and proof of this universal corruption.”⁵⁴ Although many people suffer at the hands of others, “still sin is at the root of trouble, and it is unholiness which causes unhappiness.”⁵⁵

Edwards also suggests a connection between misery and universal sin. One of Taylor’s opening arguments in *The Scripture-Doctrine of Original Sin* was that the threat of death presented to Adam in Genesis 2:17 was merely *physical* death. The Englishman writes, “Now the death here threatened can, with any certainty, be opposed only to the [physical] life God gave Adam when he created him. . . . I do not see how anything

⁴⁹WJE 3: 176.

⁵⁰Ibid., 177.

⁵¹WJW 9: 235.

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³Ibid., 236.

⁵⁴bid., 235.

⁵⁵Ibid., 237.

more can be made of it.”⁵⁶ Edwards believed that not only could more be made of the passage, but that more was intended to be made of the passage. To be sure, death should be understood as the loss of life. However, Taylor’s error was assuming that both life and death were exclusively understood in the physical sense. On the contrary, “the life Adam had, was truly a happy life; happy in perfect innocency, in the favor of his Maker, surrounded with the happy fruits and testimonies of his love.”⁵⁷ In other words, Adam received more than a beating heart when he “became a living being” in Genesis 2:7. He received a beating heart “in a state of excellent and happy existence.”⁵⁸

If Adam’s prelapsarian life was more than simple physicality, then his death was more than simple mortality. In Edwards’s own words, “If Adam, for his persevering obedience, was to have had everlasting life and happiness . . . then doubtless the death threatened in the case of disobedience . . . was being given over to everlasting wickedness and misery.”⁵⁹ That humanity was in such a state was undeniable and implied that humanity was experiencing all that had been threatened in Genesis 2:17. By excluding happiness and misery from the dimensions of life and death, Taylor had been able to significantly reduce what was transferred from Adam to his posterity. Physical death alone, which actually served as a useful goad in the promotion of virtue, was all that humanity inherits from the first man. By reintroducing happiness and misery into the dimensions of life and death, Edwards attempted to reaffirm the concept of original sin as the transference of a corrupt nature.

5. The Dispositional Argument. A final objection raised by both Wesley and Edwards to Taylor’s work concerns the disposition of human beings to make decisions. Taylor insisted that God provided all human beings with a disposition to “distinguish between good and evil, to chose the one, and refute the other” based on reason.⁶⁰ Indeed, the use of such rational faculties is what constituted the image or likeness of God within humanity.⁶¹ Furthermore, the very notion of righteousness demands that

⁵⁶Taylor, *The Scripture-Doctrine of Original Sin Proposed to Free and Candid Examination*, 7.

⁵⁷WJE 3: 237.

⁵⁸ibid.

⁵⁹Ibid., 238.

⁶⁰Taylor, *The Scripture-Doctrine of Original Sin Proposed to Free and Candid Examination*, 184.

⁶¹Ibid., 181.

humanity is endowed with such a disposition. Taylor argues, "For righteousness is the right use and application of our powers: consequently our powers must not only exist but also be used and applied before we can be righteous."⁶² Therefore, to suggest that a corrupt nature is inherited from Adam is not only unfair, but also impossible since "we cannot, as moral agents, observe what is right and true, or be righteous and holy, without our own free and explicit choice."⁶³ The same logic applies to Adam. The first person could not be created righteous "because he must choose to be righteous before he could be righteous, and therefore . . . he must exercise thought and reflection, before he *was* righteous."⁶⁴ Therefore, just as Adam did not possess an original righteousness, neither does his posterity possess an original sinfulness.

Wesley responded that it was incorrect to equate righteousness with reasonable choosing. Righteousness, according to Wesley, "is a right state of mind; which differs from right action, as the cause differs from the effect."⁶⁵ He further clarifies that "righteousness is, properly and directly, a right temper or disposition of mind, or a complex of all right tempers."⁶⁶ To conjoin righteousness with choice was the "fundamental mistake" on Taylor's part. When Taylor claimed that loving God is "righteous only so far as apply'd to righteous action,"⁶⁷ Wesley retorted, "The love of God is righteous, the moment it exists in any soul; and it must exist before it can be applied to action."⁶⁸ In other words, righteous acts always proceed from a righteous disposition. To suggest otherwise created logical impossibilities, even for Christ. Borrowing an argument from Jennings, Wesley suggests that by Taylor's logic "the man Christ Jesus could not be righteous at his birth" because he had not yet exercised his intellectual powers.⁶⁹ In fact, even God himself could not be eternally righteous unless it were proven that God eternally acts. "For let him exist millions

⁶²Ibid., 180-81.

⁶³Ibid., 180.

⁶⁴Ibid; emphasis in original.

⁶⁵WJW 9: 342.

⁶⁶Ibid.

⁶⁷Taylor, *The Scripture-Doctrine of Original Sin Proposed to Free and Candid Examination*, 440.

⁶⁸WJW 9: 344.

⁶⁹Ibid., 343.

of ages, he could not be righteous before he acted right.”⁷⁰ Righteous acts, even for God, are derived from righteous dispositions. To reverse the order ends in absurdity.

In a similar way, Edwards found Taylor’s notion of virtue “quite inconsistent with the nature of things.”⁷¹ Responding to the same passage of Taylor’s work, he argues that principles do not derive their goodness from actions, but rather that the goodness of actions are derived from principles. “The act of choosing that which is good, is no further virtuous than it proceeds from a good principle, or virtuous disposition of the mind.”⁷² This, Edwards assumes, is the “common sense of mankind.” He further elaborates that if virtue necessarily follows choice, as Taylor asserts, then human will is eliminated. He reasons that “human nature must be created with some dispositions; a disposition to relish some things as good and amiable, and to be averse to other things as odious and disagreeable. Otherwise, it must be without any such thing as inclination or will.”⁷³ In other words, a righteous or wicked disposition is necessary for a real choice to be made in the first place.

Conclusion

Wesley visited Taylor’s newly opened Octagon chapel on November 23, 1757. However, the divine of Norwich had departed just weeks earlier and the two men never met. Eighteen months later, Wesley wrote a letter to Taylor, exhorting him to formally respond with a published rejoinder. He states, “Either you or I mistake the whole of Christianity, from the beginning to the end! Either my scheme or yours is as contrary to the scriptural, as the Koran is. Is it mine or yours?”⁷⁴ Taylor chose not to respond, allegedly because “it would only be a personal controversy between John Wesley and John Taylor.”⁷⁵ Edwards, who died in 1758, did not receive a response either, and it is unlikely that Taylor even read the

⁷⁰Ibid.

⁷¹WJE 3: 224.

⁷²Ibid.

⁷³Ibid., 231.

⁷⁴Letter to the Reverend John Taylor, 3 July 1759, in WJW 9: 465.

⁷⁵Ibid. After the death of Taylor in 1761, a small collection of responses to Wesley were discovered and eventually published in John Taylor, *A Reply to the Reverend Mr. John Wesley’s Remarks on the Scripture-Doctrine of Original Sin* (London: J. Waugh, 1767).

work. Taylor, who continued to publish on a variety of other subjects,⁷⁶ seems to have been content to allow others to have the last word.

Although Wesley and Edwards are often considered representatives of two different forms of eighteenth-century evangelicalism, their contemporaneously published rebuttals of Taylor suggest that similarities between the two forms are more significant than often imagined. Both the Arminian Wesley and the Reformed Edwards were alarmed at the content and influence of Taylor's *The Scripture-Doctrine of Original Sin*. Even a brief juxtaposition of their rebuttals reveals that Taylor's views generated a variety of similar objections, five of which have been outlined above. An examination of their exegetical arguments would disclose even more. Obviously, theological and philosophical differences can be found when comparing the two works, especially when considering the extensiveness of each treatise. For example, Edwards appealed to his metaphysical occasionalism to defend original sin, an appropriation of philosophy that Wesley would consider baleful.⁷⁷ Yet even this extensiveness indicates a certain affinity between the Arminian Wesley and his Reformed counterpart. The desire to attack Taylor's work with a deluge of criticisms suggests that a negative definition of original sin was, in this case, as important as a positive one. When Wesley and Edwards confront Taylor, the solidarity between the two evangelical saints is notable.

⁷⁶John Taylor, *The Lord's Supper Explained Upon Scripture Principles and Adapted to the Use of Common Christians*, 2nd ed. (London: Printed for J. Waugh and W. Fenner, 1757); John Taylor, *The Covenant of Grace, and Baptism the Token of It, Explained Upon Scripture Principles* (London: Printed for J. Waugh and W. Fenner, 1757); John Taylor, *The Scripture Account of Prayer, in an Address to the Dissenters in Lancashire: Occasioned by a New Liturgy Some Ministers of That County Are Composing for the Use of a Congregation at Liverpool* (London: Printed for J. Waugh and W. Fenner, 1761).

⁷⁷ WJE 3: 400-1, 403, 405. Wesley complained that in *The Religious Affections* Edwards "heaps together so many curious, subtle, metaphysical distinctions, as are sufficient to puzzle the brain, and confound the intellects, of all the plain men and women in the universe, and to make them doubt of, if not wholly deny, all the work which God had wrought in their souls." Quoted in WJW 14: 270.

EVANGELISM AND IDENTITY IN EARLY AMERICAN METHODISM

by

Mark R. Teasdale

“I was born September 1st, 1785, in Amherst County, on James River, in the State of Virginia. My parents were poor. My father was a soldier in the great struggle for liberty, in the Revolutionary war with Great Britain.”¹ So begins the *Autobiography of Peter Cartwright* (published 1856). Cartwright focused the bulk of his autobiography on sharing anecdotes about his years as a frontier circuit rider and opining about the state of the Methodist Episcopal Church throughout the fifty years he served the denomination as a presiding elder. By the end of the memoir, it is clear that Cartwright was a “croaker,” a term given to those Methodists who harkened back to the heroic days of Methodist ministry marked by camp meetings, frontier living, revivalism, highly emotional conversions, an unfettered itinerancy, and a deep piety evidenced in Methodist worship, Methodist family devotions and Methodist morality.

Cartwright and his fellow croakers sounded a chorus against the growing respectability of the Methodists and the ways that the members of their beloved denomination seemed bewitched by the innovations that the culture made available for churches to adopt in their daily operations (e.g., the technology and wealth that made the installation of pipe organs possible). Nowhere is this clearer than in Cartwright’s resigned-yet-condemning comments about worshipping in a Methodist congregation in Boston which had adopted all the paraphernalia of denominational and cultural success:

I shall not attempt a labored argument here against these evils, for I suppose, where these practices have become the order of the day, it would be exceedingly hard to overcome the prejudice in favor of them, though I am sure, from every observation I have been able to make, that their tendencies are to formality,

¹Peter Cartwright, *Autobiography of Peter Cartwright* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1984), 25.

and often engender pride, and destroy the spirituality of Divine worship; it gives precedence to the rich, proud, and fashionable part of our hearers, and unavoidably blocks up the way of the poor; and no stumbling-block should be put in the way of one of these little ones that believe in Christ.²

Yet, as Cartwright's opening lines show, he was no stranger to identifying with American culture. Launching his career in the denomination in 1803, Cartwright was quick to appropriate the core values of the American Revolution, particularly the value of "liberty," as central to his personal identity and as perfectly sympathetic to the ministry of the Methodist Episcopal Church. In doing this Cartwright, along with the circuit riders of his era, helped lay the foundation for the denomination to merge Methodist values with the mainstream cultural values of the United States over the coming years. In many ways, these early circuit riders established the ability of the denomination to undertake the very changes that they bemoaned later.³

This introduction of national values into the message of the circuit riders suggests that during the first half of the nineteenth century the Methodist Episcopal Church's practice of evangelism entailed more than a call to repentance. Methodist evangelism during this era is best understood as a means of seeking to form the identities of those being evangelized. Specifically, it sought to form people's identities in a way that they were centered around the core values of Methodism. In doing this, it also formed their identities around mainstream American values.

I will first survey how the organization and practices of the Methodist Episcopal Church during the antebellum era promoted evangelistic work that fostered a Methodist identity in those it evangelized and at the same time reflected the situation and experiences of early Americans, especially those on the frontier. I will then describe how the process of conversion that Methodists sought to bring about as a result of their evangelistic preaching was aimed at forming people's identities around Methodist values through its promotion of denominational loyalty. Finally, I will show that this emphasis on denominational identity moved Methodist evangelism further in the direction of promulgating American values.

²Cartwright, 310.

³I treat this point in more detail in my article: Mark Teasdale, "Peter Cartwright and the Emerging National Identity in Antebellum America," *Methodist History* 46, no. 2 (January 2008): 101-113.

An Evangelistic Organization

The organization of the Methodist Episcopal Church greatly facilitated the denomination's practice of evangelism. American Methodists structured their denomination around a circuit and conference system they adapted from John Wesley's use of itinerant preachers who gathered to meet once a year. In the American adaptation, the "circuits" were geographical areas to which Methodist bishops appointed itinerant preachers known as "circuit riders." On these circuits the preachers rode from one preaching site to the next to encourage the faithfulness of those already organized into Methodist societies, and to evangelize non-Methodists in the hopes either of drawing them into existing societies or of organizing them into new societies. The "conferences" were regular meetings in which the preachers gathered, worked out administrative, doctrinal, and legal issues for the denomination, and received their new appointments from the bishops. The combination of the circuit and the conferences formed a remarkably flexible-yet-centralized system that was ideal for relating to as many people as possible along the expanding American frontier, while also retaining the uniqueness of the Methodist identity through the accountability of regular meetings among the preachers.⁴

This organizational structure uniquely suited evangelism in several ways. First, it all but guaranteed that the circuit riders understood their primary job to be evangelistic. The denomination deployed them to proclaim the gospel and draw people into both the Christian faith and the Methodist Episcopal Church. That the Methodists who participated in this system during the early nineteenth century understood this evangelistic focus can be seen in the language they used to describe their work. In his history of Methodism, for example, Abel Stevens (1868) often used the words "evangelists," "great evangelists," and "missionaries," interchangeably with such words as "itinerant" and "preacher."⁵ It is clear that Stevens

⁴In reference to the organization of the Methodist Episcopal Church, John Wigger has adapted David Paul Nord's argument that the American Tract Society demonstrated the characteristics of modern managerial style, a notion defined in Alfred Chandler's book *The Visible Hand* that traces the development of management in American organizations throughout American history. Chandler claims that the Methodists provide the earliest example of a modern managerial style in how they organized and maintained their ecclesiastical organization.

⁵Abel Stevens, *Compendious History of American Methodism* (New York, NY: Eaton & Mains; Cincinnati, OH: Jennings and Graham, 1868), 52-53.

understood the itinerant Methodist preacher as involved in evangelistic activity as a matter of course. The Methodist preacher was an evangelist and a missionary precisely because he was a Methodist preacher.

The second way this organizational structure supported Methodist evangelism was by providing the Methodist Episcopal Church the freedom to relate to the American people in a relevant and meaningful way while also allowing the denomination to avoid having its identity become defined as nothing more than a reflection of cultural tastes. In doing this, the Methodists avoided the twin pitfalls of either being so ecclesiastically rigid that they could not be relevant and attractive to potential converts or being so concerned about being relevant that they lost sight of their denominational identity as handed down in their Wesleyan heritage. The Methodist Episcopal Church's intentional desire to craft a careful balance between preserving identity and forging relevant connections to the American people is seen in 1791 when, even before mass camp meetings began to take place in the United States, the Methodists modified their circuit and conference structure by creating a three-tier system of conferences in order to establish both a greater means of promoting revival on the circuits and a means of providing stronger denominational oversight for those circuits.⁶

The first tier was the general conference at which preachers and bishops would meet every four years to consider the business of the entire denomination. The second tier was composed of multiple annual conferences in which Methodist preachers appointed to circuits within specific geographical regions would gather to conduct business necessary to the Methodists in their region once a year. The third tier was composed of quarterly conferences which met once every three months. Quarterly conferences would draw together all the Methodists on a specific circuit, providing the opportunity for a religious meeting while also guaranteeing the presiding elder, a preacher who oversaw the preachers on many circuits, an opportunity to ensure good Methodist discipline was maintained.⁷ This was a masterful move in the Methodist organization that

⁶Russell E. Richey, *The Methodist Conference in America: A History* (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 1996), 51-52.

⁷Richey, 50-51. The 1798 *Discipline* reminds presiding elders "to be present, as far as practicable, at all the quarterly meetings: and to call together at each quarterly meeting all the traveling and local preachers, exhorters, stewards, and leaders of the circuit, to hear complaints, and to receive appeals." *The Doctrines and Discipline*, 1798, Section V, Q. 5.

allowed the Methodists a way to relate to the American people at large while also ensuring that Methodist discipline would not be broached.

A third way the Methodist organizational structure supported Methodist evangelism is in how it emphasized evangelistic activity on the local level, including through the evangelistic work of the laity. Since it would take between four and six weeks for the average Methodist preacher to visit all the preaching sites on his circuit, Methodists depended on the laity within their societies to maintain Methodist order and instruction. This most frequently happened within the Methodist class, a subset of the Methodist societies. Methodist classes were small groups in which Methodists would gather for the purpose of reflecting on how they had been living in light of their commitment to Christ through the Methodist Episcopal Church. Without a Methodist preacher in attendance at these meetings, it fell to the lay Methodists to encourage, rebuke and instruct each other in the class. A layperson served as the "class leader" and was given the responsibility of facilitating the class and looking after the spiritual welfare of the members of the class on a day-to-day basis. Various other laypeople filled roles such as "exhorter" and "local preacher" through which they met the need for Methodist worship services and preaching in the absence of the itinerant preacher. As John Wigger explains it, "Seizing on the democratic and leveling impulses of the age, American Methodists offered new roles to zealous lay men and women as local preachers, lay exhorters, class leaders, and a host of other semi-official positions."⁸

The substantial authority that the Methodist Episcopal Church granted to its laity not only empowered the laity to provide leadership within the Methodist societies and classes, but also to engage in what Wigger called "loosely regulated evangelism."⁹ Contrary to the more formal evangelistic preaching of ordained clergymen such as Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield during the First Great Awakening in the United States, Methodism encouraged its adherents, both men and women, to become evangelists who spread the good work of Methodism through personal persuasion and emotional appeal. David Hempton describes this as the Methodist "mobile laity" who undertook evangelistic endeavors on behalf of the denomination before the denomination was able to create official structures to support those endeavors:

⁸John H. Wigger, *Taking Heaven by Storm: Methodism and the Rise of Popular Christianity in America* (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 29.

⁹Wigger, 29.

Methodist expansion was the result not of an evangelistic strategy concocted by elites, but was carried primarily by a mobile laity. . . . Methodism had a mobile laity before it had missionaries, it had missionaries before it had a missionary society, and it had locally based missionary societies before it had a national missionary society.¹⁰

William Watters, a Methodist minister from Maryland, summed up this view in his memoirs as he recollected his evangelistic activities as a lay Methodist in the late eighteenth century. "In one sense," he wrote, "we were all preachers."¹¹

The Practice of Evangelism: Camp Meetings and the American Psyche

Complementing the Methodist Episcopal Church's evangelistically-oriented organization were specific practices the denomination deployed to great evangelistic effect. The most potent of these practices, and the one that came to be seen as the most emblematic of the Methodist ministry during the early nineteenth century, was the camp meeting.

Originating in Scotland, camp meetings first came to the attention of Americans on a large scale at Cane Ridge, Kentucky in 1801.¹² This particular camp meeting represented an innovative means for American evangelists to reach the masses. According to Sydney Ahlstrom, not only evangelists, but whole denominations were quick to make use of this new format for evangelizing: "The organized revival became a major mode of church expansion—in some denominations the major mode. The words evangelist and evangelism took on this connotation."¹³ When discussing

¹⁰David Hempton, *Methodism: Empire of the Spirit* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005), 30.

¹¹William Watters, *A Short Account of the Christian Experience and Ministerial Labours of William Watters* (Alexandria, VA: S. Snowden, 1806), 18-19.

¹²It is important to note that, while Cane Ridge proved the watershed event introducing camp meetings to the American landscape, evangelical Protestantism and the camp meeting were part of a larger Atlantic movement that can be traced back to medieval spirituality. Leigh Eric Schmidt deals specifically with the connections between Cane Ridge and the Scottish fairs in the Preface to the New Edition of *Holy Fairs*. Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Holy Fairs: Scotland and the Making of American Revivalism*, second edition (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), xi-xxix.

¹³Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*, second edition, with foreword and concluding chapter by David D. Hall (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004), 435.

the Methodists specifically, Ahlstrom noted that one of the factors that led to the rapid numerical growth of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the antebellum era was the Methodists "appropriation of the camp meetings, which they made an instrument for satisfying both the social and the religious impulses of a scattered, though naturally gregarious people."¹⁴

Ahlstrom's analysis is worth further consideration. The reason the Methodist implementation of the camp meeting was successful was because it demonstrated a profound capacity to relate to the real life situations of Americans on the frontier. It was especially effective in meeting the deep need many frontier dwellers felt for relationship. On this point William McLoughlin explains that camp meetings

were communal in nature. . . . Frontier dwellers had nowhere else to get their children baptized, to pray and sing together, to have weddings performed by ministers, or to give vent to pent-up feelings. . . . The fact that people went to great effort to attend camp meetings, traveling miles by wagon over rough roads and camping out when they arrived, indicates a craving for human fellowship and spiritual consolation.¹⁵

As Ahlstrom puts it, "underlying every other conditioning circumstance was the immense loneliness of the frontier farmer's normal life and the exhilaration of participating in so large a social occasion."¹⁶

In addition to offering solitary inhabitants of the frontier an opportunity to gather, McLoughlin also observes that the camp meetings provided participants with the potential to have powerful religious experiences along with the emotional release that often attended such experiences. Nathan Hatch suggests that "American camp meetings were awesome spectacles indeed, conjuring up feelings of supernatural awe in some."¹⁷ Ahlstrom records a lengthy passage from Barton Stone's journal in which Stone named several of the outward manifestations people exhibited when impacted by the presence of God. These included falling like dead, a rapid jerking of the body ("the jerks") sometimes accompa-

¹⁴Ahlstrom, 437.

¹⁵William McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform*, Chicago History of American Religion, ed. Martin E. Marty (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 132.

¹⁶Ahlstrom, 433.

¹⁷Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 55.

nied by a barking or grunting noise, dancing in ecstasy, laughing in rapturous joy, running away from fear of being convicted of sin, and heavenly singing of praise to God.¹⁸ Contrasted with the restraint and discipline settlers had to demonstrate in order to survive in the frontier wilderness, the evangelistic camp meeting provided a safe, indeed a sanctified, setting in which settlers could release pent up anxiety and receive a sense of hope and joy.¹⁹

These analyses of the camp meetings make it clear that “the churches were made for people rather than the people for churches.”²⁰ Wigger agrees with this assessment, suggesting that after the Revolution “Christianity in America was popularized . . . by allowing the people to become the final arbiters of religious taste.”²¹ This analysis points to the same tension between identity and relationship that the Methodist Episcopal Church sought to balance in how it organized its circuit and conference system for evangelistic activity. At times, it undoubtedly became tempting for the denomination to mirror the identities and values of those it evangelized. This move toward the values of the evangelized could decrease the firmness of the denomination’s identity, but could potentially increase the denomination’s appeal to the evangelized.

While the denomination kept a healthy tension between its identity and its relationship with the American people during the early part of the nineteenth century, keeping this tension required significant internal accountability and unanimity within the denomination. As the nineteenth century moved ahead, this internal fortitude became increasingly more difficult for the denomination to muster. As a result, the organization of the Methodist Episcopal Church and the evangelistic practices of the denomination would change.

¹⁸Ahlstrom, 434.

¹⁹It is worth noting that this is not the universally accepted reading of what these various activities meant. In his autobiography, Peter Cartwright mused on the meaning of the jerks and concluded they were “a judgment sent from God” meant to convict sinners and to prove God’s power working in people’s lives and bodies whether they desired God’s to do so or not. Additionally, Cartwright was wary of other extravagant demonstrations in his revivals, such as jumping and barking, realizing that these were sometimes the antics of weak-willed individuals rather than the genuine movement of the Holy Spirit in people’s lives. Cartwright, 46.

²⁰McLoughlin, 133.

²¹Wigger, 11.

Two-Part Evangelism: Conversion and Denominational Loyalty

If the organization and practices of the Methodist Episcopal Church implicitly promoted evangelism through providing excellent means of the denomination retaining a clear understanding of its own identity, even while it related to the American people, the content of Methodist preaching and teaching was explicitly evangelistic. It was in these verbal connections with the American people that the Methodist preachers clearly laid out the Methodist message and called their hearers to respond to it.

The message of the Methodist preachers aimed primarily at bringing their hearers to a conversion experience. Conversion, for Methodists, was a three-step process which followed “the Scripture way of salvation” articulated by John Wesley. The first step was the “awakening,” in which a person became aware of his or her sins and of the impending judgment that the person would face as a result of those sins. The second step, which was the actual moment of conversion, entailed a renunciation of those sins and a declaration of allegiance to Jesus Christ. The final step was sanctification, which encompassed the lifelong process of the converted individual resisting sin and seeking to live a holy life through engaging in Christian practices.

That facilitating this conversion was a central task of Methodist preachers was made plain by Bishops Francis Asbury and Thomas Coke in the 1798 *Discipline*. Under Section VIII, which covered the duty of preachers, they began by quoting Wesley:

You have nothing to do but to save souls. Therefore spend and be spent in this work. And go always not only to those that want, but to those that want you most. Observe! It is not your business only to preach so many times, and to take care of this or that society: But to save as many souls as you can; to bring as many sinners as you possibly can to repentance, and with all your power to build them up in that holiness, without which they cannot see the Lord.²²

Offering further observations on these words, the bishops reiterated this: “The salvation of souls should be your only aim. The zeal of the Lord’s house should eat you up. O that we could but feel a little of what Jesus felt *for immortal souls*, when he offered up himself on Calvary!” In Section

²²*The Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church, in America, with Explanatory Notes, by Thomas Coke and Francis Asbury* (Philadelphia, PA: Henry Tuckniss, 1798), Section VIII, Q. 11 and note, 59, 65.

XII, entitled "Of the Matter and Manner of Preaching, and of other public Exercises," the bishops offered practical advice on how to carry out the mandate to save souls through the work of preaching, specifically enumerating the three steps of conversion.

The preaching of the gospel is of the first importance to the welfare of mankind; and consequently *the mode* of preaching must be of considerable moment. . . . The preacher must: 1. Convince the sinner of his dangerous condition. . . . He must set forth the depth of original sin and shew the sinner how far he is gone from original righteousness; he must describe the vices of the world in their just and most striking colours, and enter into all the sinner's pleas and excuses for sin, and drive him from all his subterfuges and strongholds . . . ; 2. He must set forth the virtue of the *atoning blood*. He must bring the mourner to a *present* Saviour: he must shew the willingness of Christ *this moment* to bless him, and bring a present salvation *home* to his soul. Here he must be indeed *a son of consolation* . . . ; 3. He must, must like a true shepherd, feed the lambs and sheep of Christ [i.e., those already converted]. He must point out to the newly justified the wiles of Satan, and strengthen them if they stagger under unbelief. He must set before them the glorious privileges offered to them in the gospel.²³

The way American Methodist preachers put their bishops' exhortations into practice in the antebellum era was to preach sermons that pressed people into a crisis situation in which they had to choose between continuing with their sins, recognizing damnation was the result of that, or accepting forgiveness through Christ with its hope of eternal glory. Often a conversion occurred when people who were fully awakened to their perilous spiritual position suddenly and radically repented of their sins and felt the assurance of forgiveness offered through Jesus Christ.²⁴

²³*The Doctrines and Discipline*, 1798, Section XII notes, 85-86.

²⁴My suggestion of what a conversion experience entailed for American Methodist converts is based on what Methodist preachers themselves described as the experiences that they went through themselves and that they helped bring about for others. It should be noted, however, that there is a substantial literature on the nature of conversion within the critical study of evangelism. Bill J. Leonard, for example, criticizes the shallowness of the kind of conversion that evangelical American Protestants often held to, suggesting that it was little more than a transaction based on human will rather than divine grace. The late Anglican missionary and bishop, Lesslie Newbigin, went even farther, suggesting that

Following this crisis conversion, the preachers offered the people a means of engaging in the process of sanctification through inviting them to become members of the Methodist Episcopal Church.

What is critical to note here is that denominational commitment was a central feature of Methodist preaching, tied directly to the Methodist understanding of conversion.²⁵ This denominational commitment took the form of converts first assenting to the discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church and then joining a Methodist class on probation. Methodist classes would meet regularly to provide a place for Methodists to support one another in discerning and living out the moral and ethical implications of their new commitments to Jesus Christ and the Methodist Episcopal Church. While full membership was reserved for those who attended Methodist classes for at least six months and demonstrated a transformed life,²⁶ the fast-swelling ranks of the Methodists in the early and middle part of the nineteenth century show that once a person became active in a Methodist class, full membership was highly likely to

conversion “can only be a work of God, a kind of miracle—not natural, but supernatural.” Still, there is a human component to conversion, as Orlando E. Costas points out in his assessment of evangelism recorded in the Bible. According to Costas, evangelism has the goal of conversion, which includes “a decision about God’s liberating activity in Jesus Christ.” As such, evangelism is “to invite people to confess him [Jesus Christ] as the Lord and Savior of their lives, to recruit them for God’s kingdom, to persuade them to be reconciled to God through his Son, to make them his disciples.” All of these ideas can be found in Paul W. Chilcote and Lacey C. Warner, *The Study of Evangelism: Exploring a Missional Practice of the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), 42, 106, 348.

²⁵John Wigger explains that “conversion was a vocation, not a one-time event” (Wigger, 16). The emphasis is on the need for converts to continue working toward Christian perfection because of the possibility that they could lose their salvation through laziness and inattention to the grace they received from Jesus Christ. I am suggesting that this theological emphasis was coupled with a denominational emphasis that sought to focus that continual effort to grow in faith toward specifically Methodist Episcopal Church practices and loyalties.

²⁶The first six months were set aside as a time of probation in which the class members, and especially the class leader, sought to “discern the proper moral and spiritual condition” of the new class member. The entire official process of probation in joining Methodist classes was described by Charles Elliott, editor of the Methodist weekly *Western Christian Advocate*, in his article “Receiving Members into the Church.” Charles Elliott, “Receiving Persons into the Church,” *Western Christian Advocate*, 1 May 1840, 6.

follow.²⁷ After a period of time on probation, the convert was welcome to join a Methodist society and participate in such events as love feasts, which were Eucharistic gatherings reserved only for Methodists who were members of societies in good standing.

In his autobiography, Peter Cartwright provides an example of how this instruction leading toward denominational commitment operated in his ministry as a frontier circuit rider. In one vignette he recounts how he began preaching in a neighborhood where a large number of the residents were members of the local Presbyterian congregation. The Presbyterian pastor received Cartwright's preaching cordially; however, he made it clear to Cartwright that he did not want any Methodist denominational instruction attached to the more general evangelistic preaching, saying that

this neighborhood was in the bounds of his congregation; that I was heartily welcome to preach but, said he, you must not attempt to raise any society. I told him that was not our way of doing business; that we seldom ever preached long at any place without trying to raise a society.

True to his word, Cartwright returned to the neighborhood a few weeks later over the objections of the Presbyterian minister. Then,

At the close of my sermon I read our General Rules, and explained our economy. I then told them . . . if there were any there that day that believed the Methodist doctrine, and were willing to conform to the Discipline of the Methodist Church, and desired to join us, let them come and give me their hand, and I would form them into a class and appoint them a leader. There were twenty-seven came forward; thirteen of them were members of this minister's Church.²⁸

Clearly, for Cartwright, an allegiance to Christ was best connected with an allegiance to the Methodist Episcopal Church. As such, he felt he could

²⁷James E. Kirby, Russell E. Richey, and Kenneth E. Rowe offer a discussion of the probationary process that early American Methodists asked those who desired to join the Methodist Episcopal Church to undertake. They also note that, at least according to Charles Elliott, conversion was not necessarily a requirement of joining a class. James E. Kirby, Russell E. Richey, and Kenneth E. Rowe, *The Methodists* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996), 177-178. However, it seems to have been the norm for a conversion experience to precede a preacher inviting people to participate in a Methodist class.

²⁸Cartwright, 90-91.

appropriately evangelize even those who were already converted to Christ but who were not Methodist.

Nathan Bangs recorded a similar situation in the life of Freeborn Garrettson, a circuit rider during this era, quoting from Garrettson's own journal. What is striking in this passage is the amount of energy it required of Garrettson to receive his converts into the Methodist Episcopal fold.

Monday, April 5th, I preached still nearer the sea; and the same convincing power ran through the audience. Some of them thought but little of walking ten or twelve miles to hear the word. I appointed a day to read and explain the rules of our society; and many came together. I preached with great freedom; then explained the nature and design of our society, and desired such of the weeping flock as desired to join, to draw near and open their minds. I examined and admitted about thirty; but being weary, I declined taking any more at that time. Weeping and mourning were heard among the people.²⁹

The Methodists had reason to press denominational commitment as a necessary second step for converts. The chaotic religious and intellectual situation in which churches operated in the early United States created an atmosphere in which conversion experiences that occurred under a specific denomination's ministrations were no guarantee of that denomination gaining new members among those converts. Hatch suggests that the combination of anxiety over the possibility that the Republic would fail, the mobility of Americans which cut them off from any traditions, and the democratic spirit which allowed for an infinite number of variations of Christianity meant that "people veered from one church to another [while] religious competitors wrangled unceasingly, traditional clergy and self-appointed preachers foremost in the fray."³⁰ Left to their own devices, without guidance as to how to join a church community that would help them remain faithful to their newly proclaimed Christian faith, those who became converts under Methodist auspices would likely drift toward one of the established churches, especially the Presbyterians

²⁹Nathan Bangs, *The Life of the Rev. Freeborn Garrettson: Compiled from His Printed and Manuscript Journals, and Other Authentic Documents*, fourth edition, revised and corrected (New York, NY: G. Lane & C. B. Tippet, 1845), 81-82

³⁰Hatch, 63-64.

or Congregationalists, or would be ripe for the picking by other frontier evangelists who urged converts to declare loyalty to the various denominations they represented.

Cartwright's autobiography offers a window into how he had to deal with the sheep-stealing tactics, specifically of Baptists who sought to woo away those who had experienced conversion under Cartwright's preaching. Following several days of preaching, Cartwright recorded:

There were twenty-three very clear and sound conversions. . . . I was young and inexperienced in doctrine, and especially was I unacquainted with the proselyting [sic] tricks of those that held to exclusive immersion as the mode, and the only mode, of baptism. I believe if I had opened the doors of the Church then, all of them would have joined the Methodist Church, but I thought I would give them time to inform themselves. Accordingly, I told them that when I came again, I would explain our rules and open the doors of the Church, and they could join us if they liked our rules and doctrines. In the meantime I left them some copies of our Discipline to read. After doing this I started on my circuit round, and although the Baptist preachers had left this place, without preaching in it for years, yet, in a few days after I was gone, there were sent on appointments for the next Sabbath three of the Baptist preachers. . . . When they were done preaching, they opened the way for persons to join the [Baptist] Church by giving in their experience.³¹

Cartwright agonized over hearing the Baptist preacher declare his converts fit for membership in the Baptist Church as a result of the conversion experiences they had under his own Methodist preaching. Only quick thinking and subterfuge on the part of Cartwright allowed him to reclaim his converts for Methodist membership before they underwent full immersion baptism.

Garrettson noted in his journal that he not only had to contend with those who desired to sway his converts away from Methodism,³² but with

³¹Cartwright, 55-56.

³²Immediately following the acceptance of thirty new Methodists, Garrettson recorded that "a man started from his seat, saying 'Sir it is a shame for you to go on as you do; why do you think you can make us believe your doctrine is true?'" Bangs, 82. In a separate episode, Garrettson reported that his "work was greatly hindered by the Baptists, who came among the people, drew off a few, and set others to disputing about the decrees, and their method of baptizing." Bangs, 90.

state and local officials who were members of more established denominations using their authority to restrict his preaching.

Monday, July 20th, . . . After sermon, being much spent, I withdrew. Shortly after a person came to me and said "two men wanted to see me." I told him to desire them to walk up, thinking they were persons in distress, and wanted instruction; but when I saw them I discovered wickedness in their very looks. One of them was a magistrate, and he was a Churchman; the other was a Presbyterian, and he was a disputant. The magistrate brought him out in order to confute me in the points of religion: and then his intention was to send me to prison.³³

Fortunately for Garrettson, he was able to overcome the religious argumentation of the Presbyterian and, gaining the sympathy of the sheriff sent to arrest him, allowed to proceed unmolested to his next preaching appointment.

By the mid-nineteenth century, the practice of early Methodist preachers instructing their converts in how to become members of Methodist classes was codified in a genre of books known as convert's guides.³⁴ These guides, often published by annual conferences, offered practical advice on how converts could remain faithful to their new allegiance to Christ through participating in Methodist spiritual practices. These practices, of course, were much easier to undertake if the convert would join the Methodist Episcopal Church and so be surrounded by like-minded individuals.

A representative example of these guides is *The Convert's Counsellor Respecting His Church Relations*, published in 1856 by the Methodist Book Concern. The book's subtitle spoke directly to the purpose of bringing those who had experienced conversion under Methodist ministry to membership in the Methodist Episcopal Church: *Popular Objections to Methodism Considered and Answered: with Reasons Why Methodist Converts Should Join a Methodist Church*. The text begins by commenting on how vulnerable the new convert is to advice about joining churches, especially when that advice is prejudiced against Methodism:

I address you as recently converted, but as undecided concerning your church relations. You have been led to Christ, I will

³³Bangs, 94.

³⁴The earliest convert's guide was published in 1838. Kirby, Richey, and Rowe, *The Methodists*, 179.

presume, through the instrumentality of Methodism. If left to your own unbiased judgment, you would unhesitatingly unite with the Methodist church. But your associates, relatives, or personal friends are hostile to Methodism. Perhaps you reside in a community where Methodism is crushed down and trodden under foot by proud, influential, sectarian men. False views of Methodism, the offsprings of a prejudice which is willingly ignorant of the true character and spirit, are whispered in your ears. So much is said to you, by persons you have ever esteemed, that your mind is perplexed and unsettled. You hesitate and wait. You do not feel entirely free to relinquish Methodism. You are too deeply indebted to it to turn from it readily; yet in consequence to what has been said to you by others, your mind is not satisfied with respect to your duty to enter into church relation with it. Like a weaver's shuttle, you are tossed to and fro, and amid these perplexities, you are tempted to join no church at all.³⁵

After overcoming this temptation to avoid any sort of denominational membership, the text then seeks to woo converts to Methodism by suggesting that Methodism alone would offer converts true understanding and support in working through their conversion experience. This contrasts to other denominations which would look askance at having such an experience at all, and which might even put converts in danger of losing their conversion experience altogether.

I hail you, dear reader, as a *child of Methodism* . . . having been converted to Christ through Methodist instrumentalities, you are a child of Methodism! God sent Methodism to you, as he sent Ananias to Saul of Tarsus, that it might become your spiritual parent. It found you a poor unawakened sinner. It alarmed you, persuaded you, led you to the cross, taught you how to believe, encouraged your first acts of trust, and led you, with the solicitude of a mother, through the earliest steps of your experience in the way of faith. Under God, you owe your spiritual life to it. . . . Remember, that being a child of Methodism, you will be but an *adopted child* in any other branch of the Christian

³⁵Daniel Wise, *The Convert's Counsellor Respecting His Church Relations: or Popular Objections to Methodism Considered and Answered: with Reasons Why Methodist Converts Should Join a Methodist Church* (Boston, MA: J. P. Magee, 1856), 12-13.

church. You will feel this fact painfully, if you leave your true home. So long as you are the object of a zealous proselytism, the confidence and sympathy of those who seek to win you to their ranks will appear strong and deep. But when you have once crossed the Rubicon, and stand among them as a candidate for church membership, a change will be visible in the spirit of your new friends. Having lured you from Methodism, they will seek to divest you of every shred of the Methodist garment, and to shape the manifestations of your experience in their own denominational mold. They will scrutinize your conversion, and challenge its genuineness, because it was obtained among the Methodists. It will be well if they do not lead you to cast it aside as mere excitement and leave you to grope through mist and unbelief after new light, so that, after all, you may date your new birth from the period of your connection with them, and thus lose your sense of obligation to your true spiritual parent.³⁶

As this guide points out, one of the deep concerns Methodists had for their new converts was that they would be wracked with doubts concerning the authenticity of their conversion experience. A Methodist society was critical in helping them claim their experience absolutely. According to Hempton:

the spiritual lives of most members of Methodist societies began with keenly remembered conversion experiences. Indeed, the conversion narrative is a common Methodist genre in which is stressed the drama of the second birth as a means of escaping a world of sin and licentiousness, and of entering a world of faith and godly discipline. . . . Once the decision is made, there are the customary doubts and episodes of self-examination. It is at this point that the Methodist machinery of class meetings and prayer groups offers crucial community support.³⁷

Denominational Loyalty and American Identity

Undoubtedly, Garrettson, Cartwright, and the authors of the various convert's guides genuinely believed Methodism offered the most effective doctrines, polity, and practices for supporting converts in their new lives

³⁶Wise, 23-24, 26-30.

³⁷Hempton, 61-62.

as Christians.³⁸ However, their denominationalism also had a pragmatic edge. In the free marketplace of American religion, if the agents of any particular denomination could not convince a sizable portion of the American people to accept and commit to their vision of the Christian church, then their denomination was doomed to obscurity and, potentially, to disappear forever. It was precisely the Methodist insistence on connecting converts to the Methodist Episcopal Church that allowed for the Methodist Episcopal Church to become the largest Protestant denomination in the United States by the end of the nineteenth century.³⁹

At the same time, it was the Methodist effort to be relevant to American culture as circuit riders called for denominational loyalty that led to Methodists to become progressively more wedded to American cultural values. The very practice of competing in the religious marketplace demonstrated that Methodists, if only implicitly, were already taking marching orders from American values. Their emphasis on accruing loyal adherents who accepted Methodism to the exclusion of all other denominations had strong sympathies with the work of merchants who hoped to win over customers that would remain loyal to only their particular products. Wigger explains this point in observing that one of the central reasons Methodists were so successful in convincing Americans to join the

³⁸In one situation, in responding to a Methodist lay preacher who was considering becoming a Baptist, Cartwright said, "I joined them [the Methodists] from a firm conviction, believing them to be the best people in the world; and the longer I live with them, and the more I understand of their doctrine and system of Church government, the more firmly I am settled in mind to abide my choice; and this world has not treasure enough to allure me from the Methodist Church." Cartwright, 85.

³⁹ Methodist preachers not only connected converts to the Methodist Episcopal Church, but they regularly reminded those who were already members of Methodist societies of their commitment to the denomination. Bishops Coke and Asbury exhorted preachers on this point: "To read the rules of the society, with the aid of the other preachers, once a year in every congregation, and once a quarter in every society." *The Doctrines and Discipline*, 1798, Section X, Q.2.9, 71. In offering further explanation for this rule, the bishops stated, "We do nothing secretly. We wish the whole world to know every part of our economy, and more especially the rules of our society, so necessary for every member of it at least to be thoroughly acquainted with. We have also enacted this rule, that Christian fellowship in general, and particularly that mode of Christian communion which has proved so beneficial to ourselves and to myriads now in glory, may be strongly and repeatedly recommended to all who truly fear God." *The Doctrines and Discipline*, 1798, Section X, Q. 2.9 and note, 81.

Methodist Episcopal Church was that they were “‘packaging’ American Methodism to suit the tastes and demands of a new kind of consumer.”⁴⁰ Specifically, American Methodism appealed to the middling and artisan classes because it was “enthusiastic, individualistic, entrepreneurial, and lay-oriented,”⁴¹ all of which were traits that could be just as easily applied to the marketplace for pecuniary rewards as they could to organizing a church. This was a significant attraction for Americans who, now free from the hierarchical system which would have kept them in a specific socio-economic bracket regardless of their personal industry, intelligence or talents,⁴² were electrified with “an unprecedented sense of entrepreneurial energy.”⁴³

Wigger states that Methodists also connected with American aspirations through their lay leadership and their morality. The people Methodist preachers often tapped to become the class leaders, those individuals who held direct authority over the Methodist laity during the times in between the visits of itinerant preachers, “were the more successful members of their peer groups, both in terms of worldly accomplishments and spiritual progress.” This sent the clear message that the values which led to wealth and status were of equal importance to the Methodists as the values leading to holiness of life—or rather, that these two sets of values were essentially the same. The morality of the Methodists made this same point. “The church’s *Discipline* condemned indebtedness, intemperate drinking, swearing, ostentatious dress, gossiping, discord, gluttony, gambling, bribery, and taking ‘treats’ when voting.” While these moral dictates

While the total number of members of all Methodist denominations compared to all Baptist denominations at this time might give the edge to Baptists, the Methodist Episcopal Church was the largest single denomination. Indeed, Methodists and Baptists, who made up nearly fifty percent of all Protestants in the United States by the end of the nineteenth century, are both notable for promoting clear-cut practices to ensure denominational loyalty in their converts. The Methodists encouraged attendance at class meetings. The Baptists offered full immersion baptism. Both of these practices were public signs of loyalty to a specific denomination in addition to being signs of conversion.

⁴⁰Wigger, 26.

⁴¹Wigger, 7.

⁴²Gordon Wood’s book *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* offers the classic analysis of the psychological shift that took place in Americans as they rejected the traditional British social stratification in favor of a social model in which people could obtain to higher social stations through hard work.

⁴³Wigger, 8.

certainly fit with the Methodist identity, they also proclaimed a message that “would make sense” to the American striving to do well financially for himself and his family through self-discipline and diligence.⁴⁴ As a result,

Methodism simply appealed to and nurtured the kinds of people likely to do well in the fluid social environment of the time. It did so by encouraging individual initiative, self-government, optimism, and even geographic mobility. . . . In short, Methodism accepted and encouraged the new values necessary for ‘improvement in a market-driven society.’⁴⁵

In addition to appealing to the desire of Americans to improve their social and economic stations, the Methodists of this time also felt comfortable weaving national values together with their call to conversion. As noted at the beginning, Peter Cartwright explicitly engaged patriotic themes and values to buttress his preaching. He was specifically fond of the value of liberty. In Cartwright’s thinking, becoming a Methodist epitomized the liberty America had purchased in the Revolution. When a person became a Methodist, that person declared his or her personal liberty to worship according to his or her conscience rather than the person worshipping in a specific church because of familial, societal or other external forces compelling the person to do so.

Cartwright raised this point on numerous occasions when dealing with preachers from other denominations that resisted the influence of the Methodists. In the case of the Presbyterian minister mentioned above who had forbidden him from forming a Methodist society, Cartwright recorded that he told the minister, “the people were a free people and lived in a free country, and must and ought to be allowed to do as they pleased.”

⁴⁴Wigger, 98. Charles Sellers, in his Marxist interpretation of the rise of capitalism in antebellum America, sees Methodism as an oddity in this regard. While Sellers generally understands evangelical Christianity as an agrarian reaction against the various forces that had brought about the agrarian crisis, thus ending the hopes of many farmers to obtain the ideal of the Jeffersonian yeoman, Methodism simultaneously is evangelical and a supporter of the market forces encroaching on the rural frontier. To make this point, he specifically analyzes an anecdote in which Peter Cartwright encouraged a man to spend his money on better furnishings for the comfort of his wife and children rather than hoarding his cash as a means of hoping to remain independent from the market. Charles Sellers, *The Market Revolution* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1991), 155.

⁴⁵Wigger, 12.

Later, speaking directly to the people of the neighborhood, Cartwright prefaced his invitation to join the Methodist Episcopal Church by expressing a similar sentiment, "I then told them my father had fought in the Revolution to gain our freedom and liberty of conscience; that I felt that my Presbyterian brother had no bill of sale on the people."⁴⁶

Effectively, then, in its organization, practices, and preached message, Methodism was already showing the signs of adopting American culture even as it emphasized conversion and denominational loyalty as its primary goals. While the strong push for denominational loyalty that Methodists connected to their call for conversion, and the regular meeting of preachers in conferences allowed for Methodists to keep a distinct identity apart from the culture, the fact that so many Methodists drew close connections between the Methodist understanding of a holy life with the life of a good citizen, hard worker, and economically-successful individual, suggests that these strategies for retaining an identity that had some independence from the American culture would soon fail. After all, conferences of preachers and calls to denominational loyalty can only fend off being overtaken by cultural values so long as the preachers going to the conferences and the existing members of the denomination to which loyalty is pledged are not themselves coming to accept parity between national values and the values handed down by the denominational heritage. Given that even such ardent croakers as Peter Cartwright showed a penchant for baptizing national values, it was all but certain that those Methodist leaders who were glad to adopt pipe organs and other innovations made available by wealth and higher social status would do the same.

The question then arises, how would a growing denomination with a strongly loyal membership have its evangelism, which was based on calling people to participate in that denominational membership, be impacted by this movement toward claiming loyalty to nation and loyalty to denomination as of a single piece? The answer to this question would ultimately be seen in the deep identification that Methodists felt with the cultural values in their respective sections of the United States as they moved toward the Civil War. By imbuing the identities of the people who hearkened to its evangelism with both denominational and cultural values, the Methodist Episcopal Church forged some of the most ardent partisans over the issue of which set of sectional values would ultimately be adopted as the normative values for the United States.

⁴⁶Cartwright, 90-91.

CREATIO EX NIHILO: IT'S NOT ALL ABOUT NOTHING

by

Richard Rice

The venerable concept of creation *ex nihilo* has fallen on hard times in recent years.¹ Originally developed as a way of distinguishing the Christian view of God from the notions of God and world characteristic of Gnostic dualism,² the formula was readily accepted as integral to the doctrine of God and has remained so more or less throughout the Christian era. While there are many today who believe that it has great merit, however, they are not alone. Theologians from various perspectives now raise objections to the idea. In fact, no issue highlights more vividly the differences between traditional and relational theists, the contrast between process and open theists, and variations among open theists themselves, than the issue of creation *ex nihilo*. Before defending my conviction that creation *ex nihilo* still has a great deal going for it, it will be helpful to review some of the questions it raises.

Questions Being Raised

Creation *ex nihilo* expresses the view, as one theologian describes it, that when there was once nothing but God, there is now God and a world other than God.³ But according to a number of biblical scholars, this idea is not to be found in the *locus classicus* of creation. Genesis 1:1—2:3 does not describe God as bringing into existence a material world where none had existed before. Instead, as Hebrew scholar Jon D. Levenson argues, the portrait of God's creative activity that appears in Genesis is primarily

¹So say Paul Copan and William Lane Craig in *Creation Out of Nothing: A Biblical, Philosophical, and Scientific Exploration* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 9.

²Pieter Smulders, "Creation," in *Encyclopedia of Theology: The Concise Sacramentum Mundi*, ed. Karl Rahner (New York: The Seabury Press, 1975), 317.

³Colin Gunton, *The Triune Creator: A Historical and Systematic Study* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1998), 83.

one of mastery, that is, an assertion of divine power over something other than God. It shows God bringing order out of disorder, arranging things in a useful pattern. Along with other accounts of divine sovereignty, such as Psalms 82 and 74, it depicts God as subduing chaotic forces whose potential disruptiveness continues. “The traditional Jewish and Christian doctrine of creation ex nihilo can be found in this chapter,” states Levenson, only if one relies on a problematic translation—“In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth”—and applies it “to some comprehensive creative act on the first day.”⁴ Scholars now question this translation, he notes, and, besides, the chapter goes on to describe the creation of the heaven on the second day to restrain the celestial waters and the creation of the earth on the third.

In another analysis of the Bible's opening chapter, *The Lost World of Genesis 1*, John H. Walton comes to similar conclusions. Viewed in light of what we know of ancient Near Eastern literature generally, other biblical passages, and the specific construction of this passage itself, he argues, Genesis 1 should be interpreted as an account of functional origins. It shows God assigning the various components of the world their appropriate places in the scheme of things or the contributions they are to make in fulfilling God's purposes for creation. Put negatively, Genesis 1 was never intended to provide an account—the author never envisioned it as an explanation—of the world's material origins. What interested the author was not how things came to be, but how they came to be arranged or ordered as they are. His sole focus was the roles they were supposed to play once God formally established the world as his temple.⁵

Additional reservations concerning “creation ex nihilo” stem from the fact that neither the phrase itself nor the specific issues that gave rise to it emerged until well after apostolic times. According to Gerhard May's oft-cited work on the topic, it was not until the second century CE that the question of the world's origin became a particular concern for Christian thinkers. And it was in the second half of the century that Christian writers employed the formula in order to counter the influential view that matter, like God, is “unoriginate.” According to May, three thinkers in particular helped develop the ideas the creation *ex nihilo* came to express.

⁴*Creation and the Persistence of Evil: The Jewish Drama of Divine Omnipotence* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), 5.

⁵John H. Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate* (IVP Academic, 2009).

Tatian insisted that matter is created directly by God. Theophilus of Antioch added that God's free decision is the sole ground of the world. And Irenaeus maintained, contra Valentinian teachings, that God alone is responsible for the very patterns of reality. In a relatively short time, these ideas assumed the form that came to play such an influential role in Christian doctrine. Ever since, the well-known phrase has expressed "in the most pointed manner the absolutely unconditioned nature of the creation and . . . God's omnipotence as its sole ground."⁶

Although the phrase itself may have arisen within intra-Christian debates, Christians were not alone in detecting a radical difference between the biblical view of creation and the classical view of origins. According to historian Robert Wilken, the second century physician Galen was the first critic of Christianity to see the implications of its view of God's relation to the world.⁷ Like other Greeks, Galen believed that God created the world out of what already existed, like a potter fashions clay (Plato's *Timaeus* was widely read at the time). In contrast, Galen perceived, "The Mosaic view implies that the world was created out of what did not already exist. . . . [It] implies that matter came into existence only at the time of creation and did not exist prior to creation."⁸ This, of course, is the idea that *creatio ex nihilo* came to express: the world's existence is due entirely to God's decision. God creates because God chooses to create, and God's relations to the world are based on freedom, not necessity.

Theological and Philosophic Objections

If creation *ex nihilo* does not enjoy the clear support of Genesis 1, and if it entered Christian parlance only well after apostolic times, it is not hard to understand why people wonder if it deserves the place it has traditionally occupied in Christian views of God. Aside from exegetical and historical considerations, however, the more pressing reasons people

⁶Gerhard May, *Creatio Ex Nihilo: The Doctrine of 'Creation Out of Nothing' in Early Christian Thought*, trans. A. S. Worrall (T&T Clark, 1994), xi.

⁷Robert L. Wilken, *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them* (Yale, 1984), 89. According to Wilken, the first Christian thinker to develop the rudiments of a doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* was the Gnostic theologian Basilides. But it is not clear what, if any, influence his treatment of the topic had on subsequent Christian thinkers.

⁸*Ibid.*, 85.

now give for questioning the concept are philosophical and theological in nature. A number of Christian thinkers now reject the formula on the grounds that it presents us with an unacceptable view of God, and none are more prominent than those who work from a process perspective.

Some of them are feminist theologians who object to the “dominology” they see in the formula—the hierarchical, patriarchal, even sexist, view of God it seems to convey. From their perspective, creation *ex nihilo* evacuates the world of value and makes it subservient to an overbearing and manipulative God. In her provocative study *Face of the Deep: A Theology of Becoming*, Catherine Keller takes an approach to creation that stands in vivid contrast to the God-world relation expressed in creation *ex nihilo*. Her “tehomitic” theology takes its name from the Hebrew expressions of Genesis 1:3, *tohu vabohu*, typically translated “waste and void.” In place of the notion that God in majestic solitude brought into existence a material world where nothing existed before, Keller proposes the idea of a primeval material reality that predates the activity described in Genesis 1 and is equiprimordial with God. Instead of something that God must master or defeat, however, in ways reminiscent of other ancient Near Eastern origin accounts, this tehomitic reality is something positive, a mysterious depth brimming with possibility. “Creation begins—continually,” says Keller, “in this relation, this incipient incarnation, at the edge of the waters. And that relation,” she continues, “the ‘relation of relations,’ may be called by *implication* the *spirit of God. Ruach* on the face of the waters.”⁹ For Keller, God creates, not *ex nihilo*, but *ex profundis*.

Along with Keller, process thinkers across the board, both philosophers and theologians, embrace a “panentheistic” concept of God, and this brings additional reasons for rejecting creation *ex nihilo*. Panentheism denies that this (or any) particular world is necessary, but it does insist on the necessity of some world or other. Since ultimate reality is God-and-world, or God as inclusive of the world, the very notion of God without world is anomalous. God could not exist without the world any more than the world could exist without God.

The basis of process thought is the conviction that reality is essentially temporal and social. A philosophy of “event pluralism” of the sort that Alfred North Whitehead, Charles Hartshorne, and their theological followers embrace holds that the ultimate constituents of reality are momentary events, not enduring objects, with each event integrally related to preceding

⁹Catherine Keller, *Face of the Deep: A Theology of Becoming* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 232.

events and contributing to subsequent ones. A world conceived along such lines requires a supreme agent for a number of reasons—to introduce novelty in the creative process, to place limits on the conflict that inevitably results when a welter of self-creative agents is at work, and to retain the value of all that happens, that is, to give meaning to the very notion of the past.¹⁰ But such a supreme agent, God, though essential to the creative process, is nevertheless very much a part and not the whole of the process.

Since reality as such consists of “social process,” to invoke the title one of Charles Hartshorne’s books, the supreme reality is social as well.¹¹ As Whitehead memorably put it, God is not an exception to all metaphysical principles; he is their supreme exemplification.¹² So, while God is the supreme instance of creative freedom, the one reality who affects and is affected by all others, God is not by any means the only one. Indeed, without a multiplicity of sub-divine or creaturely agents, God would not exist. And since there was never a time when the world was not, creation *ex nihilo* makes no sense.

As generally understood, open theists take a position somewhere between process theism and traditional views of God.¹³ They share with

¹⁰Hartshorne is well known for his vigorous defense of the ontological argument (see *Anselm’s Discovery: A Re-examination of the Ontological Argument for the Existence of God* [LaSalle, IL: Open Court Publishing Co., 1965] and *The Logic of Perfection and Other Essays in Neoclassical Metaphysics* [LaSalle, IL: Open Court Publishing Co., 1962]), but he develops a number of other theistic proofs as well. See, for example, “Six Theistic Proofs” (chapter 14 in *Creative Synthesis and Philosophic Method* [LaSalle, IL: Open Court Publishing Co., 1970]).

¹¹Charles Hartshorne, *Reality as Social Process: Studies in Metaphysics and Religion* (New York: Hafner Publishing Co., 1971).

¹²“God is not to be treated as an exception to all metaphysical principles, invoked to save their collapse. He is their chief exemplification” (*Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology* [New York: The Free Press, 1969 (originally published by The Macmillan Company, 1929)], 405).

¹³Principal articulations of the position known as “the openness of God,” “open theism,” or “openness theology,” include Clark Pinnock, et al., *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994); John Sanders, *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Divine Providence* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998; 2nd ed.; 2007); Clark Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover: A Theology of God’s Openness* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001). The expression “openness of God” first appeared as the title of a book in 1980: Richard Rice, *The Openness of God: The Relationship of Divine Foreknowledge and Human Free Will* (Nashville, TN: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1980 [republished as *God’s Foreknowledge and Man’s Free Will* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1985)).

process theists the conviction that God's relation to the world is one of dynamic interaction. Like process thinkers, they believe that God's experience is characterized by temporal succession. And like process thinkers, they maintain that God is intimately related to the world and deeply affected by it. Open theists side with traditional theists, however, in denying that God is ontologically dependent on the world.¹⁴ The world contributes to God's experience, they believe, but the world is not a necessary condition of God's existence.

While this leads many open theists to embrace the concept of creation *ex nihilo*, this is not true of all of them. Some, while agreeing that God is ontologically independent of the world, nevertheless insist that there are other factors, just as compelling, that make creation *ex nihilo* problematic. Certain qualities in the divine character, they believe, presuppose the existence of a creaturely world, and it is inconceivable that God should ever be without them. So, even though God's sheer existence does not depend on anything else, God nevertheless requires a world in order to be the kind of person God is. And since we cannot imagine God without creatures, a creaturely world must be co-eternal with God.

Two open theists who argue along such line are Michael Lodahl and Thomas Oord. Lodahl grants that creation *ex nihilo* makes an important point about God, but requires significant qualifications. According to Lodahl, Whitehead's cosmology is deficient from a Christian perspective in that it postulates two metaphysical ultimates, or two "brute facts," viz., God and the world. And this leaves us with a God who cannot fulfill the Christian promise of "ultimate deliverance."¹⁵ Although Charles Hartshorne, the most influential process philosopher next to Whitehead, and John B. Cobb, Jr., another influential process theologian, move away from a strictly Whiteheadian view of the world's necessity, neither provides a fully adequate view of God's role as Creator of the world. To fill this need, Lodahl proposes a "Wesleyan rendering of creation *ex nihilo*"—one which preserves the essential insight of creation *ex nihilo*, but modifies it in rather significant ways.

¹⁴Five scholars examine the similarities and differences between process and open theism in John B. Cobb, Jr., and Clark H. Pinnock, eds., *Searching for an Adequate God: A Dialogue between Process and Free Will Theists* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1994).

¹⁵Michael Lodahl, "Creation Out of Nothing? Or Is *Next* to Nothing Enough?" in Bryan P. Stone and Thomas Jay Oord, eds., *Thy Nature and Thy Name is Love: Wesleyan and Process Theologies in Dialogue* (Nashville: Kingswood, 2001), 227.

From this Wesleyan perspective, Lodahl argues, God's power is best understood as "empowering" the creatures, rather than exerting "power over" them. If the essence of divine power is self-giving love, indeed, self-emptying, compassionate love, then it is the very nature of divine potency to flow into creation, empowering the world to be. This has two consequences. It means that God never exercises coercive power; to do so would violate the divine character. But it also means that God's love has never been without creatures to empower. Since God has always been the loving Creator, God has always had a creation to love. Otherwise, creation would be merely arbitrary on God's part and creatures would be merely incidental to God's life. An expression such as *creatio ex amore*, he suggests, renders more faithfully than creation *ex nihilo* the creative activity of a loving God.¹⁶ "If there has been, and everlastingly will be, a world of creaturely response, it is not because such a world exists of its own necessity but because 'Love Divine, all loves excelling' freely and abundantly creates *ex amore*."¹⁷

Thomas Oord is more emphatic in his criticisms of creation *ex nihilo*. In a review of Clark Pinnock's open theism, Oord finds many things to affirm, but he also finds significant flaws—most of them related to Pinnock's acceptance of creation *ex nihilo*. One is the notion that God occasionally exercises "coercive power." Another is the concept that God once existed alone, without a world. According to Oord, both ideas directly conflict with the claim that love is the fundamental, defining quality of God's reality.

If God initiated and occasionally interrupts the normal course of creaturely events, Oord argues, then God is responsible for every instance of suffering, because God has the perfect means to prevent it. "The God who creates *ex nihilo* is culpable for failing to control creatures or creaturely events entirely and/or failing to create instantaneously from nothing that which could prevent genuine evil."¹⁸ If God could intervene, then God should intervene, and God would be morally responsible for failing to do so. For this reason, Oord rejects "voluntary covenant at creation

¹⁶Lodahl, 234-35.

¹⁷Lodahl, 238. At the same time, Lodahl asserts, there are good reasons for maintaining creation *ex nihilo*, even though there was never a time when the world was not. God's power to deliver, or redeem, the world must be rooted in God's power to create (Lodahl, 237).

¹⁸Thomas Jay Oord, *The Nature of Love: A Theology* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2010), 107.

theodicy,” the idea that God could override creaturely freedom, but has chosen not to do so. In its place he proposes “Essential Kenosis theology.” The central idea here is that God’s relations to the creatures are *necessarily* characterized by self-sacrificing, self-emptying love. Accordingly, it is not the case that God merely refrains from exercising coercive power; God is literally incapable of displaying it.¹⁹

Oord also has problems with the idea that God’s existence predates that of the world. If God *necessarily* loves the world, he argues, there must always have been a world for God to love. Otherwise, it would not be the case that God’s love for the world is essential to God’s very nature. Moreover, unless God loves the world necessarily, we have no assurance that God will not at some point arbitrarily withdraw God’s love. After all, if God’s love for the world had a beginning, it could just as easily have an end,²⁰ and our confidence in God’s love for us would be baseless. For a number of reasons, therefore, Oord calls on open theists to reject creation *ex nihilo* and in its place embrace the theory he labels *creatio ex creatio a natura amoris*.²¹ If God’s essential nature is that of love, indeed kenotic or self-emptying love, then God has never been, and will never be, without a creaturely world to which God is unconditionally devoted. “Because God everlastingly loves, God everlastingly creates.”²² So, every act of divine creation presupposes a previous creation, and there was never a time when the world did not yet exist.

For Oord’s version of open theism, then, the world is just as necessary as it is for process theism, though for different reasons. God’s existence may not depend on the world (contra process thought), but we cannot conceive of a God whose essential nature is that of kenotic love unless there exists a creaturely world to provide it with an object. So, even though creation is not necessary to the divine existence, it is nevertheless necessary to the divine character.²³ For Oord and Lodahl, then, creation is the natural, and therefore necessary, expression of divine love.

Faithful to the Biblical Portrait of God

As an open theist, I share with Lodahl and Oord the view that God’s existence does not depend on that of the creaturely world, and I appreci-

¹⁹Oord, 145.

²⁰Oord, 111-112.

²¹Oord, 134.

²²Oord, 138.

²³“Creating in love is a necessary aspect of God’s nature” (Oord, 136).

ate their emphasis on love as an essential—make that, *the* essential—quality of the divine character. But I believe that their insistence that the world is co-eternal with God is mistaken, and I am afraid it has the effect of undermining the very quality of God that they are most concerned to uphold. My contention is that creation is the *natural, but not necessary, expression of divine love*. In contrast to those who argue that creation *ex nihilo* has outlived its usefulness—for reasons exegetical, historical, philosophical or theological—I believe that the concepts that creation *ex nihilo* express are indispensable to an adequate understanding of God's nature, and of God's relation to the world—concepts, in other words, that are central to the Christian vision of things.

To begin with, the crucial question regarding creation *ex nihilo* is not whether the formula as such is found in the Bible, nor whether the specific issues that led to its historical development are ones we face today. The crucial question is whether the essential idea it expresses is faithful to the biblical portrait of God, and there is strong evidence that it is. Even if we grant that Genesis 1 provides an account of functional rather than material origins,²⁴ the sovereign freedom with which God acts stands in striking contrast to other ancient Near Eastern creation narratives and leaves little doubt that the one who brings order to the *tehom*, the deep, is also the one responsible for its very existence.²⁵

Then, too, there are other biblical statements indicating that all that is owes its existence to God the Creator. Those in the Old Testament include Psalms 103:14-30; 139:13; and 147:8—passages, which according to Wolfhart Pannenberg, “imply the unrestricted freedom of God's creative action that the phrase ‘creation out of nothing’ would later come to express.”²⁶ The most familiar New Testament texts which affirm God's sovereign creative power are John 1:3 (“All things came into being

²⁴Cf. John H. Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate* (IVP Academic, 2009).

²⁵The majestic freedom characterizing God's creative activity in Genesis 1 stands in striking contrast to the pervasive picture that appears in other ANE creation accounts. There, *theomachy*, or divine conflict, is the predominant motif. “Particularly in the Babylonian creation epic, *Enuma Elish*, creation is accomplished in the aftermath of a battle for control of the pantheon and the cosmos” (Walton, 28-29).

²⁶Indeed, for Pannenberg, these statements “offer no basis for the view that the formula [creation *ex nihilo*] rejected” (Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley [3 vols; Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1991-98], 2:17).

through him, and without him not one thing came into being”), Romans 4:17 (“God . . . who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist”), and Hebrews 11:3 (“By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible”). “Behind these statements,” to quote Pannenberg again, “there is always the fact that the creatures owe all that they are to God’s almighty creative action.”²⁷ They express “the unlimited freedom of the act of creation,” and this is what later found expression in the formula creation *ex nihilo*.²⁸

So, even though this particular formulation of the God-world relation did not emerge until a couple of centuries into the common era, it arguably reflects the biblical accounts of God’s relation to the world.²⁹ It preserves the biblical portrait of God’s ontological self-sufficiency and unilateral power over the world. As one supporter puts it, Biblical characterizations of God’s freedom to act in and over against the world require an absolute qualitative distinction between creator and creation. And creation *ex nihilo* preserves this by designating a creative act in the purest sense of the word: God brought it about that, when there was once nothing but God, there is now God and a world other than God.³⁰ If God and world are co-eternal, then God and world are equally necessary, and God is not ultimate.

While a central emphasis of creation *ex nihilo* is the sovereign freedom with which God creates, the formula has important implications as well for the object of God’s creative activity. It underscores the fact that the world owes its existence, not to any claim it has on God, or to some requirement of the divine nature, but solely to divine decision. God may create a reality distinct from Godself, and give the world freedom to be the world, as Terence Fretheim says, “without micromanagement, tight control, or interference every time something goes wrong,”³¹ but the sheer existence of the world has no other explanation than God’s sovereign uni-

²⁷Pannenberg, 2:16.

²⁸Pannenberg, 2:16.

²⁹One could argue along similar lines that the Christological formulas that emerged during the fourth and fifth centuries have enduring theological value, whether or not their precise wording appears in the Bible or the issues facing the church then are identical to those it faces today.

³⁰Colin Gunton, *The Triune Creator: A Historical and Systematic Study* (Eerdmans, 1998), 83.

³¹*God and World in the Old Testament: A Relational Theology of Creation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005), 7.

lateral decision. As Philip Clayton remarks, the notion of creation out of nothing whatsoever “more powerfully conveys the most radical contingency of created things” than the idea that God’s creative activity presupposed a “chaos” or “ocean” which formed the “material” with which God worked, as Catherine Keller proposes.³²

Creation *ex nihilo* thus underscores the striking difference between process theism and the view of God that open theism expresses. As an open theist, I appreciate many of the insights that process philosophy brings to an understanding of God. By showing, in contrast to traditional views of divine perfection, that a perfect being need not be thought of as immutable, process thought makes it possible for us to take seriously the pervasive biblical descriptions of divine change and divine sensitivity to the creatures. Process theism comports with the biblical view that God’s relation to the world is one of dynamic interaction.

At the same time, process theism varies from the biblical view of God in ways that are problematic for open theists. If God and world are equally ultimate, and therefore equally primordial, as process thought requires, then there are serious restrictions on what God can accomplish in the world. This has implications for a wide range of Christian concepts, such as miracle, providence, and incarnation.

To cite just one example, consider its impact on the content of Christian hope. A consequence of the view that God and world are equally ultimate, as Pannenberg observes, is “that the creature does not depend on God alone but on other powers, so that it cannot rationally put full trust in God alone for the overcoming of evil in the world.”³³ For process thought, what we call evil is a permanent phenomenon in a world of self-determining agents, for their decisions cannot avoid conflicting with each other.³⁴ But for open theism, as for the Christian tradition generally, God’s purposes will eventually be realized, evil will be eliminated, and the suffering it causes will be a thing of the past.

While there are impressive power-based arguments for creation *ex nihilo*, we can give the notion even firmer footing by appealing to divine love. From this perspective, it is precisely because God’s preeminent charac-

³²*Adventures in the Spirit: God, World, Divine Action* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 183.

³³Pannenberg, 2:16.

³⁴According to Hartshorne, “It is the existence of many decision makers that produces everything, whether good or ill” (*Omnipotence and Other Theological Mistakes* [Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984], 18).

teristic is self-giving love that God brings into existence a reality distinct from God, a world totally dependent on God's free decision both to sustain *and* to initiate its existence. Viewed as an expression of divine love, creation *ex nihilo* conveys something important about both Creator and creation.

In line with Karl Rahner's famous dictum regarding the economic and immanent Trinity,³⁵ creation *ex nihilo* reminds us that God's relation to creation is consistent with, and revelatory of, what God has always been. It affirms the Christian vision of God as a complex reality, inherently and within itself social, relational, temporal and, yes, contingent. On the one hand, this means that God does not need something other than God in order for God's loving nature to find fulfillment. Because God's own life exhibits all of these qualities, a creaturely world is not required to account for any of them.³⁶ Accordingly, God's creative activity does not fulfill some divine obligation or meet some metaphysical or moral necessity on God's part.

On the other hand, creation is a perfectly natural expression of God's love. Since God's inner reality is characterized by the affirmation of the other, we see in God's decision to create, and in God's care for and commitment to what God creates, a vivid reflection of the one whose nature is to embrace the other. So, the world exists as a perfectly natural extension of the love that characterizes the inner life of God as a loving society.³⁷

³⁵The insight that God's inner life and God's saving activity in the world are intimately connected received its best-known formulation in Karl Rahner's familiar maxim, "the 'economic' Trinity is the 'immanent' Trinity, and the 'immanent' Trinity is the 'economic' Trinity" (*The Trinity*, trans. Joseph Donceel [Herder & Herder, 1970], 22). Rahner's Rule, as it is widely known, expresses the conviction that God's revelation in Jesus Christ was a genuine *self-revelation*. What we see of God in salvation history corresponds to God's own inner life.

³⁶Indeed, the doctrine of the Trinity arguably arose hand in hand with the conviction that the world is not eternal, that God does not need the world for God's existence, and therefore that God's creative activity is the free and natural expression of the person that God is and always has been.

³⁷Although they approach the Trinity from different vantage points, Joseph A. Bracken, S.J., and Robert Jenson both portray God's inner life as a vibrant social reality, a reality which definitely includes, but is not exhausted by, its relations with the creaturely world. See Bracken, *What Are They Saying About the Trinity?* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979). For a probing and critical study of Bracken's thought in general, see Marc A. Pugliese, *The One, the Many, and the Trinity: Joseph A. Bracken and the Challenge of Process Metaphysics* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2011). For Jenson's Trinitarian thought, see *The Triune Identity: God According to the Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), and *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, "The Triune God" (2 vols.; Oxford University Press, 1997-1999).

Even though God's decision to create is fully consistent with God's essential character, it was neither necessary nor inevitable. It was something God freely chose to do, something God might have chosen not to do, and this says something important about the world. It reminds us that the sheer existence of the world is due to divine grace. The world has no claim on God other than God's freely chosen commitment to it.

For process thinkers and for some open theists, as we have seen, divine love is inconceivable in the absence of a creaturely world. So, unless the world exists necessarily, we cannot think of God as essentially loving. If there is a world only because God chose to create it (and God might not have chosen to do so), they argue, then God's love for the world does not express God's innermost, fundamental reality. It is merely incidental to God's nature, and it could not possibly mean as much to God as if something in God *required* its existence.

To the contrary, I believe, the notion of a world whose very existence is contingent argues *for*, rather than against, divine love. Although creation is a choice, not a necessity, for God, this does not lessen the world's value to God. Instead, it shows how important it is. After all, a freely chosen commitment can express one's deepest character just as much as one that is inevitable.³⁸ For many people, having children is a choice, not a necessity, but this hardly makes their children incidental to their identity.

Ironically, it is the idea that God's nature requires such a world that lessens the world's value, for it means that the world exists primarily to fulfill God's needs. To cite Pannenberg once again, it is essential to God's freedom as Creator "that he did not have to create the world out of some inner necessity of his own nature. If he did, he would be dependent in his very essence on the existence of the world."³⁹ Moreover, God's commitment to a world that owes its existence entirely to the fact that God freely chose to create it adds a new shade or color to the spectrum of God's love. The love that radiates within the Trinity involves an affirmation of equals, the embrace of another who fully deserves the affection it receives. In contrast, God's love for the creaturely world involves affirming something

³⁸Perhaps even more so! As Philip Clayton suggests, citing David R. Larson, creation *ex nihilo* expresses "the deeper insight into the nature of creaturely existence before God," viz., the "radical contingency" . . . that characterizes the existence of our world as a whole," and of created things: "they exist out of no necessity of their nature, but only in and through their relationship with the final Ground" (Clayton, 183).

³⁹Pannenberg, 2:19.

that has value only because God has freely chosen to bring it into existence and embrace it within God's own life.

The notion that creation is the natural but not necessary expression of divine love does not mean that God's creative activity is purely arbitrary, nor that creation is merely incidental to God's life, nor that the value of the world is negligible. Far from diminishing the value of creation, the concept of creation *ex nihilo* enhances it. There is nothing matter-of-fact about the world God created. The truth that its very existence is a matter of sheer grace makes it a cause for wonder and for thanks.⁴⁰

Creation *ex nihilo*, then, is not about nothing after all. It involves the most fundamental questions theology has to answer—What kind of God created the world? What kind of world did God create?—and the ideas it expresses are indispensable for an adequate understanding of God. The expression makes a valuable and, I hope, an enduring contribution to Christian thought.

⁴⁰Cf. Clayton, "The creation of both ourselves and the universe, being completely free and unconstrained, was a sign of God's grace, that is, of God's eternal character" (Ibid.).

AN ANALYSIS OF MICHAEL LODAHL'S ARGUMENT THAT GOD IS THE BODY OF CREATION

by

Rodney Enderby

Michael Lodahl, a professor in theology at Point Loma Nazarene University, identifies himself as a Wesleyan theologian. He views the Wesleyan tradition as being too dependent on orthodox forms of Christian theology. His desire is to rescue contemporary Wesleyan theology from this over-dependency on its antiquated metaphysical assumptions, such as belief in a God who is outside of nature, who creates the world supernaturally, who is all-powerful, and who performs unilateral acts such as miracles. Lodahl believes that Wesleyan theology can be embraced as a viable contemporary theology if it is reinterpreted in the context of a Whiteheadian process metaphysic.

This writer challenges Lodahl's broad criticisms of orthodox Christianity and does not share his enthusiasm for reinterpreting Wesleyan theology through the lens of a Whiteheadian process metaphysic. Central to Lodahl's theology and rejection of orthodox Christian theology, as he interprets it, is the notion that God is the body of creation. God, as such, does not stand outside of nature but is fully embedded within nature. Therefore, to know and understand creation is to know how God creates and works in the universe and how, in fact, God relates to creation.

In an attempt to identify the major problems associated with Lodahl's perspective that God is "the body of creation," I will examine several of his assumptions, including his interpretation and application of science to theology, the nature and extent of God's independence and distinction from creation, that creation significantly contributes to its own making, that God and creation exist eternally together, and God and the theodicy problem, with specific reference to divine power.

The Role of Science

Lodahl states that it is critical that we recognize that Genesis 1 is not to be viewed as a "scientific account of the world's structures."¹ From his

¹Michael Lodahl, *God of Nature and of Grace: Reading the World in a Wesleyan Way* (Nashville, Tennessee: Kingswood Books, 2003), 31.

perspective, the best way to read Genesis 1 was to recognize that it is written in the context of an ancient Mediterranean cosmology and that modern science justifies a more pictorial reading of Scripture.² How figuratively or pictorially one should read Genesis 1 is a debated issue. Even theologians who advocate a form of creationism do not necessarily understand Genesis 1 literally. For example, Hugh Ross states that the days in Genesis 1 are long time periods.³

The difficulty and challenge of Lodahl's perspective is not so much with his argument that Genesis 1 is pictorial language, but that the worldview he claims is justified by science. He challenges the idea that God can exist without a world, that God existed prior to any beginning of a first world. For Lodahl, there was never a time when there was only God. He writes: "It is logically possible that there is a creator and that the world in some form or another has always been. . . . It is not at all impossible that a creator deity has everlastingly been the creator of worlds, perhaps even infinite worlds."⁴ For Lodahl, God only exists in creation, not in any sense outside of it. God does not have any power that is expressed outside of or independent from the power that is already in creation or potentially within it. God cannot act unilaterally. Lodahl asserts that a Wesleyan view of God's power suggests that God cannot exercise power unilaterally, not because God is metaphysically limited in power but because the use of such power is contrary to God's character of self-emptying and compassionate love.⁵ He justifies this conclusion on the grounds that unilateral power is contrary to God's purpose to create responsible agents who can respond to and grow in love.⁶

Lodahl seems to recognize that God is "almighty" only in that "God is not limited in God's capacity to influence the world."⁷ He states that the terms "almighty" and "omnipotence" imply that God exercises all power and that creatures exercise none.⁸ This interpretation of God's omnipotence suggests an either-or-nothing alternative, that if God has all power

²Ibid.

³Hugh Ross, *A Matter of Days: Resolving a Creation Controversy* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2004), 228.

⁴Lodahl, *ibid.*, 80.

⁵Lodahl, *ibid.*, 98-99.

⁶Ibid, 99.

⁷Ibid, 98.

⁸Ibid, 96.

then creatures have none, or if creatures have some power God cannot have all power. Perhaps there are other ways to understand God's power. For example, God may be omnipotent in that God is the source of all power and creatures have power only to the extent that God has unilaterally and freely given gifts of some power to them. However, even in giving the gift of power, God remains sovereign in the relationship with those creatures who have received a gift of power. God may choose to manipulate creaturely power, to restrict it, or even to take it away in some contexts. To restrict creaturely power does not necessarily mean to deny creatures their integrity as a whole.

While one might be attempted to agree with Lodahl in part, that God respects our freedom and seeks to persuade rather than to coerce and dominate, he has not justified why unilateral power is always contrary to love. Perhaps, for example, there are morally valid reasons to restrict power, or perhaps there are situations where unilateral power could be justified on the basis of justice, to make love more available to those who have been denied it, or to punish perpetrators of perpetual injustice. Another difficulty with Lodahl's perspective of divine power is that he seems to imply that unilateral power necessarily means a coercive use of power. While unilateral power may be coercive, it does not necessarily mean this. Rather, unilateral power need only suggest that God has an independent capacity to exercise power, that God may initiate power independently of any existing power. God is not limited metaphysically by the natural forces or powers of any world, and God may act in an independent and unilateral way if God so chooses.

Given Lodahl's denial of God's unilateral capacity to exercise power, he consistently assumes that an evolutionary perspective of the world's creation justifies a Whiteheadian process metaphysical interpretation of both God and the world. As he understands things, God's being is contained fully within the world as a whole (in an on-going sense). God does not stand outside of and independent from the general creative processes, but is fully present in and functions within the realm of the general metaphysical principles of creation itself. He, therefore, argues that process theologians begin with the world of our present experience.⁹ This world grows and reproduces. New things and new organisms come into existence, but always from the energies and materials of others. There is then, for Lodahl, no evidence of creation *ex nihilo* in our world. He believes that he is

⁹Ibid, 89.

entirely justified in making the conclusion that our present experience is a fundamental clue for intuiting the way the world has always been.¹⁰

In making such assertions, Lodahl's claims may go beyond empirical evidence. He seems to assume that the present world of experience is necessarily typical of what has always been for all previous worlds from an infinite past. Why is it not logically possible, however, that God may have created uniquely in the past and is not necessarily exercising divine power in the same way that God is doing in the present? Perhaps some distinction could be made between a unique creation and the divine preservation of nature. Lodahl appears to assume that, once God as the body of creation gains a power, this power will always be exercised in the present and into the eternal future. How would we know this?

One may argue that, while creation may reflect God's handiwork, it may not as a whole necessarily reflect in all of its facets what God may be like and what powers and abilities God has. In beginning with the assumption that the world is God's body, Lodahl presupposes the unitary nature of all metaphysical principles, that creation as a whole is a type of unitary and universal individual that is interconnected and functions like a connected "body." Undergirding this philosophy of the interconnectedness of all creation is his endorsement of a particular understanding of evolutionary cosmology, that not only did everything evolve through natural selection, but there is only one realm of existence, namely, nature, and that everything, including God, exists only in and through nature.

For Lodahl, there is nothing outside or beyond nature. Thus, there cannot be an independently existing being, God, who is present in nature and at the same time beyond and independent of nature. He seems to assume as a given the widely-held endorsement of evolutionary cosmology that automatically justifies his perspective that God is the "body" of all existence. Contrary to this argument, the traditional view of God as a self-existing being who is other than the world can also be entirely consistent with an evolutionary cosmology. Embracing evolutionary cosmology does not automatically justify a Whiteheadian perspective of God as the "body of creation."

God's Distinction and Independence From Creation

Lodahl does speak of God as transcending the world in some sense. However, he seems to interpret transcendence not as God's distinction

¹⁰Ibid.

over against creation but in terms of telos. That is, any snapshot of the world can never be an exhaustive picture of God since God is always moving the world forward to become something other than what it has been before. Lodahl refers to God's transcendence by analogy to Paul the apostle who stated that he forgets what lies behind him and strains forward to what is ahead. Applying this understanding to God, Lodahl argues that God as the maker and moulder of all things is calling and shaping the world into something new. Therefore, to live, move, and dwell in God is not to remain stagnant and satisfied with the past or present, but to be straining forward to what lies ahead.¹¹

Lodahl's interpretation of God's transcendence is open to the same criticism as is the perspective of Charles Hartshorne. Hartshorne attempts to overcome the difficulty that God is not the world, while still maintaining the view that God is all-inclusive actuality, by arguing that God transcends the world in an abstract, infinite, and necessary sense. For Hartshorne, the possibilities for God are infinitely more than any actual state of the world. If, therefore, the totality of actual being, just as it stands, is God, then God is completely bound by actuality, and actuality is completely bound by God.¹² Hartshorne's alternative to this is that the totality of actual being and of potential being has a "flexible self-identity" independent of its actual parts. Actuality in God is not an eternally fixed sum of a variable, although God is the only being who preserves an essential self-hood through change. There is continuity in God in the midst of time and flux, just as a person remains the same individual through the variety of life's experiences.¹³

In response to Hartshorne's interpretation, which is equally applicable to Lodahl's understanding, it would seem that neither thinker has overcome the pantheistic problem of equating God with the world if world is understood not as a fixed entity but as being in a constant state of change. Therefore, simply asserting that God is more than any particular world is only saying that the world has an infinite capacity to transcend itself, or its previous forms, as an "integrated individual." Still, in that distinction, God remains the world, for God's self-identity is totally derived from the world, even if an infinite number of particular worlds are involved. It is only that the world changes in relation to its previous

¹¹Lodahl, *ibid.*, 126.

¹²Charles Hartshorne, "Pantheism," *An Encyclopaedia of Religion*; ed., Vergilius Ferm (New York: The Philosophical Library, 1945), 558.

¹³*Ibid.*

forms. God, then, is “not” the world in that God is not strictly defined or limited by any particular world, whether past, present or future. Even Farley, who appears to generally support Hartshorne, recognizes this point. He says that, for Hartshorne, “God in his essence does not transcend ‘world as such,’ as it is God’s essence to have a world. There was no time when the world was not and God was.”¹⁴

A criticism of this panentheistic perspective is that God is not really able to give anything to creation that creation does not first experience in itself. It would seem that both God’s self-identity and mode of activity are passive in nature in the sense of having an independent identity and mode of existence. For example, God receives God’s mode of being from the world. However, God cannot give the world anything other than what creation realizes in itself. Hence, as Gunton has interpreted Hartshorne (and equally applicable to Lodahl), divine initiative understood as unilateral action is not necessary because all that the Bible attributes to divine initiative, including creation, covenant, incarnation, justification and consummation, are replaced by the necessary progress that process thought attributes to the cosmic process.¹⁵

Lodahl also speaks of the universal presence of God. He argues that John Wesley is correct that nothing is distant from God, that there cannot be any place where God is absent, and that God is the lover of creation’s most minute details.¹⁶ In Lodahl’s perspective, therefore, God is “intimately present” and does not know anything from a distance.¹⁷ Building on these assumptions, he understands both God’s transcendence and immanence as fully embodying the world. Where orthodox forms of Christianity speak of God’s otherness and distinction from creation, Lodahl interprets these ideas to mean that God is distant or outside of creation. He rejects the idea of the existence of an individual, a solitaire, insulated, self-enclosed monad,¹⁸ agreeing with Tillich that God should not be reduced to an identifiable and manageable factor in the world, to become an object among other objects.¹⁹

¹⁴Edward Farley, *The Transcendence of God: A Study in Contemporary Philosophical Theology* (London: The Epworth Press, 1962), 158.

¹⁵Colin Gunton, “Process Theology’s Concept of God: An Outline and Assessment,” *The Expository Times*, Vol. 84 (July, 1973), 295.

¹⁶Lodahl, *ibid*, 119.

¹⁷*Ibid*.

¹⁸*Ibid*, 121.

¹⁹*Ibid*, 43.

Lodahl's caricature of orthodox theology is somewhat distorted. He seems to imply that, for God to have self-existence that belongs only to God's self, God cannot be at the same time omnipresent and must exist necessarily outside of and distant from creation, a sort of spatial separation where one object exists and functions totally outside another. Lodahl, however, does not adequately defend this assumption; he only asserts it. By contrast, John Calvin, a staunch Reformation and Christian orthodox thinker, did not see a conflict between God's otherness and distinction from creation and God's care and compassion for the world. Calvin believed that God is not the world, that God existed prior to and independent of creation. Even so, he also insists that God is universally present in creation in a compassionate and caring way. Calvin, in fact, rejected the idea of a momentary Creator who completed creation once and for all time. Such a God, Calvin argues, would be cold and barren. Calvin describes God as the everlasting Governor and Preserver "not only in that he drives the celestial frame as well as its several parts by a universal motion, but also in that he sustains, nourishes, and cares for everything he has made, even to the last sparrow."²⁰

Lodahl uses very pastoral language to speak of God's love for the world as if to imply God's unilateral freedom and deliberate choice to love and to fully embody the world. Such a description of God, however, does not sit well with his process metaphysic in a thoroughly consistent way. He denies that God existed independently and prior to any creation. He also seems to deny that God has an independent sense of self-consciousness and will and purpose, that God has a divine mind and rationality that belong only to God, and that God has a unilateral capacity to act, think and feel. Since he denies God's capacity to act unilaterally,²¹ it would seem consistent that God does not have any unilateral capacity for self-thought and feelings or a unilateral capacity to determine what the divine will should be on any occasion. After all, God's body (the world) is made up of an infinite number of impulses received from creation. If God's consciousness is located in creation, how can it discern between the many competing claims received?

Lodahl contends that God does not have an eternally fixed will for the world. God's will is pliable, flexible, buoyant and ever adaptive to

²⁰John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. In 2 volumes (Vol. xx: Books 1.i to III.xix). *The Library of Christian Classics*. Vol. XX. Trans., John T. McNeill (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), 197-198.

²¹Lodahl, *ibid*, 97.

newly emerging conditions.²² While this perspective adequately addresses the problem of God having an immutable will, Lodahl does not have an adequate metaphysic to consistently justify how God is able to deliberately select and target the divine will in a manner that is clearly distinguishable from the creatures of God's world(s). If God does not have a unilateral and transcendent capacity to rationally reflect and chose from the myriad of impulses that God both receives from and gives to creation (in the sense of deliberate divine intention), how can it necessarily be argued that God's responses to creation are motivated by love and freely chosen? Love implies motive and deliberately chosen action designed for the good of others. If God does not have any unilateral capacity for thought, action or motive, how can we be sure that God is even capable of a loving and nurturing action?

Lodahl argues that God has from eternity been calling and luring the world into greater levels of complexity and of beauty.²³ God offers "initial aims." While he may assert that God's initial aims are always motivated by love, it is questionable that he can justify this given his process metaphysic. Lodahl says that God could have left the elements of our universe "at the barest puffs of existence."²⁴ For God to make such a decision or to do otherwise assumes some unilateral capacity to make that choice. Lodahl, however, does not want to recognize that God has a unilateral capacity for thought, action, or independent self-existence. It seems that the initial aims of God come only from within creation or from previously existing worlds. He seems to assume that the entire cosmic process is good and that God, as the ground of being and universally present in all of creation (as the body of the world), is by that very broad definition necessarily good in a metaphysical sense. Therefore, by logical extension, all initial aims received from creation (God) are calling the world forth to greater harmony.

Is this interpretation of goodness merely a metaphysical interpretation of goodness? If creation is good, will all of the impulses received from the world (God's body) also be good by definition? Is such a grandiose confidence in the world of creation justified? While nature may contain much beauty, it also contains much ugliness. To argue that the

²²Michael Lodahl, "To Whom Belong the Covenants? Whitehead, Wesley, and Wildly Diverse Religious Traditions? 193-209. In, *Deep Religious Pluralism*. Ed., David Ray Griffin (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 196.

²³Lodahl, *God of Nature and of Grace*, 88.

²⁴*Ibid.*

ugliness or evil in our world is only the result of creaturely free choice is too simplistic. There is much natural evil in our world. Looking at nature, one could quite validly make a myriad of assumptions. One may even question whether God is offering initial aims to overcome natural evil. Perhaps God has a higher good in allowing natural evil. Perhaps there is not a God at all and the perceived ugly parts of nature are simply a necessary part of the way our world has panned out over time.

There is no definite way of knowing or coming to any conclusions about the perceived ugly parts of our world apart from assuming a philosophy and metaphysic to try to explain them. Lodahl's process metaphysic can only define God's acts as good if he assumes that the very ground and essence of creation (as God's body) is also good, and by virtue of that "goodness" also loving. For God to have any sense of love as an intentional motivation, that motivation cannot be expressed unilaterally by God since God does not have a capacity to love unilaterally. Rather, in Lodahl's process metaphysic, God can only express feelings of love to the extent that the various creatures of creation also express love.

Creation Significantly Contributing To Its Own Making

Lodahl argues that God is always labouring with the world to achieve greater harmony and beauty.²⁵ God's labouring, however, is never unilateral.²⁶ The world is never under God's total control, especially if this rule means total dominance. God is present to each and every occasion of the world, but this presence is not an overwhelming determinant of each or of any occasion. God cannot be such a unilateral determinant since the world itself is also contributing to each occasion's becoming.²⁷ Moreover, each occasion of the world is exercising a measure of self-direction and self-determination. Given this vision of God's working in the world, Lodahl argues that it is a misconception that everything happens in accordance with a divine blueprint.²⁸ For Lodahl, both God and the world together are sources of their own novelty. God seeks to labour creatively and redemptively with the novelties the world offers. God does have a will for the world, but this will is ever flexible and adjusts to newly emerging conditions.²⁹

²⁵Lodahl, "To Whom Belong the Covenants?" 194.

²⁶Ibid, 194-195.

²⁷Ibid, 195.

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Ibid.

Lodahl's perspective draws valid attention to the point that God's preferred mode of operation in the world is to persuade, to respect creaturely integrity and to give degrees of freedom to the creatures rather than to coerce and dominate. Lodahl's interpretation presupposes an evolutionary cosmology of the world in which God is the full and complete embodiment of the world. However, it is questionable whether Lodahl is entirely consistent within this assumption since he refers to both God and the world, as if that God is somehow distinct from and other than the world. Lodahl even seems to speak of God as a person who relates to the world in a personal way. He argues, for instance, that God and creation interact in time. He describes God as the divine *ruach* who hovers upon the face of the deep. The Spirit of God is life-giving.³⁰ Even though he uses very pastoral language to describe God as personal and not being the world, he does not adequately explain in what ways God is different from although not separate from the world.

He does seem to suggest that God is other than the creatures. On this point, Lodahl seems consistent with Hartshorne who says that God is never the sum total of the world's parts or the totality of its various creatures together.³¹ For Hartshorne, there is something about the whole that always transcends that of the sum total of the parts. For Hartshorne, and consistently implied by Lodahl, God necessarily transcends the creatures because they are only fragments of the world, whereas God is all-inclusive reality. God is not the sum total of inclusive reality added together as parts, but inclusive reality that functions as a whole, encompassing all worlds together, including all past, present and future worlds as they develop.³²

Given this context, how is God able to act, think and feel in the world when God does not have a unilateral capacity to do anything? Building on Lodahl's theology, it would seem that, if God has a mind, it is not an independently functioning mind outside of the world like the mind of a creature that is different from other creatures. Rather, God is the all-encompassing mind of the world that can only express and know itself through the collective and individual intelligences which already exist in the world. So, when God provides initial aims to each occasion of

³⁰Ibid, 196.

³¹Charles Hartshorne, *Natural Theology for Our Time* (LaSalle, Illinois: Open Court Publishing Company, 1967), 6, 38, 104.

³²Ibid.

creativity, these may only be communicated through the minds or intelligences of those creatures which are already in creation or potentially within creation. God's initial aims can only come from within the world of creation. They cannot be communicated by an intelligence that exists outside of creation since there is nothing outside of creation. Epistemologically, is it really possible to know and distinguish between aims that come from creatures and those which come from God since God necessarily works only in and through the world and its creatures?

Lodahl also seems to speak almost romantically about the world's capacity to co-create itself with God, as if to assume that the various creatures that make up our world are participating significantly in their own making. He may infer that the creatures have a significant sense of freedom in creating who and what they are becoming. Lodahl writes: "Since all creatures, including human beings, participate with God in their own making, God never begins with a clean slate: God works with the world as it is in order to lead it toward what it can be."³³ His statement that the world participates in its "own making" seems very much exaggerated. He is consistent in his belief in evolutionary theory that the world develops entirely from the natural processes of natural selection, randomness and chance and therefore that the mechanisms of evolution are embodied entirely from within nature itself. There is no need for a supernatural agency to create a world from any process outside of the world itself.

Lodahl's use of evolutionary theory to justify the conclusion that the world participates significantly in its "own making" is at best simplistic and over romanticized. Building on Darwinian evolutionary theory, there is much that is predetermined by both genetics and environment. The struggle of the creatures to survive is in the context of a world that is thrust upon them. Many responses to the struggle to survive are at least arguably based on instinct, not freedom of choice. The weapons of self-defence and/or aggression of the world's various creatures are more commonly inherited than chosen. The bodies creatures inherit are provided by nature and not chosen. Although the creatures that best adapt to their environments are more likely to survive in the longer term, this does not necessarily imply that the creatures are "self-determining" their destinies. Perhaps in the very struggle to survive, it is less a question of self-determination and more what attributes creatures already possess that either

³³Lodahl, *"To Whom Belong the Covenants?"* 197.

better equip them to survive or reduce their chances of survival. It could be argued, therefore, that it is predeterminism more than choice and self-determination that shape the world in which creatures live.

Lodahl's position seems to assume that the world as an integrated whole (God) works for the betterment of its parts. Parts or creatures are only fragments of the whole and may only seek their own interests. Human beings and, in fact, the rest of the world, make their own responses to the subtle calling of God.³⁴ He argues that God's creative and sustaining activity in the world assumes the immediate presence of God in the whole of creation, a presence that does not overwhelm or negate "creaturely integrity and energies."³⁵ His appreciation for the integrity and persuasive nature of God's power is to be respected as an alternative to God exercising brute force and a tight-fisted rule over creation. A difficulty with this perspective is not so much with the view that God exercises persuasive power, but with the process metaphysic in which God's power is embedded.

Why is it that the whole is always looking out for the good of the parts? Is there necessarily a working and active whole embedded in nature itself that continuously works with the fragments or parts of creation for the benefit of the whole? What scientific evidence is there for this? Is there some sense of integration within the world only because of a hierarchy of power within creation and an interdependency of one part to another for survival, where the higher powers tend to dominate the lower powers into submission? Is the idea of God as the ground of being only an abstraction, an arbitrary philosophical construction?

What independent rational intelligence to make decisions for the good of the whole does this whole (God) have if God does not have an independent mind from which to reflect and justify what is good? If there is any sense of a universal mind in the whole to ensure a degree of consistency in how God works for the betterment of the whole, how would this universal mind function since the whole only exists and works through the fragments or many minds that together function as the whole? What rational and independent capacity would God have to decide between the many impulses received from the many minds of God's creation? Moreover, if the parts or fragments of the world are capable of corruption, by what means is God as the body of these parts able to filter out moral evil

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Ibid, 199.

within the divine self? If the whole is able to filter out moral evil from the many impulses that it is receiving from its parts, then it would seem necessary that God have some unilateral capacity to think, feel, and act independently in a consciously and deliberately chosen fashion.

God in Lodahl's theology may be the universality, the ground of consciousness in the world. However, without a center of universal consciousness, by what means is God able to filter out the moral evil that is received from the myriad of contributions made by individual consciousness within the world (the "body of God")? God must in some sense have a significant degree of unilateral reasoning capacity to decipher between what is good for the body and what is harmful to it, regardless of the degree of autonomy of individual creatures. In orthodox Christianity, God has an independent existence and an independent divine mind and is able to reflect on, deliberately choose what is good, and determine and resist what is evil over against the more selfish desires of the creation's creatures.

God and Creation Existing Eternally Together

Lodahl agrees with creation *ex nihilo* on only one point; that nothing exists apart from God's creative will and power.³⁶ However, he insists that creation *ex nihilo* should be rejected as a statement about the original conditions of creation since God and the world have mutually and eternally existed together.³⁷ Lodahl seems to assume that this is logically necessary because God's nature is always self-existing love, and must necessarily express that love through reciprocal love by creating worlds and being eternally enriched by them. He says, "If . . . it is the very nature of God to be the outflow of self-giving, other-receiving, empowering Love, then it makes theological sense to speculate that God is indeed everlastingly creating world upon world."³⁸

The difficulty with Lodahl's perspective is that he seems to assume that it is metaphysically necessary for God to create. While God creates from love, God's love cannot really choose not to create since the world is God's body and God cannot choose to remain stagnant. Lodahl claims that creation *ex nihilo* is based on the assumption that there is no element or power that is ultimately outside of God's purview.³⁹ But this is not the

³⁶Lodahl, *God of Nature and of Grace*, 82.

³⁷Ibid, 87.

³⁸Ibid, 100.

³⁹Ibid., 82.

whole point to creation *ex nihilo*. This doctrine also assumes that God exists independently from creation, that God transcends the world, that God existed prior to any creation and could continue to exist even if all worlds created by God ceased to exist. For Barth, God is able to freely choose to create; not from necessity but from love.⁴⁰

Lodahl, of course, rejects an orthodox understanding of God such as is expressed in Barth's writings. He seems to assume that an orthodox view of God puts God at a distance from the world. If, therefore, God is not the body of the world, but independent of it, God cannot participate and share in the suffering of creation except as an empathic but distant observer. He argues that the notion of God's presence in and throughout the universe challenges portraits of God as "up there," "out there," or ruling over everything "from a distance."⁴¹ In reaching this sort of conclusion, he assumes that, to suffer with something, one must at the same time be ontologically and physically connected to it.⁴² To the contrary, it may reasonably be argued that one may feel a deep emotional connection to another without being physically connected. In fact, an orthodox view of God may offer a much stronger understanding of the love of God than the process alternative. In process metaphysics, God must love since the God-self is ontologically joined to the world and can only exist in and through the world. In orthodox forms of Christian faith, God could totally abandon the world but has freely chosen to love it and to incarnate the God-self in it through the Son. In a process metaphysic, God must love from necessity, whereas from a traditional view, God freely chooses to love the world even though God could give up on it and abandon it. God's love in orthodox theology is not so compelling that God no longer has a sense of choice. The Bible speaks of God "giving up" and no longer continuing to "strive with" those who do wickedly. When God loves, it is freely chosen and this love is made all the more powerful in the context where we know and understand that God could truly abandon us.

Lodahl also assumes that God as love means that God must be continuously creating new worlds. Why should this necessarily be so even if God is love? Perhaps God in God's freedom could choose to create an occasional world. This would not have to mean that, when God stopped

⁴⁰Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*. Vol. 3. Part 1. *The Doctrine of Creation*. Trans., J.W. Edwards; O. Bussey; H. Knight (Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 1958), 70.

⁴¹Lodahl, *God of Nature and of Grace*, 113.

⁴²*Ibid*, 119-120.

creating a world, God stops loving. Perhaps more relevant to the point of whether God is love is not so much whether God is continuously creating worlds but the sort of relationship God sustains with the worlds that God has created and will likely continue to create.

Lodahl may be subtly redefining the meaning of “create” to mean not only the shaping and re-creating of existing and new worlds, but also to be, to act, even to show an act of love. If this is the definition implied by Lodahl’s interpretation of God’s endless creativity, of creating world upon world, then it would be impossible for God not to create, for in doing anything at all God must create. However, when this writer speaks of God as creating a world, this only needs to mean the creation of something such as our universe that is not God. In the context of this more narrow definition, there is no metaphysical need for God to be continuously creating world upon world unless God so chooses. If God chooses only to create an occasional world, such as our universe, this in no way implies that God is something less than supremely loving. As stated, what is fundamentally important is the kind of loving and nurturing relationship God has maintained with the worlds that are being created.

Why is it not possible that God existed prior to any creation if God is self-existent? In Lodahl’s theology, it is not possible for God to exist prior to creation or independently of creation because the world is God’s body and therefore God cannot exist apart from within creation itself. Hence, his assumption is that God must be continuously creating since to stop creating would necessarily mean that God has stopped enriching the divine self and the worlds that are being created. Lodahl’s interpretation appears to depend on the broad definition of creation, namely that to act in any way is to create. It seems that, in Lodahl’s perspective, if it were theoretically possible for God to stop creating, then both all worlds and God would cease to exist—new worlds would not be created and existing worlds would not be sustained and created anew. If all worlds ceased to exist, God would lose God’s body. As long as there is any world at all, God will exist, no matter how rudimentary and primitive the functioning of these worlds.

A primary difficulty with Lodahl’s perspective is that who God is at any one time is dependent on the types of worlds that exist and the extent of their capabilities. In less primitive worlds in comparison to our own God can only do what these primitive worlds can do and can only do more as they develop. God must therefore acquire both new and developing capabilities from any and all worlds but God can only do more than

God can do now as the worlds of God's creation also develop. It seems, therefore, that God and God's worlds are mutually dependent and must grow together in order to develop their capabilities. This suggests that the quality and nature of God's existence is very dependent on the various worlds that exist in any point in time. If, say, most things ceased to exist through whatever catastrophic cause, to what degree would God's self be very impoverished by the loss of a significant number of worlds? If the surviving worlds were very primitive in comparison to existing universes, or other worlds, would God's capacities be similarly reduced if they did not continue to exist in at least some other world? If only primitive worlds remained, where God sustained significant loss of memories (in the sense that capacities or their potential were no longer contained in at least one existing world) would God's powers also be significantly reduced? By contrast, in an orthodox view, while God may choose to be enriched by the worlds God has created, God is nevertheless not dependent on the created universes and worlds for God's own existence or could even exist without any creation.

God and Theodicy: The Problem of God's Power

Lodahl claims that Whitehead's process theology offers a solution to the problem of evil. In a process view, God is doing the best that God is able to achieve with the worlds that are being created.⁴³ Creatures of God's creation are self-determining and therefore are able to thwart the creative purposes of God.⁴⁴ In an important way, process theology has reduced God's apparent responsibility for evil. It also has reduced the Christian concept of hope, namely God's power to finally triumph over evil. In a process view, evil is likely to continue as long as anything exists since God is doing the best that can be achieved. There can be no guaranteed eschaton since a radical in breaking into our world to overcome and eradicate evil is not possible.

Lodahl appears to deny God's unilateral power to act in resurrection. He adopts Schubert Ogden's concept of "objective immortality" which denies any need for individual or subjective immortality of the human person existing after death as a conscious, self-aware intelligence.⁴⁵ In the context where he appears to be sympathetic towards Ogden's concept of

⁴³Lodahl, 88.

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵Ibid, 224.

“objective immortality,” Lodahl writes: “The only ‘resurrection’ that our universe needs is one that it is always undergoing by being lovingly experienced and somehow integrated into the unimaginably rich life of the omniscient God. It is a kind of resurrection in God.”⁴⁶

On the issue of God’s power, Lodahl does not appreciate the diversity in thinking about God’s power. For him, the contrast is between process Whiteheadian thought, a God who is limited in power and doing the best that God can, and traditional theology in which God is all powerful. Neither alternative is persuasive. As a middle ground position, God may be viewed as sovereign to the extent that God will achieve God’s ultimate purposes by genuine struggle against evil. While God has sufficient power to ultimately prevail, God has to a significant degree limited or significantly surrendered some of the divine power by virtue of giving creation varying degrees of free will. Hence, God’s purposes are often thwarted in our world. This writer is therefore more persuaded by an “Openness” view of God (such as expressed by Clark Pinnock⁴⁷) which better explains God’s self-existence, presence and unilateral capacity for action, will, and purpose in our world. Lodahl’s process view of God seems to diminish the traditional view of Christian hope and denies that God is actually self-existent in an unilateral and independent sense.

Conclusion

If one is contemplating a choice between Whiteheadian metaphysics and atheism, it could be argued that atheism is a more robust option because it is the more rigorously consistent of the two theories. Even in atheism it is feasible to view the world as an integrated body of some kind, but there is no necessity at all to call this integration “God” or even what creation has turned out to be. For atheism, it is simply the case that the processes of evolution have forged a degree of interconnectedness between the numerous life forms that make up our world. Atheism can also recognize that past worlds are contributing to present and future worlds, but there is no metaphysical need to call this shaping inherently good, although much good and evil will likely result from the ever-evolving processes of both old and developing worlds. There is, furthermore, no metaphysical problem of evil in atheism since there is no God to blame.

⁴⁶Ibid, 225.

⁴⁷Clark Pinnock and others, *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* (Illinois, USA: Inter Varsity Press, 1994), 1ff.

Perhaps Whiteheadian process theologians need a "God" concept since the brute world by itself may not appear to be very loving and caring, apart from the functional and emotional value of the assumption of such a God to some of us humans. Does the concept of a God who has no power to think, act, or even exist unilaterally and independently from the body, the "world," in reality actually offer any real sense of hope in the face of this world's suffering? Is it even useful to maintain the notion of "God" in process metaphysics when God does not actually exist in an independent and unilateral sense from the world? In an orthodox Christian vision, God's unilateral existence and independence from creation means that God can freely seek to love, not from a metaphysical necessity, but from an intentionally chosen and free act to love. Within an orthodox perspective, God exists independently from the world, is unilaterally able to act, think and feel, and thus is able to give us hope beyond what we can achieve for ourselves, beyond what we can "self-determine," both in this world and in whatever world is yet to come.

A RESPONSE TO RODNEY ENDERBY

by

Michael Lodahl

Rodney Enderby's critique of my thinking, particularly as I offer it in *God of Nature and of Grace* (hereafter *GNG*), suffers from a serious flaw. He assumes that a—or perhaps even *the*—central theme in *GNG* is “the notion that God is the body of creation.” I believe there is paltry support in *GNG* for Enderby's identification of this idea as particularly critical to the book's vision. For Enderby, this allegedly central theme leads to the conclusion that “God . . . does not stand outside of nature but is fully embedded within nature.” However, I do not believe my book stakes this claim.

One of the reasons my book makes no such claim is that, generally, I do not intend theological language to function in the way(s) that Enderby appears to assume. I am far less interested in making definitive statements regarding the absolute veracity of any given theological idea, and far more interested in its allusive, evocative, or generative possibilities. For me, theological writing is less about epistemological exactitude, and more about asking, perhaps even playfully, “What if?” This should not be interpreted as implying that “anything goes,” nor as a lack of concern for coherence and consistency. I am indeed concerned for such characteristics as contributing to good theology. But I also think it important for us to maintain an appropriate humility regarding the nature of our theological claims and the profound inadequacies of human language *vis a vis* God, the Holy Mystery.

In that light, it may be helpful to attend to the (only) two relatively brief passages in *GNG* where I did explore the imagery of “the world as God's body.” I mention in chapter 4 Sallie McFague's provocative suggestion that “Christians ought to reflect on the thought-model of the world as ‘the body of God’” (120). This is not the prose of hard claims being offered as propositional truth. Later in the same paragraph I write, “Admittedly, Wesley never suggested that we think of the world as God's body—but how different is that notion from one that Wesley *did* experiment with: God as the world's soul”? (120). Again, this is far from my

insisting upon some hardened proposition; instead, it's a question: "How different?" Further, it is an open question. Perhaps the right answer to the question would end up being "very different." Honestly, I am not certain, and I did not attempt an exhaustive answer. I do take seriously the verb "experiment," i.e., that Wesley did experiment with the imagery of God as the *anima mundi*—and he played with this phrase more than once in his writing. Certainly for me it is an experiment, not a decree.

I proceed to question the present helpfulness of the phrase "God is the soul of the world" on the premise that most contemporary theologians and biblical scholars are not likely to assume so radical a soul/body dualism as Wesley did. "Nonetheless," I add, "the notion of God as the 'soul of the world' may still exercise some evocative power for us" (121-122). That statement gets closer to what I assume to be a primary function of theological prose. Not long after, I suggest that careful reflection upon the traditional doctrines of divine omnipresence and omniscience could lead us "to *something like* McFague's model of the universe as God's body" (122). This language hardly implies an aim of theological exactitude. It is, therefore, difficult to discern why Enderby claims this to be a "central notion" in the book.

With this important proviso in place, I will follow Enderby's own rubric of topical headings in order to facilitate clarity in my responses to his critiques.

The Role of Science

Under this heading, Enderby accuses me of challenging "the idea that God can exist without a world, that God existed prior to any beginning of a first world"—and that I issue this challenge on the basis of my assumptions about science. I regret that he interpreted me in this way, but I also do not believe the book lends itself to such a reading. If I offer this as a suggestion, I do so far more on theological grounds and really not on scientific grounds at all. It has to do with speculations that can be traced in Christian thought at least as far back as Origen: that God, as creative and fecund Love, has (perhaps) never not been the Creator of worlds. Note the difference between Enderby's characterization of my claim and his own quotation of my actual words. He first writes, "For Lodahl, there was never a time when there was only God"; he then cites GNG, "It is logically possible. . . . It is not at all impossible that a creator deity has everlastingly been the creator of worlds. . . ." In the text I am offering possibilities for thought; I am not trying to construct hardened systems for thought.

Further, none of this logically leads, so far as I can discern, to the idea Enderby attributes to me that “God only exists in creation, not in any sense outside of it.” I not only never made such a claim, I simply do not see it even implied in the text. On the other hand, I think he rightly characterizes my convictions when he writes, “Lodahl asserts that a Wesleyan view of God’s power suggests that God cannot exercise power unilaterally, not because God is metaphysically limited in power but because the use of such power is contrary to God’s character of self-emptying and compassionate love.” And this is precisely the point. This is not primarily about hewing to a process metaphysic, as much as I have learned from and been inspired and challenged by writings in this tradition. Nor is it not about the deliverances of the natural sciences, important as I believe these to be for theological reflection. Instead, this is about what I take by faith to be the character of God as given to us in and through Jesus Christ.

God’s Distinction and Independence From Creation

I appreciate and affirm the very ideas that Enderby champions in his lovely citation from John Calvin. Indeed, in *GNG* I quoted Calvin to similar effect: “The world is daily renewed, because God sendeth forth his spirit. In the propagation of living creatures, we doubtless see continually a new creation of the world. . . . God sendeth forth [God’s] spirit . . . and as soon as he has sent it forth, all things are created. In this way, what was his own he makes to be ours” (*GNG* 45).

Creation Significantly Contributing To Its Own Making

Hopefully, it is now clear that Enderby misinterprets me when he writes that I “presuppose an evolutionary cosmology of the world in which God is the full and complete embodiment of the world.” In fact, I am entirely unsure as to what such a rendering of the God-world relation would entail; even if I were to claim that the world is the embodiment of God, surely that would not also mean that God is the embodiment of the world! Thus, it really is no surprise, let alone inconsistent, that I would suggest in *GNG* that “God is somehow distinct from and other than the world.” It is only Enderby’s strong misreading of my book that would make this surprising.

Since Enderby insists that I fail “adequately [to] explain in what ways God is different from although not separate from the world,” allow me to attempt to remedy this. As a Christian theologian, when I say or speak

“God” I do mean (among many other things) the Creator of all things, “visible and invisible,” revealed to us decisively and with finality in the person, words and works of Jesus the Christ. That revelation, rooted as it is (and must be) in the history and traditions of Israel, suggests strongly that God the Creator is pleased to dwell intimately with, and within, the creation in a kind of covenantal relation. God is “Immanuel,” God *truly* with us—and “us” must mean all of creation. I do not know if “God necessarily works only in and through the world and its creatures,” as Enderby believes I claim, but I do believe that the biblical and Christological witness point us toward God as the Creator who, in great and deep love, seeks to labor faithfully in and through the world and its creatures. For that reason, I tend to believe that God dwells with creation in a truly timeless manner.

Such a vision of God, I argue, suggests that God allows the creaturely realm a significant degree of agency (for lack of better terms) in the ways it goes about its becoming. An evolutionary history of the universe, including our planet, would seem to bear this out. But Enderby is wrong to think that I assume this means that every creature “chooses” or “determines” itself. He mentions the important factors of genetics and environment, as well he should. I would only add that these are precisely the sorts of creaturely realities I have in mind. This is about the realm of creation “making itself” (not in an absolute sense, for God is the Creator) through its own creaturely contributions over the eons of the universe’s ongoing life. Of course, there is a great deal of “predeterminism” in the existence of every creature. I am much less interested in “freedom of choice” than in acknowledging that all creatures exercise true agency in relation to all others.

God and Creation Existing Externally Together

Enderby inquires, “Why is it not possible that God existed prior to any creation if God is self-existent?” It is possible. I never said once that such a state of affairs is not possible. He then proceeds to answer his own question: “In Lodahl’s theology, it is not possible for God to exist prior to creation or independently of creation because the world is God’s body and therefore God cannot exist apart from within creation itself.” I certainly never have written or believed that “God cannot exist apart from within creation itself.” Instead, I am only suggesting the possibility that God the Creator has never not been God the Creator. It has nothing to do with God needing a creation to provide a “body” for God. It has every-

thing to do with speculations regarding the character of God as self-giving, other-receiving, “pure unbounded” Love.

God and Theodicy: The Problem of God’s Power

Enderby is, I think, correct to observe that “process theology has reduced God’s apparent responsibility for evil. It also has reduced the Christian concept of hope, namely God’s power to finally triumph over evil.” This is, at best, a double-edged sword in process thought. I am aware that this is an area in which I am quite conceivably vulnerable. But again, for me this is much less about adopting or defending a process metaphysic and much more about wondering about God’s character and ultimate purposes. If God our Maker is Love, and intends (hopes?) to recreate and renew creatures (humans particularly, so far as we know) in love, then how does God go about this labour of love? *How* might God propose “to finally triumph over evil”? This is my question.

I am not at all certain where Enderby gets the idea that I “adopt Schubert Ogden’s concept of ‘objective immortality’ which denies any need for individual or subjective immortality of the human person existing after death as a conscious, self-aware intelligence.” Granted, I recount Ogden’s ideas as appreciatively as I can; but I also write at length (*GNG* 227-229) about why the notion of objective immortality is entirely insufficient from a truly Christian perspective.

Conclusion

I end *GNG* with a quotation from the conclusion of John Wesley’s sermon *The New Creation*: “And to crown all, there will be a deep, an intimate, an uninterrupted union with God; a constant communion with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ, through the Spirit; a continual enjoyment of the Three-One God, and of all the creatures in him!” I will only add here: this too is my hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

**HOLINESS SIMPLICITER:
A WESLEYAN ENGAGEMENT AND PROPOSAL
IN LIGHT OF JOHN WEBSTER'S TRINITARIAN
DOGMATICS OF HOLINESS[†]**

by

Daniel Castelo

I believe the infinite and eternal Spirit of God, equal with the Father and the Son, to be not only perfectly holy in Himself, but the immediate cause of all holiness in us; enlightening our understandings, rectifying our wills and affections, renewing our natures, uniting our persons to Christ, assuring us of the adoption of sons, leading us in our actions; purifying and sanctifying our souls and bodies, to a full and eternal enjoyment of God.¹

Outside of the constituencies associated with the Wesleyan Theological Society, one could say that holiness is not a topic considered with much frequency in theology proper (i.e., the doctrine of God). For a theme that is often labeled the chief attribute or the very essence of God, one wonders why the paucity of theological reflection on holiness persists. Any number of culprits could be pointed out, including the favoring of love among divine attributes, a latent supersessionism within the doctrine of God, modern-day therapeutic culture, guilt-laden portrayals of soteriology, and others. Nevertheless, too much is at stake to allow this oversight to continue. Holiness is at the heart of a biblically and theologically salutary account of the Christian God and this God's purposes within the creation. Those within the Wesleyan tradition may appreciate this importance more than some, but at stake are matters greater than any particular theological sub-tradition's sensibilities and scope.

[†]I wish to thank those associated with the Duke Summer Wesley Seminar, particularly Professors Richard P. Heitzenrater and Randy Maddox, for the institutional and collegial support to pursue much of the research underlying this essay.

¹"Letter to a Roman Catholic" in John Telford, ed., *The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley* (London: Epworth Press, 1931), III, p. 9.

Such a state of affairs makes a work like John Webster's *Holiness* an exceptional volume.² In a very concise manner, similar in style to his "dogmatic sketch" of Holy Scripture,³ Webster grants his readers a "small exercise in dogmatic theology, a *trinitarian dogmatics of holiness*." Within the first two chapters, Webster offers a refreshing and illuminating portrayal of the way theology can be understood as the "exercise of holy reason" (chapter 1) and provides glimpses of what is implied by a trinitarian dogmatics of holiness (chapter 2). He concludes by drawing out the implications of his vision for the church (chapter 3) and the Christian life (chapter 4). Wesleyans should take seriously Webster's proposals since some of the reflections he entertains in *Holiness* are of a species that one rarely finds regarding a topic that is hailed by so many (at least formally) as pivotal for the theological task. Nevertheless, Wesleyans cannot endorse Webster's agenda completely without compromising significant features of how they would envision a trinitarian dogmatics of holiness. An engagement, therefore, is worthwhile in order that congruencies and divergences can be noted for the good of Wesleyan and Reformed believers particularly, but also the church as a whole. Furthermore, this kind of endeavor can help Wesleyans engage the constructive side of a trinitarian dogmatics of holiness in a more concerted way, and the need for such proposals is pressing given the contested coherence and viability of Wesleyan theology generally.

The Nature of the Theological Task

Webster begins his text with a sobering reflection on the holiness of the theological task itself. "We need to understand," he remarks, "that theological thinking *about* holiness is itself an exercise *of* holiness."⁴ Such a gesture points to the theme of holy reasoning, which is at the heart of all dogmatic reflection: "Theology is an aspect of the sanctification of reason, that is, of the process in which reason is put to death and made alive by the terrifying and merciful presence of the holy God."⁵ The point is well taken because Webster is aware of the dangers: Without the sanctifi-

²*Holiness* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003).

³*Holy Scripture: A Dogmatic Sketch* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). Webster admits that working through this text led him to the composition of *Holiness*.

⁴*Holiness*, 8.

⁵*Holiness*, 8. Although Webster will have more to say on holy reason in an upcoming work, with *Holiness* he seems to assume reason to be definable in similar ways to Wesley: as a capacity or function of the intellectual life. This view

cation of reason (i.e., its mortification and vivification) before and by the presence of God, theological reflection can become idolatrous; it can delve into correlational or comparative endeavors that analyze phenomenological experiences of the numinous that at their heart can be projectionist without any clear norm or criterion to guide them.

Unlike what modernity would have, reason is not some neutral faculty that can be employed and appealed to by anyone. Archaeologists of knowledge would recognize that reason is context-dependent and that appealing to an account of reason, however universal it portends to be, often serves the covert exercise of power.⁶ In this sense, Webster calls for reason's service only after it has been chastened and transformed by the triune God. In Webster's opinion, reason operates theologically out of a necessary contingency, one that allows for its contribution only after God's Spirit has torn it down and built it back up.

As a product of the Enlightenment period, it is true that John Wesley had a cultural proclivity to regard reason highly. The most telling indication of this sensibility is his oft-repeated claim that faith is always consistent with reason.⁷ His account of reason largely evaluated it as context-independent, for he thought of it as a faculty of the human soul that exerted itself through simple apprehension, judgment, and discourse.⁸

is possible, no doubt, but it is contentious in that it at least initially assumes the viability and coherence of something a-contextually referred to as "reason" that in turn requires sanctification. In other words, the self-standing notion of "reason" itself is problematic given late-modern sensibilities (and Webster is well aware of these as he relates them in chapter 1 of *Confessing God* [London: T & T Clark, 2005]). With its subsequent sanctification, however, Webster does grant reason a context and tradition-based logicity that is not implicitly self-deriving; therefore, perhaps what is needed in a more sustained fashion from Webster is an account of sinful or fallen rationality.

⁶One effort that engages in this kind of work is Alasdair MacIntyre's *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988).

⁷See for instance *The Case of Reason Impartially Considered* in Albert C. Outler, ed., *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley, volumes 1-4* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984-1987), II, 593. All subsequent references to Wesley's sermons will be drawn from this edition and indicated by volume and page number alongside the sermon title in italics.

⁸*The Case of Reason Impartially Considered*, II, 590. For surveys, see Randy Maddox, *Responsible Grace* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 40-44 and Rebekah H. Miles, "The Instrumental Role of Reason," in W. Stephen Gunter, et. al., eds. *Wesley and the Quadrilateral* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997), 77-106.

His appeal to reason (usually alongside Scripture) was pivotal for his arguments against enthusiasm as well as antinomianism. In this sense, there is no denying that the sensibilities at play between Webster and Wesley are significantly different, for these are forged not simply from varying theological impulses, but are also indicative of different cultural and philosophical contexts, ones separated by centuries.

And yet, Wesley wished to acknowledge limits to what reason could do. In his estimation reason was dangerously idolized (a remarkable claim from a person in the eighteenth century),⁹ and it could not produce either the theological virtues or happiness. Despite the obvious pressure to pursue the matter in a unilateral way, he was keen to walk a middle path between devaluing and excessively esteeming reason. For instance, Webster's emphasis on the contingency of reason's possibilities finds resonances in Wesley; as the latter noted, "Is it not reason (assisted by the Holy Ghost) which enables us to understand what the Holy Scriptures declare concerning the being and attributes of God?"¹⁰ Also, Wesley remarks to those who would undervalue reason, "Unless you willfully shut your eyes, you cannot but see of what service [reason] is both in laying the foundation of true religion, under the guidance of the Spirit of God, and in raising the whole superstructure."¹¹ Therefore, admittedly two different accounts of reason are at play in Webster and Wesley. For the former, reason has to be reconciled to God since it has sinful proclivities; for the latter, reason requires illumination or awakening because of its limits. And yet both would admit that a pneumatological shaping and work are required for reason to attain its proper and fitting function in apprehending the holy mysteries.

A key departure, however, between these two figures would most likely take place in terms of how and to what degree this pneumatological action is understood within the life of the church. To summarize some of Webster's orienting concerns, a holy theology has a specific context and content (the revelatory presence of the Holy Trinity) as set forth through a particular norm and limit (Holy Scripture) that takes place within a specific modality (prayerful dependence upon the Holy Spirit) among a certain fellowship (the holy people of God) for a distinct purpose (the sanctifying of God's name). In most of these aspects, Webster sets out the preliminaries

⁹*The Circumcision of the Heart*, I, 410.

¹⁰*The Case of Reason Impartially Considered*, II, 592.

¹¹*The Case of Reason Impartially Considered*, II, 599.

associated with his trinitarian dogmatics of holiness in ways Wesleyans would find agreeable, if not helpful and edifying. The one feature of Webster's first chapter that Wesleyans would probably want to press would be the way Webster frames the modality in which a theology of holiness is pursued (namely through a pneumatological conditionedness) and what that would mean for the theologian pursuing the theological task.

If reason is to be reconciled to God, a matter worth pursuing would be: And what is the nature of the transformation required? Webster repeatedly admits the fallen nature of reason and its need to be reconciled to God in order to be put to use for holy ends; however, remarkable in this elaboration is the truncated nature of the transformation itself: it extends to reason *qua* reason. The matter becomes a bit clearer when one reconsiders how Webster defines dogmatics in the first place: "Dogmatics is that delightful activity in which the Church praises God by ordering its *thinking* towards the gospel of Christ."¹² In other words, dogmatics for Webster is an intellectual enterprise and as such requires the sanctification of its operational mechanisms for it to serve the purposes of God.

Webster continues in this section by citing the famous dictum of Barth that the first and basic act of theological work is prayer,¹³ one that Webster acknowledges could sound strange, ludicrous, or overly mythologized and idealized when speaking of "intellectual work," i.e., "rational activities which make up the study of divinity."¹⁴ He goes on to say, "And faced with this suspicion, might it not be less embarrassing to make a much softer claim—about the pious disposition or spiritual virtues of the theologian? But talk of theology as the exercise of holy reason is not just talk of a certain setting of the theologian's affections; in the last analysis, holiness is not a psychological or a religious quantity. Reason is holy because God acts upon reason, arresting its plunge into error and freeing it from its bondage to our corrupt wills and our hostility to God."¹⁵

¹²*Holiness*, 8 (emphasis added).

¹³Karl Barth, *Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963), 160. Barth makes a related point early in the *Church Dogmatics*: "We simply confess the mystery which underlies it, and we merely repeat the statement that dogmatics is possible only as an act of faith, when we point to prayer as the attitude without which there can be no dogmatic work" (G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, eds., *Church Dogmatics*, I/1 [Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1975], 23).

¹⁴*Holiness*, 24-25.

¹⁵*Holiness*, 25.

The Wesleyan emphasis would be quite clear and distinct at this juncture. By defining dogmatics as primarily an intellectual endeavor, Webster points to the need for reason's transformation, but all the while this account of reason presents it in disembodied form; it would seem that *mortificatio et vivificatio* are not simply acts that relate to reason *per se* but more generally to the practitioner of holy reason. The matter is not necessarily reducible to psychological or religious quantities; one need not engage in a kind of holy metrics here for the point to stand nevertheless. Reason can only be considered as a function of human bodies; reason is an operation of human selves in all of their multifunctional capacities. Therefore, if the sanctification of reason is required prolegomenally for the pursuit of a trinitarian dogmatics of holiness, it is difficult to come away from that acknowledgment without attending to the sanctification of the practitioner of holy reason, the circumcision of this one's heart, and to do so intentionally at this prolegomenal stage.¹⁶ A Wesleyan concern would run thus: Do not the affections,¹⁷ the spiritual senses, and the overall spiritual life of the theologian significantly shape the theological task when at stake in this endeavoring is the apprehension of the Holy One of Israel, the one who commands love as the primary disposition to have both in relation to God's very self and one's neighbor?¹⁸

¹⁶Wesley's "heart theology" is not simply the repetition of a pious sensibility; it emerges from a lineage of reflection that recognizes the integrated nature of the intellect, will, and affections. The trajectory would include figures like Augustine and Pascal, as James R. Peters has recently documented in his study *The Logic of the Heart* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009). In Peters' estimation, reason is "radically embedded" in that for it to function properly it has to be "informed by the intuitions of the heart as it is nurtured by historically constituted traditions of belief and practice" (16). In this manner, Peters is navigating a path between the Enlightenment's emphasis on rational autonomy and postmodernity's poetics of self-creation.

¹⁷And of course, the account of the affections operative here is specifically Wesleyan and not the mishmash of psychobabble that is standard fare in our contemporary environs. For a work that documents the transitions of affective language within the Anglophone world, see Thomas Dixon, *From Passions to Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

¹⁸A beautiful section from *The Circumcision of the Heart* is apropos here: "Here then is the sum of the perfect law: this is the true 'circumcision of the heart.' Let the spirit return to God that gave it, with the whole train of its affections. . . . Other sacrifices from us he would not; but the living sacrifice of the heart he hath chosen. Let it be continually offered up to God through Christ, in flames of holy love" (I, 413).

Precisely here do the concerns raised by Wesley's epistemology come to bear, for his emphasis on the spiritual senses, ones that are awakened and vitalized by the Spirit's work, runs crucial. Wesley operates from the assumption that we need to grow sensible to God in order to apprehend the things of God. Without the realization of the work of the Spirit in one's life, the presence of God does not make an impression on one's soul, thereby disabling one from discerning and sensing what God is doing and what God's purposes are.¹⁹ With this new birth, one enters, as it were, into another world²⁰ in which one's eyes of understanding are opened so that one "may properly be said to *live*."²¹

One would think that Webster would touch on this affective matter more, given his reference to the Barth quote on prayer, but also because he devotes a subsection of this first chapter on the "fear of the Lord." Drawing on the dominant motif across the whole of Christian Scripture, Webster remarks, "Theology is a work in which *holiness is perfected in the fear of God*. The perfection of holiness—that is, its completion or fulfillment—involves the fear of God."²² What does Webster mean by the fear of God? In a sense, he is suggesting that the fear of God be construed as an apophatic mechanism, as a limit to reason's penchant to overextend irreverently its reach: "Reason can only be holy if it resists its own capacity for idolatry, its natural drift towards the profaning of God's name by making common currency of the things of God. A holy theology, therefore, will be properly mistrustful of its own command of its subject-matter; modest; aware that much of what it says and thinks is dust."²³

This apophatic concern is well-taken and justifiable from the biblical witness,²⁴ but again, the very language itself suggests an affective (rather than simply cognitive) register.²⁵ The "fear of the Lord" can extend to the

¹⁹See *The Great Privilege of Those that are Born of God*, I, 434.

²⁰*The Great Privilege of Those that are Born of God*, I, 432.

²¹*The New Birth*, II, p. 193 (emphasis in original).

²²*Holiness*, 27 (emphasis in original).

²³*Holiness*, 28.

²⁴I have made similar arguments in "The Fear of the Lord as Theological Method," *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 2 (2008), 147-160.

²⁵It is not that Webster is unaware of the affective dimension of holiness; he mentions in *Confessing God* that "As revealer and reconciler, God's presence converts creatures to holiness, a holiness which embraces not only the moral and affective life but also the life of reason" (4). The deeper matter would be if the affective register is applicable and integral to rationality as a whole.

resistance to forming idols, but such a sensibility runs deeper than simply a circumscription of intellectual functioning. From one important angle, at the heart of idolatry is disordered love, not muddled thinking. If the “fear of the Lord” is a disposition in which holiness is perfected, then one has to wonder: Where and in whom does this perfection take place? Why and how does it do so? Is the fear of God strictly an intellectual disposition or does it run deeper?

All of these concerns point to embodiment: it is not simply the abstract trope of the “fear of God” that is the beginning of a *practical* notion such as “wisdom”; rather, the “fear of God” means nothing without “God-fearers,” instantiations in which this notion is registered and operative because its very nature as a holy disposition means that it can only do conceptual work as it is on display in someone who is inclined in a certain way. Again, the Wesleyan push would be against abstraction and toward embodiment: Holy reason is non-generative apart from its holy practitioner who cultivates and exercises it. If the former requires crucifixion and resurrection by the work of the Holy Spirit, then so does the latter.

The Doctrine of God

When moving to the doctrine of God, Webster is keen to point out how divine attribution is often out of kilter, particularly since the metaphysical features of such endeavoring have a way of highlighting certain attributes more than others as a way of contriving a more generalizable divinity. Therefore, “capacity attributes” have tended to overshadow “character attributes,” and such a move has a way of marginalizing trinitarian dogma from shaping in any significant way the negotiation of the being of God. One can only assume that such endeavoring would tend to minimize the place of holiness among the divine attributes.²⁶ To put the matter bluntly, holiness is often perceived to be unnecessary for those seeking to portray divinity as the ground of all being and the primal cause of all that is rather than the active, self-revealing triune God within the economy of redemption.²⁷

²⁶Colin Gunton was right to point out that holiness defies these categories within divine attribution: “Do we not want to say both that holiness is a form of action and relation to and in the world and that it is something that characterizes the being of God in himself, absolutely; that God is not only holy in his action, especially . . . on the cross of Christ, but that he is eternally the holy one?” (*Act and Being* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003], 24).

²⁷*Holiness*, 35.

Webster wishes to correct this approach by locating divine attribution within the simplicity of God: God is what God does. God does not just act in holy ways, but God is holy (with the subject determining the predicate in an irreversible way within this simple declaration). This strategy helps keep at bay nominalist tendencies, but it also points to the particular identity of God, an idea Webster subsumes under the heading of "God's name." In sum, "holiness is a predicate of the personal being, action and relation of the triune God, of God's concrete execution of his simplicity; it is not a quality in abstraction, but an indicator of God's 'name.'"²⁸ From this basis, Webster moves to consider God's identity by what God does, thereby rendering holiness not simply an attribute of God's essence but of God's character.

In a very real way, holiness problematizes a distinction within divine attribution that has been perpetuated for too long, namely the absolute-relative differentiation. One suspects that this category difference is related to the way the doctrine of God has circulated in terms of "*ad intra-ad extra*," or "immanent-economic." The bifurcation is deeply problematic since it potentially compartmentalizes God's identity because of a metaphysical sensibility. Yes, it is true that God is both transcendent to the world and yet deeply related to it; nevertheless, the recognition of this dialectic through the stratification of divine attributes in one or another category is detrimental for the doctrine of God in the long-run; it makes the God-cosmos distinction unflatteringly decisive for the negotiation of the divine identity.²⁹ God is holy, and as such, "holiness is a mode of God's activity; talk of God's holiness identifies the manner of his relation to us."³⁰ Another way of putting the matter is to say that "an essential condition . . . for making dogmatic sense of God's holiness is to avoid the polarizing of majesty and relation; the divine distance and the divine approach are one movement in God's being and act."³¹

Webster's dogmatic instincts are very helpful for Wesleyans. He takes the opportunity to raise holiness as a divine attribute that problematizes the activity of divine attribution as it has been pursued for some time.

²⁸*Holiness*, 39.

²⁹The contributions of Barth, Krötke, Schwöbel, and Gunton (in addition to Webster) have helped on this particular point within divine attribution; I have tried to extend this logic with my work on divine impassibility.

³⁰*Holiness*, 41.

³¹*Holiness*, 42.

Holiness is not the kind of topic that can easily be categorized or delimited because of prior ontotheological commitments as expressed in a conceptually architectonic scheme. Nevertheless, holiness can reinvigorate the negotiation of the doctrine of God in that it ties God's essence and character in a narratively economic-shaped fashion (namely, as it is on display in God's covenant-establishing and covenant-keeping disposition towards God's people). All of these gestures point to a general weakness within Wesleyan construals of holiness, ones that could be shored up by Webster's reflections.

The Wesleyan fellowship has a penchant to depict holiness within matters soteriological. Such is the case because of the inclination toward the "practical" by its founder. The sub-tradition's inclinations to promote holy living and experiential accoutrements (including assurance and entire sanctification/Christian perfection) all potentially contribute to the de-theologizing of holiness if the latter suggests a de-emphasizing of theology proper, the doctrine of God.³² But whatever Wesleyans want to make of it, the holy life has to be grounded in a dogmatic account of a holy God, and perhaps this underdeveloped relationship within the Wesleyan fellowship has made holiness as a motif within this sub-tradition tenuous with the passing of revivalist fervor. Of course, as a revivalist movement founded by a revivalist preacher, Wesleyanism has been at pains to pursue the dogmatic task in a manner that draws from its heritage. However, the time is ripe to pursue what a dogmatic account of the doctrine of God (which would include as one of its basic concerns the endeavoring of divine attribution) would look like within the Wesleyan fellowship,³³ and perhaps Webster could be a great

³²Wesley did develop his views on the interrelationship between divine attribution and Christian formation. As Maddox remarks, "Wesley became increasingly convinced of the formative (and *deformative*) influence of our understanding of these attributes toward the end of his ministry, publishing several sermons on them" (*Responsible Grace*, 51). Examples would include *The Unity of the Divine Being* and *On the Omnipresence of God*.

³³Many, I am sure, believe this activity is already underway among Wesleyans and Methodists because of their associations with metaphysical currents such as process, open, and relational theologies. Certainly these groups, each in its own distinct way, has contributed working proposals toward this end. Nevertheless, symptomatic of many of these developments and their multiple instantiations has been the penchant for trivializing (and maybe even caricaturing) past metaphysical proposals as a way of creating conceptual space for alternatives. Such a move can only jeopardize the degree to which these working proposals can relate in a sustained way to what is on offer within the Wesleyan corpus, one that is, among many things, simultaneously deeply patristic and Anglican.

ally in such a task given his inclination to emphasize so prominently the holiness of God as he strives to make theology more theological.

Holiness and the Christian Life

Perhaps the most strident parting of ways between Webster and Wesleyans would be in relation to the way holiness plays out in the lives of Christians, both collectively and individually. At the onset of these discussions (beginning with chapter 3), Webster wishes to counter social trinitarian programs that utilize participatory language in some Hegelian-like fashion. Webster wishes to avoid the compromising of God's free majesty,³⁴ and so he finds the coinherence of the work of God and the work of the church potentially problematic. Rather than participation, Webster prefers the language of election because he believes that in this way the integrity of holiness is preserved: "Where the social trinitarian language of participation emphasizes the continuity, even coinherence, of divine and ecclesial action, the language of election draws attention to the way in which the Church has its being in the ever-fresh work of divine grace."³⁵ The church is what it is on the basis of divine gratuity, and because of this reality, Webster believes there is some modicum of wisdom in saying that the "Church's sanctity is an *alien* sanctity, a non-possessable holiness."³⁶ As a summary of the point, he states, "The Church is holy; but it is holy, not by virtue of some ontological participation in the divine holiness, but by virtue of its calling by God, its reception of the divine benefits, and its obedience of faith. Like its unity, its catholicity and its apostolicity, the Church's holiness is that which it is by virtue of its sheer contingency upon the mercy of God."³⁷

The logic of Webster's claims runs as follows: The church's holiness is not something that can be grasped or claimed but rather something that is made possible by divine initiative and gratuity. The language of participation runs certain risks that the language of election does not in terms of recognizing that ongoing dependence. In this sense, the church's holiness is an alien holiness, a *sanctitas passiva*, dependent on the work of God and not on anything inherent to the human condition. Webster here bolsters his

³⁴Another way Webster speaks of God's holy singularity is God's "majestic incomparability" as a result of the divine perfection (*Confessing God*, 116).

³⁵*Holiness*, 56.

³⁶*Holiness*, 56.

³⁷*Holiness*, 57.

claims through repeated reference to the Epistle to the Ephesians as well as to John Calvin, authorities that make sense given that this reading is significantly Reformed. He does consider an “active sanctification,” which is largely adumbrated through the notion of confession. The church confesses and bears witness to the name of God, and as it does so, it practices its alien holiness. Once again, any notion of “active sanctification” need not revert to participatory language in Webster’s estimation since at play here are not so much ontological claims as “soteriology and its fruits.”³⁸

Webster’s trinitarian dogmatics of holiness reaches a point with these reflections where Wesleyans would have some difficulty. Webster assumes a Reformed anthropology throughout his remarks regarding the church’s alien sanctity, but he does not bring it to the fore for scrutiny. This anthropology generates more theological momentum from the fall than creation, and it eclipses participatory language on the ground of an alleged requirement that it could only function logically with a native or “natural” capacity, one that is somehow a-theological because it would be responsive and so self-referentially human. In other words, Webster treads the well-travelled Protestant road that would suggest that human involvement would take away from God’s primordially. In a remark that would only make sense to a certain kind of Protestant sensibility, Webster suggests, “In the Church’s practices of holiness, therefore, its action is wholly oriented towards the action of the Holy Trinity, in electing, gathering and consecrating. The Church’s acts do not realize, complete, continue or in any way extend or embody God’s work, which is perfect, and which alone is properly holy.”³⁹

In his final chapter, dedicated to the “holiness of the Christian,” Webster dissociates himself from non-Reformed positions, ones with which Wesleyans would have some affinity. The characterizations here are brief, but, unfortunately, they require more from Webster for a proper engagement to ensue. For instance, he remarks, “Our thinking about sanctification would be disorderly if we were to suggest that . . . when we move to speak of human holiness we are required to shift to talk of our own agency, perhaps co-operating with God, perhaps rendering God his due in return for the gift of salvation. But, if we are elected to holiness, then we have been extracted from the sphere of human autonomy; the Christian’s holiness does not stem from the Christian’s decision.”⁴⁰ At another

³⁸*Holiness*, 62.

³⁹*Holiness*, 72.

⁴⁰*Holiness*, 79–80.

point, Webster raises the importance of rooting sanctification in justification so that “justification prohibits any conversion of sanctification into ethical self-improvement, as if justification were merely an initial infusion of capacities which are then activated through moral or spiritual exertion.”⁴¹ Finally, when speaking of the presence and work of the Spirit, Webster affirms:

The secret energy of the sanctifying Spirit of God is not another way of talking of our own secret energies, and is not to be conceived as an infused power which stimulates human acts of holiness. To think in such terms would simply be to lose the reference of Christian holiness back to the triune work of grace, and turn sanctification into an acquired sufficiency. The Christian's sanctity is in Christ, in the Spirit, not *in se*; it is always and only an alien sanctity. Sanctification does not signal the birth of self-sufficiency, rather it indicates a “perpetual and inherent lack of self-sufficiency.” Sanctification “in” the Spirit is not the Spirit's immanence in the saint. Quite the opposite: it is a matter of the *externality* of *sanctitas christiana*, the saint being and acting in *another*. “Sanctification in the Spirit” means: it is not I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And “Christ who lives in me” means: by the Spirit's power I am separated from my self-caused self-destruction, and given a new holy self, enclosed by, and wholly referred to, the new Adam in whom I am and in whom I act.⁴²

With such sentiments in regard to the way holiness is appropriated and on display within the economy of salvation, Webster inevitably parts ways with how Wesleyans would be compelled to narrate the matter. Plenty is on offer in Webster for Wesleyans to ponder and utilize in their dogmatic thinking about holiness, but the juncture has arrived for distinct accents to be pointed out, not so much for polemical reasons but for purposes of clarifying the varying emphases that exist across confessional lines, emphases that, when brought to the fore, can be “for the good of the whole.” What follows are constructive suggestions for how a Wesleyan trinitarian dogmatics of holiness would take shape in light of Webster's helpful sketch.

⁴¹*Holiness*, 81.

⁴²*Holiness*, 83–84 (italics in original and quote drawn from G. C. Berkouwer, *Faith and Sanctification* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952], 83).

Working Proposals for a Wesleyan Trinitarian Dogmatics of Holiness

1. First, Wesleyans generally find the Irenaean-Athanasian exchange principle (“God became human so that humans could become God-like”) compelling.⁴³ Their inclination to do so rests on their account of divine gratuity. The triune God presences Godself within a fallen and profane world for the purposes of healing and repairing it. This act of healing and repairing is ultimately a gesture of hospitality, one that shares the divine self with that which is alienated from it, in turn beckoning it to fulfill and live into its original purposes. The divine presencing, in other words, alters that which surrounds it in a fearful and wonderful way. Such gestures need not take away from the primordially of God; they do not take away from God’s glory or in some way dignify that which is not-God so that God’s self is cheapened. Quite the contrary: the Wesleyan sensibility is that such gestures of transformative hospitality show all the more that the triune God ekstasically seeks the prodigal child and brings him home in a restorative way.⁴⁴ As Wesley repeats on more than one occasion, this healing is not simply one of identity (what God does *for* us, and so a *relative* change) but of ontology as well (what God does *in* us, and so a *real* change).⁴⁵

Webster’s strategy for maintaining the primordially of God, as God is active within the economy of grace, is through the language of election. By its very logic, the gesture avoids the dangers of assuming the co-extension of the work of God and of God’s people that could include idolatry and projection. The concern is valid, but does it necessarily exclude participatory language? Wesleyans would answer in the negative, but they can do so only because of their assumed conceptual and linguistic conventions related to the way divine grace is prevenient to all that follows in the healing of the world.

⁴³The appeal would be related not only to Wesley’s Anglican heritage (in which participation language plays a role) but also Wesley’s own sensibilities as they developed through his reading of such figures as Macarius and Ephraem Syrus. However, the sensibility and appeal should not be taken as an outright endorsement of the Eastern notion of deification, as Ted Campbell has pointed out (*John Wesley and Christian Antiquity* [Nashville: Kingswood, 1991], 66).

⁴⁴Wesleyans would respond positively to how Webster elsewhere notes the way divine holiness and love mutually condition one another: “God is holy as he loves the creature; his love for his creature is holy love” (*Confessing God*, 120).

⁴⁵*Justification by Faith*, I, 187, *The Great Privilege of Those that are Born of God*, I, 431-432, *The Scripture Way of Salvation*, II, 158, and *The New Birth*, II, 187.

The Wesleyan sensibility is that something is at stake ontologically in these matters, something that the language of election may or may not include. The sensibility is informed from at least two major features of the Wesleyan theo-logic: the Johannine witness and the work of the Holy Spirit. Both are intertwined at key junctures, including the "Farewell Discourse" of John's Gospel (*inter alia*, the promise of the Holy Spirit in John 14 and 16, the "abiding" language of John 15, and the coinherence language of Jesus' prayer over the disciples in John 17). The logic is also expressible through a prominent theme in the Johannine literature, namely the "new birth," which Wesley repeatedly recalls is a work of the Spirit.⁴⁶ The Christian life, then, can and has been understood by Wesleyans and others as participatory in such a fashion that God's majestic incomparability perdures; a growth in the divine similitude need not lead to an absorption or conflation but can be a feature of the Creator-creation dynamic based on the hospitality of the divine gratuity.

2. Second, God seeks out to heal and repair the creation because it is properly, definitively, and exhaustively God's creation. Any good that is in the creation, both pre- and post-fall, is attributable to God's merciful and loving disposition and work toward and within God's creation: "Whatever righteousness may be found in man, this also is the gift of God."⁴⁷ For all the emphasis Webster places on the divine initiative, its infelicitous juxtaposition is a "de-theologized nature." A robust account of creation, however, cannot accommodate such a category.⁴⁸ To recall the Augustinian notion, all that is, in that it *is*, is good, and this goodness is secured theologically via the divine splendor as expressed through the Creator's creation. For this reason, receptivity is the primary disposition of the creation to the Creator, but it is of a kind that is multifaceted in Wesleyan key. This multidimensional receptivity is *en via*, a kind of *reditus* or a "spiritual respiration."⁴⁹ Yes, confession is involved in this process, but so are a number of other liturgical acts, including repentance, sacrifice, praise, proclamation, and so forth, and all of these, as they are practiced

⁴⁶See *The New Birth* (II, 186-201) for the development of this theme, one that largely depends on Nicodemus' encounter with Jesus in John 3.

⁴⁷*Salvation by Faith*, I, 118. The running theme here is of "grace upon grace," one that Wesley draws from John 1:16.

⁴⁸"There is no man, unless he has quenched the Spirit, that is wholly void of the grace of God" (*On Working Out Our Own Salvation*, III, 207).

⁴⁹*The New Birth*, II, 193.

and embodied in doxological mode are, because of the presence and work of the Holy Spirit, characterizing and shaping the ones engaged in them.⁵⁰

It is on the basis of a specific account of a God-graced creation, one that recognizes God's prevenient action in all that is possible within the economy, that divine and human agency are non-competitive for Wesleyans.⁵¹ God and God's creation do not vie for the same space. The divine gratuity is spacious enough for humans to come back to the extended arms of the welcoming parent as a "kind of spiritual re-action" in which the *ruach* of life is rendered back "in unceasing love, and praise, and prayer."⁵²

3. Third, Wesleyans would hold that the way holiness is understood to function within the divine life on display within God's economy has to have corollaries with the manner in which it functions within ecclesial life and the life of individual piety. If the holiness of God is not only tied to God's incomparability but also understandable and relatable as a divine character attribute, one that is on display over time and characterizes the very identity of God as God relates Godself in covenant partnership with God's people, then Wesleyans would find its appropriation (however initially alien) by the created order to be analogously negotiable. As Maddox notes of the Wesleyan perspective, "Every major attribute or action of God [has] implications for understanding what humans are to be and to do."⁵³ What is being envisioned here is not so much a "holiness by works" but a growing conformity to the divine nature that is operative because of the promise inherent to the divine command:⁵⁴ "Be holy as your heavenly Father is holy."⁵⁵

⁵⁰Both Webster and Wesley would recognize features of this doxological mode, but Wesley brings out the formative side of the matter in a more explicit and integral way. My thanks to Randy Maddox for suggesting this compact manner of expression, one on display in a number of his works related to the "practical" nature of theological reflection.

⁵¹The point is a running motif in *On Working Out Our Own Salvation*; one quote brings out the interplay: "For, first, God works; therefore, you *can* work. Secondly, God works; therefore, you *must* work" (III, 206).

⁵²*The Great Privilege of Those that are Born of God*, I, 435-436.

⁵³*Responsible Grace*, 50.

⁵⁴As Albert Outler helpfully notes of the Wesleyan position, "All moral commands in Scripture are also 'covered promises,' since God never commands the impossible and his grace is always efficacious in every faithful will" (see his "Introduction" to Wesley's sermon corpus in I, 58).

⁵⁵Webster can make a complementary claim here: "The 'You shall be holy' which corresponds to 'I am holy' is not simply the indication of a state; it is a life-

Wesley hails this point as culminating in the notion of having the mind of Christ, for humans are beings created in the divine image who are to live into the divine likeness: "Gospel holiness is no less than the image of God stamped upon the heart. It is no other than the whole mind which was in Christ Jesus. It consists of all heavenly affections and tempers mingled together in one."⁵⁶ A distinct anthropology is at work here, one that tends to be quite optimistic in terms of what is possible this side of the resurrection and Pentecost; it recognizes the malleability and growing conformity and maturity available to the believer, given that the call to perfection made throughout the Scriptural testimony is both pressing and demanding in the present *kairos*.

4. Fourth, for Wesleyans holiness is a way of life and theology a spiritual discipline because the life of a Christian is one of following and imitating the life of Jesus. For Wesleyans, to have the "mind of Christ" is to have the "heart of Christ."⁵⁷ This recognition assumes, then, that the call to holiness involves the fullness of the human experience. Mortification and vivification by the Spirit is work undertaken upon the entire self by God's mercy. As rational, desiring animals within time and space, that process implies a Spirit-enabled performance, one that recognizes the radical embeddedness of human selves in which activity is self-shaping and self-characterizing. The "new Adam" has to be appropriated and lived into for the sake of the veracity of confession and witness both to believers and the wider world alike.

The point is available in variegated ways depending on one's "canon within the canon." With the blatant risk of overgeneralizing notwithstanding, one could say in light of the history of biblical interpretation that the Pauline notion of holiness tends to be more passive than active and more centered on what Christ has done for us than on what Christ-followers do out of responsive gratitude and obedience. But if one relates the Pauline corpus with the other major collection of epistles within the New Testament, the Catholic Epistles, one sees the scriptural warrants for Wesley's "both-and" form of reasoning. As my colleague Robert W. Wall has noted:

giving imperative which bids the creature to inhabit and act out of the role to which the creature has been appointed by the Father's purpose" (*Confessing God*, 123).

⁵⁶*The New Birth*, II, 194.

⁵⁷The point is derivable from a number of places within the Wesleyan corpus, including *Scriptural Christianity*, I, 174-175 and *Sermon on the Mount, Discourse I*, I, 481.

From the perspective of the New Testament when taken as a whole witness to God's gospel, if the certain sound of Paul's letters interprets holiness as the singular effect of divine action upon the church, its complement witness in the collection of the Catholic Epistles exhorts this same community to respond actively in holy ways. In other words, the biblical witness to the holy life is more full than an accounting of God's purifying grace upon the sinful heart through faith in Christ alone; it includes a description of the holy life that exchanges those impure practices that might contaminate fellowship with God and one another for those virtues that engage the world with works of mercy and justice.⁵⁸

Humans are called to live into the likeness of Christ and to do so through a form of moral habituation in which growing conformity to the divine character would ensue in an increasingly freely and eudaimonistic way.⁵⁹ In other words, holiness, as understood in one sense within the economy of God's self-revelation and call, is a moral category. As a character attribute on display in God's covenant life and fulfilled and climaxed in the life of Jesus, so holiness is to be a character attribute of God's covenant people as they relate to God, one another, and everything else that is.

Conclusion

John Webster's *Holiness* is an engaging and promising proposal for considering holiness, not so much as phenomenological experience or as a criterion of serious piety but truly as a feature of engaged and focused reflection within Christian dogmatics. It is a proposal that Wesleyans ought to ponder and engage so that they can appreciate the catholicity of their commitments, all the while recognizing their important deviations from and charisms on offer to other constituencies within the church. Hopefully, this essay is only the beginning of an ongoing and fruitful endeavoring not simply related to Wesleyan readings and appropriations of Webster but also in terms of the dogmatic task within Wesleyan and Methodist circles more broadly.

⁵⁸Robert W. Wall, "Practicing Holiness: A New Testament Perspective," in Daniel Castelo, ed., *Holiness as a Liberal Art* (Eugene: Pickwick, forthcoming).

⁵⁹In this regard, as D. Steven Long has helped us see, Wesley's vision of the embodied Christian life is more in line with the category of moral theology than Christian ethics, the former requiring an operative account of God as the *sum-mum bonum* (see *John Wesley's Moral Theology* [Nashville: Kingswood, 2005]). Because of this inclination, Wesley would have more in common with Thomists like Servais Pinckaers than many drawing from Kantian, Troeltschian, and other Protestant-affiliated sources and patterns of thought.

THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ROLE OF LISTENING IN SHAPING THE CHURCH INTO A LEADING COMMUNITY

by

Aaron Perry

The tragedy is that our eternal welfare depends
upon our hearing, and we have trained our ears not to hear.
A. W. Tozer

This article stands on presuppositions which should be declared. First, I presume religious diversity will grow and that the world will not cease being religious. Second, I believe that Christians should seek to pray, work, and speak for the conversion of people of other faiths and of no faith to the way of Jesus. Given these presuppositions, I will develop my argument in four stages.

First, I will offer a description of listening utilizing the phenomenology of Jean-Luc Nancy. Listening allows something that is other into the self and, in that practice, provides the context for the possibility of relationship. Second, using Otto Scharmer's matrix of change, *Theory U*, I will examine how listening is an act of leadership by accessing the emerging future. Third, I will suggest why listening is a Christian act. Fourth, I will explain how listening can be formative for the church, especially churches in the Wesleyan tradition. I will then offer suggestions about how listening can shape the church to become a leading community in a religiously diverse world, opening this as an avenue for further exploration and critical engagement.

What Is Listening?

What does it mean to listen? Jean-Luc Nancy argues that listening is an action that discovers a secret. He asks, "What secret is at stake when one truly listens, that is, when one tries to capture or surprise the sonority rather than the message?"¹ Thus, listening is the practice that enables

¹ Jean-Luc Nancy, *Listening*, trans. Charlotte Mandell (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), 6. "Être à l'écoute, 'to be tuned in, to be listening,' was in the vocabulary of military espionage before it returned, through broadcasting, to the public space, while still remaining, in the context of the telephone, an affair of confidences or stolen secrets" (4).

hearing. To hear with the ear, one must listen, just as to smell with the nose, one must sniff.² However, listening and hearing have a special relationship. In hearing, there is understanding, “as if ‘hearing’ were above all ‘hearing say.’”³ Thus, Nancy believes that listening means straining toward a *self*—though not necessarily a specific, individual self. “When one is listening, one is on the lookout for a subject, something that identifies itself by resonating from self to self. . . .”⁴ This participatory nature of listening clarifies its difference from seeing. Visualization includes an object, a reflection. Sonority is *methexic*—participatory.

To be listening, then, means to enter this sharing. It is a mode of relational access.⁵ This means that listening creates the possibility of relation to another self. Nancy uses this to move away from a phenomenology rooted in being, toward action.⁶ Thus, he describes the context of relationship through the nature of sound. Sound cannot be captured; it is always moving. It is “not a point on a line,” but expands through space-time.⁷ Thus, to listen is to enter that type of space that also penetrates me, opens in and around me, and moves toward me and away from me.

This description—to be in the space of sound and to be filled with sound—means that there is a double opening in the practice of listening. There is an opening both in the self and around the self. Openness applies not only to the listener, but also to the speaker. Nancy writes, “Perhaps we should thus understand the child who is born with his first cry as himself being . . . the sudden expansion of an echo chamber.”⁸ This echo chamber of the self is exhibited when Nancy writes, “[s]ilence” . . . must here be understood not as a privation but as an arrangement of resonance: a little . . . as when in a perfect condition of silence you hear your own body resonate, your own breath, your heart and all its resounding cave”⁹ Thus, in listening Nancy believes that one also listens to oneself. To listen means to move “toward the opening of meaning, hence to a slash . . . as toward a reserve that is anterior and posterior.”¹⁰

²*Ibid.*, 5.

³*Ibid.*, 6.

⁴*Ibid.*, 9.

⁵*Ibid.*, 12.

⁶*Ibid.*, 13.

⁷*Ibid.*, 13.

⁸*Ibid.*, 18.

⁹*Ibid.*, 21.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 27.

This double opening, of self reaching for self, means that listening is the context for the possibility of relationship. The open self strains toward the other self in the space made by sound that encapsulates them both. In the sound, as one listens, there is a straining toward a meaning, otherwise secret, but now made public. A self is open to another self in the openness of the sound in which one listens. So, how can listening in this act of double opening be an act of leadership? For this question we turn to Otto Scharmer and *Theory U*.

How Is Listening an Act of Leadership?

"We live in an era of intense conflict and massive institutional failures, a time of painful endings and of hopeful beginnings."¹¹ So starts Otto Scharmer's massive exploration of the social technology of presencing. Scharmer wants to learn not only what leaders do and how they do it, but the inner source from which they operate.¹² So, he urges a new science that uncovers a "hidden dimension in the social process"¹³ by utilizing phenomenology, dialogue, and collaborative action research (including interviews with leaders involved in the change of systems).¹⁴ The result of his research is a social field theory (Theory U) and a social technology (principles and practices of "presencing").¹⁵

Scharmer believes that the "essence of leadership is to shift the inner place [of operation] both individually and collectively."¹⁶ This place is the field structure of attention, of which there are four: I-in-me; I-in-it; I-in-you; I-in-now. So, the work of leadership is to shift from a perspective of I-in-me to other, more robust places. He illustrates these four structures of attention using the example of listening. So, there are four types of listening that correspond to the field structures:

1. Downloading (I-in-me): This listening confirms previous judgments; it says, "Yeah, I already know that."
2. Factual listening (I-in-It): This listening is open to new or contrary data; it says, "Oh! Look at that!"

¹¹Otto Scharmer, *Theory U: Leading from the Future as it Emerges* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2009), 1.

¹²*Ibid.*, 7.

¹³*Ibid.*, 14.

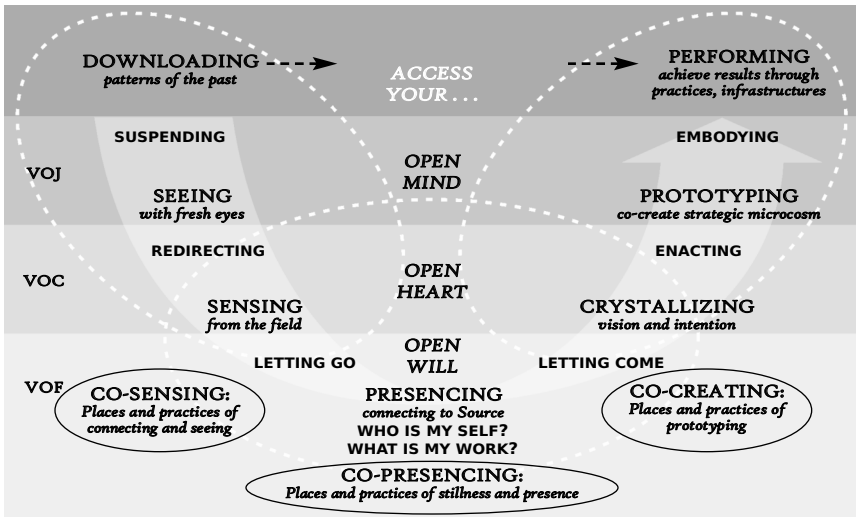
¹⁴*Ibid.*, 19.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 17.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 11.

3. Empathic listening (I-in-You): This listening is open to the other as a person. It looks into the “story of a living being, a living system, and self.”¹⁷ It says, “Oh, yes, I know how you feel.”¹⁸
4. Generative listening (I-in-Now): This listening is open to the emerging field of the future. The listener’s will is open to new understandings of the self and vocation in this listening. It says, “I am connected to something larger than myself.”¹⁹

Here is a diagram of Theory U, a social field theory that helps to shift these places of operation.²⁰



Let me offer the following thoughts on this complex diagram. First, the left side is meant to produce deep observation. To access the future, there must be a cessation of simple downloading. Instead we must see from different fields—I-in-It and I-in-You. These are the movements of Seeing

¹⁷Ibid., 12.

¹⁸This phrase is unfortunate because of its colloquial status and arrogance. One can never know how another feels, although this type of listening seeks *as much as possible* to know what the other feels. The listener who understands that this search is unending understands the constant strain to meaning which is listening.

¹⁹Scharmer, *Theory U*, 11-13.

²⁰Ibid., 45.

and Sensing. To enable these movements, Scharmer utilizes three gestures, suspending, redirecting, and letting go. We suspend judgment to see; we redirect our senses to come from the field, rather than simply from ourselves; we let go of fears that might be holding back the moment of I-in-Now, the movement of presencing. Presencing is a movement that is a combination of being fully *present* in the moment and *sensing* the future that wants to emerge, hence “presencing.” In this moment we “step into . . . our authentic self. Presencing is a movement where we approach our self from the emerging future.”²¹

The right side of the diagram is about the new project, product, movement, and organization that emerge from this movement of presencing. Once one has let go of fears, one can let come the future that desires to emerge. This gesture allows the crystallizing movement where ideas begin to take shape before there is prototyping and, ultimately, performing.

It is important to note that Scharmer does not believe the Theory U is a mechanical, linear process. Rather, “it works as a matrix . . . as an integral whole.”²² It is not a strategy for change, but a description of the movements and gestures that access the deepest source and highest future from which leading individuals and communities must act.

There are two further aspects to the U that are essential for our purposes. First, on the far left are the initials VOJ, VOC, and VOF. Scharmer describes these as blocking enemies. They are the Voice of Judgment, Voice of Cynicism, and Voice of Fear.²³ They correspond to the center aisle, which are the three instruments available to individuals and communities that allow one to perform the gestures and movements of the U. These instruments are the Open Mind, Open Heart, and Open Will. The Open Mind allows fresh seeing and suspending of judgment; it is the ability to access intellectual intelligence. The Open Heart allows empathy; it is the ability to access emotional intelligence. The Open Will is the ability “to access [the] authentic purpose and self” through gestures of letting go and letting come.²⁴ It is spiritual intelligence.

The three voices are enemies of these instruments because they keep them closed. The Voice of Judgment closes the mind and blocks access to creativity. The Voice of Cynicism closes the heart and denies the “vulnerability” of the self by distancing the self. The Voice of Fear closes the will

²¹Ibid., 163.

²²Ibid., 44.

²³Ibid., 42.

²⁴Ibid., 41.

because it threatens the very self. There is fear of alienation, ridicule, and even death.²⁵ Scharmer does not believe that these voices should never be listened to, but that these voices can block one's progress to the authentic self in the presencing movement where there is connection to the Source. Joseph Myers' approach to these voices is better, however. Myers believes that everyone has a voice of judgment, cynicism, and fear and that only by listening do we discern the actual nature of these voices. So, before one disregards these voices, one must first learn what they sound like through listening.²⁶

Scharmer also identifies concrete practices of listening that engage with Theory U. In the movement that follows presencing, one engages in co-creation. One of Scharmer's concrete practices is to engage in conversation with others who play important roles in this field. He writes, "I as a listener need to *build a space for the 'Other'* within myself. It is this inner space that creates the possibility for my counterpart to come into appearance—rather than just myself with my preconceived ideas.' So the practice here is about intentionally building that space for the 'other' within us."²⁷ In the practice of conversation, one creates space in the self to listen to and hear from the other. This resonance with Nancy is deepened as one of Scharmer's interviewees describes his leadership work as facilitating this *opening* process.²⁸

Theory U shows listening as an act of leadership through its emphasis on openness to the emerging future. Nancy's description of listening as a double opening explains why Scharmer can utilize it to describe the openness necessary to access the emerging future. In fact, Scharmer devotes an entire chapter to conversational actions to achieve presencing. Part of the initial way to deep listening is through opening, where Scharmer coaches participants in group interviews to share a personal reflection from interviews they have previously been given. This opening helps create the necessary social field.²⁹ One can here sense resonances

²⁵Ibid., 43.

²⁶Joseph Myers, telephone interview, March 11, 2010. Myers' work is especially helpful for leadership and listening in the local church. See his *The Search to Belong: Rethinking Intimacy, Community, and Small Groups* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003) and *Organic Community: Creating a Place where People Naturally Connect* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007).

²⁷Ibid., 383. Italics added.

²⁸Ibid., 314.

with Nancy's concept of being surrounded by sound to which one listens. In this field, one then listens to the emerging future which must be discerned from the common themes of the group conversation.³⁰ Scharmer believes conversations utilizing the deepest form of listening enable creation and a new world.³¹ These practices of listening and conversation allow leaders to be open to the emerging future that is opening to them.

What Makes Listening a Christian Act?

So, listening can be an act of leadership when it enables access to the emerging future. But what makes that description Christian? Let's examine this question with some reflections on reading Scripture from Eugene Peterson's *Eat This Book*.³²

Hagah is a word that our Hebrew ancestors used frequently for reading the kind of writing that deals with our souls. But "meditate" is far too tame a word for what is being signified. "Meditate" seems more suited to what I do in a quiet chapel on my knees with a candle burning on the altar. Or to what my wife does while sitting in a rose garden with the Bible open in her lap. But when Isaiah's lion and my dog meditated, they chewed and swallowed, using teeth and tongue, stomach and intestines: Isaiah's lion meditating his goat (if that's what it was); my dog meditating his bone. There is a certain kind of writing that invites this kind of reading, soft purrs and low growls as we taste and savor, anticipate and take in the sweet and spicy, mouth-watering and soul-energizing morsel words—"O taste and see that the LORD is good!" (Ps. 34:8).³³

This is the kind of reading that changes a life, engaged with words that are meant "*to get inside us*, to deal with our souls, to form a life that is congruent with the world that God has created, the salvation that he has enacted, and the community that he has gathered."³⁴ Hence, Peterson believes that reading is *eating*, taking into the self. The danger with words

²⁹Ibid., 291.

³⁰Ibid., 292-293.

³¹Ibid., 298.

³²Eugene Peterson, *Eat This Book: A Conversation in the Art of Spiritual Reading* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006).

³³Ibid., 2.

³⁴Ibid., 3-4. Italics added.

is that they can be read otherwise: words can become “propaganda or [be] reduced to information, mere tools and data.”³⁵ When we read like this, “[w]e *silence* the living voice and reduce words to what we can use for convenience and profit.”³⁶ Peterson says that words spoken and listened to “are intended to do something *in* us. . . .”³⁷

Peterson’s utilization of voice as a metaphor for text prompts us to see the phenomenological similarities between eating and listening as Nancy and Peterson use them. For Nancy, the ear takes in the sound and the body becomes its echo chamber; for Peterson, the mouth takes in the word and chews, gnaws, mulls, and swallows. For both, there is an opening for the other that does not in itself create the appropriate relationship, but only makes relationship possible. There may not be hearing of sound; there may not be transformation of life by word.

Peterson emphasizes that Scripture is *originally* the living voice. He believes that Scripture was oral before written. The living voice of God enabled a community to believe, obey, and worship before the word was written.³⁸ Peterson writes that the “primary organ for receiving God’s revelation is not the eye that sees but the ear that hears.”³⁹

This connection is reinforced in Peterson’s discussion of John the Divine and the angel from Revelation 10. John is about to write, but the angel tells him not to; instead, he must take the scroll and eat it. Peterson writes,

The words in the book had just been re-voiced, taken off the page and set in motion in the air where they could enter ear. . . . The preaching angel had just gotten them off the printed page, and now John was going to put them back again. No, says the heavenly voice—I want those words out there, creating sound waves, entering ears, entering lives. I want those words preaching, sung, taught, prayed—*lived*.⁴⁰

Notice Peterson’s language: creating sound waves, entering ears. The context of sound and hearing is the context of singing, teaching, praying—hearing creates the context for appropriate relationship to Scripture. In

³⁵Ibid., 11.

³⁶Ibid., 11. Italics added.

³⁷Ibid., 21.

³⁸Ibid., 85-86.

³⁹Ibid., 92.

⁴⁰Ibid. 37.

this relationship, Peterson says we are “to *listen* for resonances, echoes, patterns” in Scripture.⁴¹

Thus far Nancy’s concept of listening nicely illuminates Peterson’s approach to Scripture. But this is only one side of Nancy’s discussion on listening. For Nancy, listening is dual opening: of the listener and of the speaker as well. The combination creates the context where relationship is possible.

This phenomenon of double opening is displayed in Luke’s Gospel. On the road to Emmaus, Jesus travels with two companions, whom he discovers are *talking* about everything that has happened (Luke 24:14). Yet in their discussions, they are downcast. They do not believe what the prophets have *spoken* (v. 25) because they are slow of heart. Heart refers to the “inner commitments, dispositions and attitudes”⁴² of these disciples, evidently *closed* to the work of God. They have not believed because they are not *open*. Yet Jesus explains what was *said* in the Scripture concerning himself (v. 27). After Jesus breaks the bread and disappears from their sight, the two companions say to each other, “Were not our *hearts* burning within us while he talked with us on the road and *opened* the Scriptures to us?” (v. 32). That the effect on the heart is mentioned in connection with Jesus *speaking* lets us know that listening is important, but even more important for our purposes is the description of Jesus’ action with the Scriptures: he *opened* (*dianoigo*) the Scriptures. Here is the first of the double opening of listening. Luke places the second just a few verses later. Jesus appears among the disciples and confirms that he is flesh and bones. Luke then says, “Then he *opened* (*dianoigo*) their minds so they could understand the Scriptures” (v. 45). Here is the second of the double opening necessary for there to be listening: the Scriptures are opened and the disciples’ minds are opened.

Thus, the Christian approach to Scripture can be examined as a practice of listening, a phenomenon of double opening—of the self and of the text. This discovery also grounds listening Christocentrically, since Jesus is the one who opens both mind and Scriptures. How can this practice be communally formative?

How Does Listening Shape the Church?

So far we have explored listening as the double opening that creates the context of relationship. The self is opened to strain towards an open-

⁴¹Ibid., 47. Italics added.

⁴²Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, New International Commentary of the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 854.

ing. We have seen how there is a double opening in the context of Scripture: the hearer is opened and the Scriptures are opened. We have also seen how a contemporary leadership matrix, Theory U, offers an approach to leadership that keys on the notion of openness and the emerging future. Putting these descriptions together, we can see how listening becomes a formative practice for the church as it becomes a communal hermeneutical practice. To see this, we will look to Merold Westphal and Hans-Georg Gadamer.

Openness is a key theme to Gadamer. For Gadamer, as for Nancy, listening is about being addressed by the other as a self—to let the other “really say something to us.”⁴³ Thus, Gadamer writes, “[A]nyone who listens is fundamentally open.”⁴⁴ Merold Westphal calls this openness a “vulnerability to the voice of the other.”⁴⁵ Such vulnerability is exactly what enables there to be a change when engaging Scripture. This vulnerability of the reader means that the text does not (just) have a meaning to be mined, but also poses questions of the reader. The reader does not probe the text; the text probes the reader.⁴⁶ In this practice, Gadamer suggests not that readers *answer* the text, but that readers learn to ask their own questions.⁴⁷ Thus, listening is a practice of interpretation that allows a conversation to develop. In this conversation, as it spreads to other interpreters, presuppositions can be challenged, replaced, and affirmed from the text.⁴⁸

Now, consider the nature of the Scriptural text as an address. Peterson writes that language is God’s mode of communication and that God’s subsequent bestowal of language on humans means that humans can “respond, answer, converse, argue, [and] question” God.⁴⁹ God is the

⁴³Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London, New York: Continuum, 2004), 355.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 355.

⁴⁵Merold Westphal, *Whose Community? Which Interpretation? Philosophical Hermeneutics for the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 115.

⁴⁶Peterson writes, “The act of eating the book means that reading is not a merely objective act, looking at the words and ascertaining their meaning. Eating the book is in contrast with how most of us are trained to read a book—develop a cool objectivity that attempts to preserve scientific or theological truth by eliminating as far as possible any personal participation that might contaminate the meaning. But none of us starts out reading that way” (*Eat this Book*, 20).

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, 116.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, 117.

⁴⁹Peterson, *Eat this Book*, 103.

“initiator and guarantor of language *both ways*.”⁵⁰ Now, if Scripture is a living voice, from the one who assures language both ways, then we can see how Scripture is a conversation partner. Thus, as Scripture addresses people it shapes them as listeners because one grows in the capability of listening by practicing listening. Scripture both communicates with listeners and creates listeners with whom it can communicate, not in a linear sense, but in a context of relationship: in the space, we could say, created by its sound. Now, if Gadamer is correct that texts offer worlds to readers by which they can understand themselves and their own worlds,⁵¹ then we can say that this world is accessed by listening and thus creates listeners as it is accessed.

Here we can see how interpretation and performance are knit together. Westphal writes, “All performance is interpretation *and* all interpretation is performance.”⁵² Thus, if listening is a hermeneutical practice, then one performs Scripture in this action. By listening, the church not only accesses the text to know its meaning as it is opened, but performs the text and becomes the community the text is creating.

Westphal agrees with Gadamer that a text is a classic one when it is held in such regard by enough people that it founds a community and helps to sustain it.⁵³ As texts “found communities, are sustained by communities, and in turn sustain communities,” their interpretation is “a communal affair.”⁵⁴ Thus, Westphal describes the church as a “a communal conversation” around Scripture.⁵⁵ If Christian Scripture is accessed by listening and is meant to shape a community, then the hermeneutic of listening becomes formative for the church.

The Church as a Leading Political Community

I believe the trace of this sketch is important for churches in the Wesleyan tradition because of its history of “class meetings”⁵⁶ and its

⁵⁰Ibid., 103. Italics added.

⁵¹Westphal, *Whose Community?*, 94.

⁵²Ibid., 102.

⁵³Ibid., 94.

⁵⁴Ibid., 118.

⁵⁵Ibid., 120.

⁵⁶See especially D. Michael Henderson, *John Wesley's Class Meeting: A Model for Making Disciples* (Nappanee, IN: Evangel Publishing House, 1997).

intentionality to develop practices of conversation and listening. As such, churches in the Wesleyan tradition, when aware of and true to their tradition, are well positioned to be leading communities.

I declared at the outset my assumption that the world is becoming more religious. As these religious communities, founded by religious texts, share common public space, they will and must engage with one another. These smaller and intentional listening communities, as they provide more intimate settings, can create the context of relationship with other religions by being open to the other.

As such, the church, as it becomes a community of listeners, is not just communal, but also *political*. With the Wesleyan tradition of “societies,” we must reclaim the political nature of these smaller communities while exhibiting an openness to the other faith adherent. While Wesley’s societies were originally developed with the purpose of discipleship in the Christian faith, the name society itself was common, noting any assembling together.⁵⁷ The societies also served as means of providing funds. These two points can come together in contemporary expression. In my own leadership of smalls groups in the local church, we have made this a practice by supporting the common good through micro-loans in developing nations.⁵⁸ We have attempted to be an expression of the society by specifically gathering for the benefit of the common good, but without divorcing this intention from our personal piety and discipleship through giving. Likewise with listening: just as listening was described as the practice of Scripture, it is an act of discipleship; as it embodies the gospel to an adherent of another faith, it is an act of evangelism.

The most pressing concern is that a contemporary expression of the societies would lose their distinctive Christian character. This is always a concern and one John Wesley needed to address as members were not walking properly in their faith. However, an intentional openness need not discount the Christian character when people of other faiths are being invited and welcomed for the purpose of respectful conversation.⁵⁹ The more intimate nature of the early Wesleyan “bands” gives us a dynamic in

⁵⁷*John Wesley the Methodist: A Plain Account of His Life and Work* (New York: Methodist Book Concern, 1903) online at <http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/john-wesley-the-methodist/chapter-ix-society-and-class/>. Accessed April 5, 2011.

⁵⁸For an example of an institution enabling micro-loans, see www.kiva.org.

⁵⁹Indeed, Wesley’s General Rules can be read as rules appropriate to several forms of religious practice, especially Wesley’s urge simply to do good to all people, as far as possible.

discipleship that allows greater freedom in the modern expression of societies.⁶⁰ This is an avenue open for further discussion and implementation by both academics and practitioners.

The challenging nature of this calling reveals the necessity to be focused on the call to leadership and avoid simply seeing the practice of listening as being polite. As Graham Ward writes of these forthcoming and existing clashes of community, “[I]f we are to reach any common understanding of ourselves, one another, and the threats and possibilities that pervade the cultures in which we are situated, it is only by being impolite and listening to one another’s impoliteness.”⁶¹

Listening is a constructive practice. Luke Bretherton unpacks listening as a practice that *cultivates* a political sphere. Listening helps to overcome prior assumptions of agenda and political program. It “creates a common realm of shared action and meaning.”⁶² With significant public space occupied by communities of varying faiths, listening helps foster a conversation about how to act together that allows for “real politics.”⁶³ In the Wesleyan tradition, conversation, including in part the practice of listening, has been understood as a key practice and mutual aid on the way to holiness.⁶⁴ Thus, churches in the Wesleyan tradition have a unique opportunity to teach the discipline of listening as a *Christological* act, centered on the community’s interaction with Scripture and, hence, on each other. As Jesus opens the church and the Scriptures, disciples of Jesus can foster political participation in his name.

Churches in the Wesleyan tradition can be leading communities in larger gatherings because listening can also be a transformational practice

⁶⁰For a contemporary model of small group ministry that encourages larger group sizes and a certain amount of care in what amount of a person’s spiritual health is shared, see Myers, *The Search to Belong*, especially chapter 3, and Nelson Searcy & Kerrick Thomas, *Activate: An Entirely New Approach to Small Groups* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2008). Myers’ approach is heavily dependent on the sociology of Edward T. Hall and the study of proxemics as applied to a spiritual context in local church settings.

⁶¹Graham Ward, *The Politics of Discipleship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 22.

⁶²Luke Bretherton, “Reflections on Graham Ward’s *The Politics of Discipleship*,” <http://www.calvin.edu/~jks4/churchandpomodocs/bretherton.pdf>, 7. Accessed April 20, 2010.

⁶³*Ibid.*, 9.

⁶⁴See Aaron Perry, “Listening, Narrative, and Atonement,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 43:1 (Spring 2008): 133-45, for further exploration of listening and conversation in the process of transformation.

in this world. Recall that listening allows the other into you. Thus, as Christians listen, they are practicing a deep form of presence, as opposed to distance, in the world. Graham Ward argues that the events and stories that are listened to allow the church to tune itself to the world.⁶⁵ Ward writes, “as [Christians] dwell in Christ and Christ in [them], then [events, stories, etc.] pass through Christ also.”⁶⁶ Could we not say that as these events pass through Christ, they may be brought under his authority? And could we not say that this transformation of all events and history under the authority of Christ is the emerging future of the universal reign of Jesus?

Conclusion

Allow me to summarize briefly the scope of my argument. Listening is a double opening—in the self as it strains toward meaning by allowing the other to enter. Listening is a leading act that fits with Theory U, a contemporary matrix of leadership that emphasizes openness to the emerging future. As Christians are open to Scripture, they not only access Scripture, but perform this interpretation of Scripture. In a religiously diverse world with multiple scriptures, the church of Jesus can lead by championing the potential for relationship by listening. This practice is Christocentric as Jesus both opens the church and the Scriptures to form this community. In this discipline of listening, the emerging future may be discerned as events are brought under the authority of Christ. Churches in the Wesleyan tradition are uniquely poised to embody such practices because of the history of intentional conversation in its discipleship process. I believe more reflection in this area is necessary and appropriate.

The world is turbulent and listening is not relationship itself. It requires an openness in the other that may not be forthcoming. Timothy Tennent has described this globo-religious moment as a period of the pause.⁶⁷ It is the short moment of recovery before there is another concerted effort. It is a *Selah* moment. This is what listening allows. While listening is not the only Christian act of leadership, in this time of religious diversity, it may be the most appropriate.

⁶⁵Bretherton, “Reflections on Graham Ward,” 281. Recall how Scharmer described the open mind, will, and heart as three instruments to be tuned.

⁶⁶*Ibid.*, 282.

⁶⁷Timothy Tennent’s address at the “Wesley Ministry Conference: The Gospel in the North American Mosaic,” April 26, 2010, Tyndale College and Seminary.

EVANGELIZING POST-MODERNS: A CELTIC MODEL

by

David J. Swisher

Few now doubt the rising interest in things Celtic. From the popularity of Celtic art and symbols to the revival of the Celtic love of nature (and the rise of neo-pagan groups) to the recovery of cultural and ancestral identity, it is no secret that interest in Celtic lore and even “Celtic spirituality” is on the rise. What may be surprising is the extent of influence this transition could have on Christian missiological practice and in our appreciation for Patrick as a model of evangelization. Out of the intellectual and sociological shifts of the last few decades has emerged an increasingly Post-Christian society that hungers for spirituality, but is void of its true power as Christians have traditionally understood that power.

American Demographics reported in April, 1999 the five words that have now become the mantra of the new millennium: “I’m into spirituality, not religion.” The article noted an 11% decadal growth in belief in God and cited a study from the MacArthur Foundation in which seven out of ten Americans say they are religious and consider spirituality to be an important part of their lives, but observed that they do not consider the church relevant nor make attendance at any church a priority.¹ Twelve years later, George Barna reports a similar but even further pronounced dichotomy, with 67% claiming belief in God but 8-9% drops in key variables like church attendance, Bible reading, and volunteerism.² Spiritual seekers today clamor for groups that place intensive spiritual demands upon their followers. Often, however, these same seekers exhibit little discernment

¹Richard Cimino, “Choosing My Religion,” *American Demographics* (April 1, 1999).

²George Barna, “Barna Examines Trends in 14 Religious Factors over 20 Years (1991 to 2011).” *State of the Church Series*, July 26, 2011. <http://www.barna.org/faith-spirituality/504-barna-examines-trends-in-14-religious-factors-over-20-years-1991-to-2011> (20 August, 2011).

between truth and error. They want experiences and a strong sense of community, not rational answers to complex theological questions.

“Saint” Patrick (340-440?) and his disciples ministered indigenously and with dramatic success in what is now Northern Ireland. They developed a holistic, relevant missiology while encountering many of the same dichotomies in their day as we do today. The methods employed in reaching the fifth-century Irish Celts appear in large part to be transferable to today’s generation (and are already meeting with success in some congregations). Whether the resultant assimilation will be bane or blessing only time will tell, but the task now at hand— evangelizing postmoderns in this age of disbelief—necessitates an informed inquiry as to how it was done so successfully in the past in a surprisingly similar situation.

The Celtic Renaissance

It was the appearance of Thomas Cahill’s notable 1995 literary work *How the Irish Saved Civilization* that brought the Irish saga to a popular and highly desirable level. But the popularity and success of Cahill’s work may well be, at least in part, due to decades of growing interest in Celtic lore and Christianity. Ian Bradley chronicles “The Current Revival” in an engaging narrative, tracing its roots back to “a clutch of books that appeared in the early 1960s,” the most recognizable of which was Carmichael’s *Carmina Gadelica*. These “made widely and cheaply available what had hitherto been confined to expensive volumes of limited circulation.”³

By the mid-1970s, Celtic Christianity was being promoted not just for its devotion but for its relevance: “The Celt may never have excelled at developing institutions, but in an age when structures in government, industry, and even the Church are increasingly criticized for crushing the spirit that ought to exist in them, the Celt has something very vital to contribute.”⁴ Scottish theologians and ministers, such as Martin Reith and John Macquarrie, played a vital role in this development through their publications. In the years that followed, several collections of prayers, blessings, and commentary played a major role in shaping the burgeoning interest in Celtic spirituality. Esther de Waal’s *God Under My Roof* “offered a more orthodox and less ‘alternative’ view of Celtic Christianity but was

³Ian Bradley, *Celtic Christianity: Making Myths and Chasing Dreams* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999), 190.

⁴Martin Reith, *God in Our Midst* (London: SPCK, 1975), 23. Cited by Ian Bradley, *Celtic Christianity*, 193.

equally enthusiastic about its relevance to an age hungry for a new spirituality.”⁵ De Waal later published *The Celtic Vision*. Then followed Shirley Toulson’s *Celtic Journeys*, a pilgrimage guide. The interest was beginning to take on an ecumenical flair as well as a sense of recovery of an important cultural and spiritual heritage.

Ian Bradley’s book *The Celtic Way* did much to garner interest. The early 1990s are marked by a proliferation of books on Celtic subject matter, emphasizing everything from Pelagius’ impact on Patrick (and thus British theology) to claims of New Agers that Patrick had mastered the “druid” practice of shape-shifting. Many well-established Christian publishers responded with a number of noteworthy books to “counter its appropriation by New Agers and neo-pagans.”⁶ Celtic spirituality had hit the mainstream, seemingly for both good and ill.

Michael Mitton’s *Restoring the Woven Cord: Strands for Celtic Christianity for the Church Today* and Ray Simpson’s *Exploring Celtic Spirituality: Historic Roots for Our Future* did much for broadening the appeal of Celtic Christianity, though interest at first was primarily among “Christians of a liberal disposition” and later charismatics.⁷ Workshops, retreats, and pilgrimages soon began to appear, offering a taste of Celtic spirituality and a sense of involvement with the lives and mystic flavor of Celtic saints. A number of quasi-monastic communities arose with similar purposes. Even several prominent evangelical church leaders began touting Celtic Christianity’s relevance for both contemporary evangelism and models of church practice.⁸ Various evangelical leaders now recognize the relevance of the Celtic model of church to contemporary situations. The rise of interest in Celtic Christianity has for the most part paralleled the growth and development of postmodernism, both in timing and expansion. Further, many aspects of postmodernist culture and its tenets are in large part a logical progression of the same cultural and sociological developments that made the Irish Celts who they were in their time. Their civilization also experienced a post-modernistic decline following their own cultural and educational enlightenment and subsequent modernization.

⁵Ian Bradley, *Celtic Christianity*, 196.

⁶Ian Bradley, *Celtic Christianity*, 203.

⁷Ian Bradley, *Celtic Christianity*, 205.

⁸John Finney, Anglican bishop and head of the Church of England’s *Decade of Evangelism* initiative is one of these I found most helpful (*Recovering the Past: Celtic and Roman Mission*, 1996). Noteworthy others were Douglas Dales’ *Light to the Isles* (1997) and Robert Van de Weyer’s *A Celtic Resurrection* (1996).

Celtic Origins: Historical Background

The Celts first developed as a distinct people about 800 B.C. on mainland Europe. By 300 B.C. the Celtic world extended completely across Europe from today's countries of Romania and Hungary into Britain and Ireland, and from Belgium south into Portugal and Spain. Their territories were called *Celtica* by the ancient Greeks. Eventually, the only surviving Celts were confined to the Western fringe of Europe, which is why most people now think of them as in the British Isles and especially Ireland. Because of Ireland's island location and relative impenetrability (very little Atlantic traffic went through), it suffered few intrusive influences. As such, it developed a culture and a version of Christianity all its own. When the Roman Empire collapsed, the effects of Patrick's evangelization and the success of the Irish monastic model became known, and their learned missionaries played a key role in the re-education and re-evangelization of all of Europe.⁹

As George Hunter explains, "The Irish and the other Celtic peoples (but especially the Irish) were passionate people who experienced the full range of human emotions and usually based decisions on how they felt."¹⁰ They seemed to possess a rebellious, carefree spirit—carousing, drinking, and roughhousing—and yet were passionate, articulate, thinking people who had a fond appreciation for the arts, a fascinating combination. As Christianity later expanded throughout the Emerald Isle, the Celtic love for the arts became wonderfully assimilated by its Christianity, and is demonstrated by its intricate knotwork, metallurgy, and symbolism. Even today, many of its artifacts, such as the *Book of Kells*, are highly prized as intensely beautiful pieces in museum collections.

The Druids, too, played a major role in forming the social fabric in which Patrick and the early Celtic leaders ministered. They were medieval scholars and pagan priests, some specialists in physics, astronomy, astrology, geology, natural theology, and even medicine. What makes them unique, even to today's neo-pagans and druid practitioners,

⁹For more on this, see: Daryl McCarthy, "Hearts And Minds Aflame For Christ: Irish Monks—A Model For Making All Things New in the 21st Century." *In Pursuit of Truth: A Journal of Christian Scholarship*, n.d. C.S. Lewis Foundation. <http://www.cslewis.org/journal/?p=14> (30 August, 2011).

¹⁰ George Hunter III, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism: How Christianity Can Reach the West . . . Again* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2000), 69.

is that they had a staunch aversion to anything written. Despite their vast knowledge base, everything was passed on via oral tradition.¹¹ Additionally, the Druid priests were believed to have incredible magical powers, from bringing down showers of blood or fire to invisibility and divination, even to forecasting the future by watching the clouds.¹² No doubt their advanced learning gave them an edge with which to awe the uneducated, but there was a distinctive pagan spirituality about them as well. They were clearly ritual priests of what Christians would term "alternative religion." Even more notably, the Druid priests exerted extensive influence and authority over their Irish compatriots. Their decisions and judgments were absolute and final, with the penalty for transgression of their verdict being exclusion from the sacrifice, which was equivalent to being excommunicated from society. Even the tribal chieftains obeyed the advice and prophecies of these religious leaders.

Patrick encountered these Druid priests early in his ministry. He deliberately chose a location on the great plain of Brega "because it was the head of all paganism and idolatry"¹³ and the timing of the Paschal celebration in order to declare God's sovereignty even over the king's Druid-inspired edict that, under penalty of death, no one should light a fire until the fire in the king's house was lit. When Patrick lit his bonfire for his Paschal celebration, the Druid oracles' response was immediate and very negative. The result was a showdown with the king and his best Druid priests, something akin to Elijah's contest with the prophets of Baal.¹⁴

¹¹Caesar wrote in the first century that "their religion forbids them to commit their teachings to writing." It was not until the fifth and sixth centuries A.D. that some of this knowledge and folklore would be recorded, ironically, by the Irish monks.

¹²Solstice. "The Druids."

¹³Muirchú Moccu Mactheni, "Muirchú's Life of St. Patrick" in Liam De Paor, *Saint Patrick's World: The Christian Culture of Ireland's Apostolic Age* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993; Dublin, Ireland: Four Courts Press, 1993), 182-183.

¹⁴Ian Bradley says "most historians are agreed as seeing this story as a piece of pure fabrication," but not all historians agree. Bradley's work is an attempt to debunk the fancifications arising from Catholic legend and his own contribution to the revival in Celtic interest (*Celtic Christianity: Making Myths and Chasing Dreams*, 13). The account is absent from Patrick's *Confession* and *Letters*, but is included in both Muirchú's and Bishop Tirechan's accounts, and it is characteristic of Patrick's style and character. It is probably safest to conclude that such an encounter *happened* (at least in essence), but was later enhanced with great imagination.

Patrick was born to Christian parents in a Roman colony of Britain. His father was a deacon and son of Potitus, a Christian priest. We know little of his childhood except that he did not embrace his parents' Christianity, and he committed some heinous sin for which he felt he deserved what happened next. At age sixteen he was captured by Irish pirates and sold to a local tribal chieftain. Prior to his capture, Patrick was a self-described rebel, carefree and careless. He tells us in his *Confession* that he "did not know the true God" but "lived in death and unbelief until [he] was severely chastised and really humiliated, by hunger and nakedness."

After six years of slavery in Ireland, he heard a voice saying, "Your hungers are rewarded, soon you will go home." He escaped, his education entirely interrupted, and eventually he made it back to Britain where they "received [him] as their son" and begged him not to leave again. Soon, however, he received a vision of a man from Ireland begging him to "come and walk among us once more." He would indeed.

In approximately A.D. 428, Patrick returned to the island nation where he had once been a slave, now possibly the first missionary bishop in history. His courageous return to both purchase his freedom and proclaim the redemptive grace and love of God inspired the imagination and excited the psyche of the Celtic nomadic people. Accompanied, even at his arrival, by "power encounters" with the local druids and tribal chieftains, Patrick repeatedly demonstrated the power of God and earned invitations to share the gospel, always starting with the highest man in the tribe.¹⁵ Before too long, he had established a safe haven of inquiry and community which soon resulted in converts. He traveled around the Irish countryside, much as John Wesley later would do, proclaiming the gospel openly at various preaching points (usually established by interchange with the local chieftains), each time leaving behind lay evangelists who would develop and establish a truly indigenous church.¹⁶

¹⁵Louis Gougaud, *Christianity in Celtic Lands: A History of the Churches of the Celts, Their Origins, Their Development, Influence and Mutual Relations* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1932); reprinted by Four Courts Press, Dublin, Ireland, 1992.

¹⁶Patrick's evangelization model is fully described and well-documented in John Finney's book *Recovering the Past* (chapter 5, "The Monastery in Mission") and in George Hunter's book *The Celtic Way of Evangelism* (chapter 4, "The Celtic Christian Community in Formation and Mission" and chapter 5, "How Celtic Christianity Communicated the Gospel").

Patrick's apostolic bands of lay evangelists revolutionized the religious climate of fifth-century Ireland, and may well have been the most successful missionary enterprise ever undertaken to an unreached people (in terms of the extent of influence in such a short duration as well as the far-reaching effects of their evangelization). Only William Carey and the Wesley brothers rival the tenacity and indigenization Patrick accomplished in his mission to Ireland. Patrick's ministry encompassed the majority of northern, central, and eastern Ireland. According to the "Annals of the Masters," an ancient document included in Liam DePaor's anthology, Patrick's mission planted about 700 churches and ordained perhaps 1,000 priests.¹⁷ In addition to establishing an evangelistic presence throughout most of the Emerald Isle, at least 30-40 of Ireland's 150 tribes were evangelized within his lifetime.

Fifth-century Ireland was considered "rogue" territory by the Romanized Britians and no one wanted to minister there. Although the *Keltoi* peoples predated the Roman Empire by more than a thousand years and may once have been the dominant population of Europe, the Roman Church considered them barbaric, uncivilized, illiterate, and "unreachable." Nonetheless, so influential was Patrick's evangelization and methodology of contextualization that "through several generations of sustained mission, Celtic Christianity thus re-evangelized Europe, [and] helped bring Europe out of the Dark Ages. . . ."¹⁸ This is, after all, "how the Irish saved civilization."¹⁹

The Hallmarks of Celtic Christianity

The Christianity that evolved out of this Irish social context could be unique in human history. There was an austerity, a cooperativeness, and sense of immanence and mission rarely known. Irishman Caedmon Greene explains, "Celtic Christianity was characterized by extreme holiness, a love of God and man, wanderlust and the need to bring [the] light of Christ to the world."²⁰ Dave Bainbridge, guitarist and keyboardist of

¹⁷Liam De Paor, "From the Annals of the Four Masters," Transl. O'Donovan, in *Saint Patrick's World: The Christian Culture of Ireland's Apostolic Age* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993; Dublin, Ireland: Four Courts Press, 1993), 126-134.

¹⁸Hunter, 40.

¹⁹Cahill (title).

²⁰Caedmon Greene, "Introduction to Celtic Christianity," *Orthodox Christianity in the British Isles*. <http://www.nireland.com/orthodox/was.htm> (5 March, 2001).

the popular Celtic contemporary band *Iona*, explains: "I am beginning to see the importance of looking at the Celtic church in relation to how we should be as a church today. I see just how far away we are from God's ideal of his body, but how near in many respects the Celtic church was. The church of that time was united in a goal to see the light of the gospel shine brightly over the whole of these islands, with a zeal that has rarely been seen since. There was a love and a thirst for Scripture, for living a holy and simple lifestyle, a deep respect for nature and for people. Their way of evangelizing was by getting alongside folk, understanding them, and preaching by the example of their lives."²¹ While this may be a somewhat more romanticized rendering than history warrants (it is viewed by many as a sort of "Golden Age" to which Christianity has never returned), it may not be too far off.

Celtic Christianity embraces a love for nature and a passion for the wild and elemental, a gentle respect and admiration of all creation's worth and interconnectedness, and an appreciation for art and poetry. In Celtic spirituality, there is a sense of God and the saints as a continuing, personal, helpful presence. There is a high degree of asceticism and penitential acts, and there are few boundaries between the sacred and the secular. Celtic church structures are simpler and less rigid, employing a monastic rather than a diocesan model, with women having a more equal footing and more involvement in church leadership and the local abbots having more power than the bishops.²²

Donald Meek, professor and chair of Celtic studies at the University of Aberdeen in Scotland, identifies six prominent aspects of current Celtic claims that he attempts, in part, to debunk as being projected onto true Celtic history: (1) God's nearness, or immanence, rather than his transcendence, (2) God's love rather than his judgment, (3) Simplicity of structures, (4) Tolerance of paganism, (5) Feminism, and (6) Environmentalism.²³ A thorough reading of Celtic sources and quality research (as opposed to

²¹Bainbridge, Dave. Quoted in Steve Rabey, "Invoking the Celtic Saints: Irish Christian Band *Iona* Defies Trends, Transcends Tradition." *Christianity Today* (November 17, 1997).

²²Dennis Dyle, "Celtic Spirituality." *Celtic Spirituality Handout*. <http://english.glendale.cc.ca.us/christ.html> (5 Mar., 2001).

²³Donald E. Meek, "Trying to Reconnect With an Inaccessible Past: Much of Today's 'Celtic Christianity' is Neither Celtic nor Christian." *Christian History*, Fall 1998. Christian History > World Christianity. <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ch/60h/60h042.html> (12 February, 2002).

much of the myth-making currently pursued today) reveals some truth to these aspects but also an obvious effort among contemporary authors to project today's social and philosophical concerns onto an early success story; contemporary agendas are easily interwoven into Celtic lore.

No doubt the Celtic world's association with New Age and paganism is one of the main reasons why many contemporary Christians, especially evangelical ones, have shied away from anything Celtic. In my own experience, anything "Celtic" was automatically suspect as undoubtedly pagan. Only as I have explored Patrick's legacy have I understood and been encouraged by Celtic Christianity. It is now my belief that New Age and neo-pagan influences have hijacked the sincere faith of the early Celtic saints, twisting components of the early Christians' syncretism and local Druidic customs to support their agenda. I contend that far more evidence exists to support Christianity's role in evangelizing the Celtic lands (with perhaps questionable accommodations) than exists to imply a New Age/neo-pagan culture that merely accommodated Christianity.

The Challenge of Postmodernism

With these foundations laid, my intent now is to derive important missiological perspectives from the obvious success of Patrick and the later Irish missionaries. As we explore the challenges of postmodernism, I will expand on George G. Hunter III's research and analyze the sociological underpinnings which make for an effective evangelistic model. What is obvious is the failure of traditional (and I believe "modern") modes of expression and evangelism that appear to fly in the face of postmodern values and prevent effective evangelization.

As Hunter explains, Western Christianity today faces a population and worldview system that is largely ignorant of Christianity's message. These "New Barbarians" are largely "secular" (never having been substantially influenced by the Christian religion), have no Christian memory and no church to "return" to, and have never acquired a "church etiquette."²⁴ Among those who have been exposed to Christianity, they are by and large biblically illiterate. Their theology is influenced primarily by media and movies (they are more likely to understand Christ's messianic role from *The Matrix*, *Star Wars: Phantom Menace*, or *Final Fantasy* than from Isaiah) and their spirituality is a quasi-New-Age'ish mishmash

²⁴Hunter, 96, expanding on his earlier work *How To Reach Secular People* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1992).

informed by self-help media leaders like Oprah and Dr. Phil, and talk-show hosts like Conan O'Brien. They are oblivious to the holiness and lordship demands of biblical Christianity. This is very similar to the type of society in which Patrick ministered. With the rise of Celtic interest, and the development of postmodern values and beliefs that mirror many of the Celtic assumptions, I am convinced that adopting Patrick's methods may be one of the most effective ways of reaching today's generation.

Postmodernism as an identifiable worldview originated with the intellectual querying of Europeans debating subjects like architecture and literary theory. However, in recent decades, postmodernism has crossed the Atlantic where it has seeped down through academic disciplines and, with the help of media and popular culture, as Steve Rabey declares, has "become the de facto worldview of the emerging generations."²⁵ A readable work on this worldview has already been composed by Stanley Grenz (*A Primer on Postmodernism*, 1996). He identifies several irreversible trends of the new postmodern ethos: (1) the dethroning of reason in favor of a more holistic understanding of the human person, (2) the rejection of radical individualism in favor of a more communitarian understanding of existence, and (3) the rejection of uniformity in favor of the celebration of difference.²⁶ These are, by and large, Celtic values, holistic rather than empirical, communitarian over individualistic, and local/tribal over conformity.

Postmodernism presents a unique challenge to evangelical witness. One strand of postmodernism, the post-structuralists (or rather deconstructionists) derive their "hermeneutics of suspicion" from the better-known "protest atheists": Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud, and Friedrich Nietzsche, who see religion not as benign superstition but as one element in the complex of forces which keep humanity bound—the "opiate of the people" (Marx), an "infantile disorder" (Freud), or a "slave morality" (Nietzsche). Further, "post-structuralists (deconstructionists) like Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault and neo-pragmatists like Richard Rorty . . . have appropriated this hermeneutic of suspicion and turned it on the overarching metanarratives themselves"²⁷ (i.e., since the carriers of truth

²⁵Steve Rabey, *In Search of Authentic Faith: How Emerging Generations Are Transforming the Church* (Colorado Springs, CO: Waterbrook Press, 2001), 32.

²⁶Rogier Bos, "Engaging our Postmodern Culture: An Interview with Stanley Grenz," *The Ooze Community*, 20 December 2001. Reprinted from *Next Wave*, a monthly web magazine for discussing the nature of ministry, faith, and leadership in the 21st Century.

²⁷Henry H. Knight III, *A Future for Truth: Evangelical Theology in a Post-modern World* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), 57.

cannot be trusted, truth itself cannot be trusted). Frequently quoted is Jean-Francois Lyotard's statement, "Simplifying in the extreme, I define *postmodern* as incredulity toward metanarratives." The deconstructionists "are a sustained resistance movement against the tendency of Western modernity to absolutize itself."²⁸

In mission methodology, this is significant: "By implication, post-modern presuppositions challenge traditional evangelism as cultural arrogance. They throw suspicion on a service motivation as disguised self-serving. And they suggest that development through modernization is simply a new materialism. Thus, whether we agree with these post-modern implications or not, they demand a change in attitudes, modes of communication and definition of witness and service."²⁹ The concern of the ultra-critics is more than to expose universal claims as culturally conditioned. They also hope to end the violence and suffering perpetrated in the service of those claims." Further, as C. Norman Kraus explores in *An Intrusive Gospel?*, " 'Modern' Christian missions have by now been roundly—and all too often justly—condemned as being too closely allied with the secular goals and military power of their home nations."³⁰ Against this I again would posit Patrick's approach.

It is a well-publicized fact that "Ireland is unique in religious history for being the only land into which Christianity was introduced without bloodshed."³¹ Indeed, there were no Irish martyrs for the first eleven centuries, despite the desire of many to give their lives so fully. Patrick's hagiographers' depictions of the pagan priests' conversions and power encounters may imply force,³² but there is little solid evidence of coercion and instead much evidence of harmonic interactivity. If the Irish saints' agenda was to convert the heathens, their approach worked beautifully—and this without bloodshed. It is not surprising, then, that postmoderns have noticed this and embraced this more "tolerant" brand of spirituality.

Particularly encouraging is Alasdair MacIntyre's perspective. While showing how the Enlightenment project of justifying morality failed "because it sought to derive a universal ethic from human nature," MacIn-

²⁸Knight, 58.

²⁹C. Norman Kraus, *An Intrusive Gospel?: Christian Mission in the Postmodern World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 19.

³⁰C. Norman Kraus, back cover.

³¹Cahill, 151. Affirmed by multiple sources.

³²The legends were embodied in Catholic dogma to venerate desired virtues.

tyre “envisions the recovery of moral communities which embody particular moral traditions,”³³ thus retaining the postmodern skepticism of Enlightenment rationality and adding a flair for the local/tribal and affirming the postmodern value that belonging constitutes identity. A postmodernism embracing MacIntyre’s perspective, including genuine interest, a willingness to listen, and openness to contrasting perspectives (especially if done in the context of genuine community), should open considerable doors to evangelism.

Because of Christian faith in the ultimacy of Jesus Christ, Christians cannot affirm the central tenet of postmodernism as defined by Lyotard—the rejection of all metanarrative. But there are still opportunities for proactive engagement. The power of story (personal testimonies) has been elevated. While a postmodern would reject at the outset any view begun with “The Bible says. . .,” he would welcome an interfaith dialogue preceded by “Let me tell you how this has worked itself out in my journey,” particularly if the testimony is offered in the context of genuine community and entails some sort of experience for the inquirer.

The pragmatism of postmodern skepticism leaves us evaluating on the basis of “what works,” which can be a good place to be *if* while engaging postmoderns we can abandon the modern tendency to evaluate rationally and instead pursue what postmoderns value—story/narrative, “journey” testimonials, and practical examples of how our truth claims and subsequent worldview interpretations flesh out in daily life. This, I am convinced, is what happened as the Irish Celts were won by the successes of Patrick and Celtic monasticism.

Why Was Patrick Successful and Currently Relevant?

It is particularly intriguing to note that Steve Rabey and Mark Driscoll both look to Patrick and the situations he faced as they make a case for their radical alternatives to modern church methods.³⁴ Likewise, Caedmon Greene observes that “many of the issues that the Celtic Christians dealt with are amazingly contemporary, things like the position of women in the Church, nature and our environmental surroundings, and dealing with others of different customs and beliefs (both pagan and Christian). Much of its attraction comes from how it dealt with these

³³Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 201-207.

³⁴Rabey, 32-33, 40-41.

problems, taking the best from older traditions while still standing firm in the truth.”³⁵ Speaking of Celtic spirituality, E. R. Dodds remarks, “It [the Celtic Church] does seem to speak with almost uncanny relevance to many of the concerns of our present age. It was environment friendly, embracing positive attitudes to nature and constantly celebrating the goodness of God’s creation. It was non-hierarchical and non-sexist . . . it seems to speak with a primitive innocence and directness which has much appeal in our tired and cynical age.”³⁶

There are multiple reasons why the Celtic world appeals to the post-modern mind. They include: Questioning and redefining of authority, decentralizing ecclesiastical structure, emphasizing monastic community, honoring tribalism and local narrative, rejecting an Enlightenment means of knowledge, focusing on pragmatic involvement in the faith, and visibly being the church—a community in which the power of the Spirit is transforming lives and relationships (postmoderns likely would be attracted to such a community before they would be open to conversion to Christ). Celtic Christianity gave rise to a massive missionary thrust that effectively evangelized an entire region and provided the framework to re-evangelize after subsequent threats. It was the attractive quality of the transformed community that largely made this possible.

Jimmy Long of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship summarizes the following major socio-intellectual shifts that resulted in postmodernism: (1) from the autonomous self to tribalism, (2) from basing decisions on truth to basing them on preferences, and (3) from belief in human progress to hopelessness.³⁷ These themes were prominent in the Celtic world, and to a large extent formed the background for Patrick’s phenomenal success. As a missionary church planter and apostle to a people, Patrick was extremely successful. It is hard to say whether Patrick’s efforts

³⁵Caedmon Greene, “Introduction to Celtic Christianity.” *Orthodox Christianity in the British Isles*. <http://www.nireland.com/orthodox/was.htm> (5 March, 2001).

³⁶E. R. Dodds, *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety: Some Aspects of Religious Experience from Marcus Aurelius to Constantine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), reprinted 1991. Quoted in John Finney, *Recovering the Past: Celtic and Roman Mission* (London: Darton, Longman, & Todd, 1996); reprinted 1998.

³⁷Jimmy Long, “Generating Hope: A Strategy for Reaching the Postmodern Generation” in D. A. Carson, ed., *Telling the Truth: Evangelizing Postmoderns* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 325-327.

were deliberate or, more likely John Wesley, developed out of necessity. But in either case, we can learn from Patrick as we evangelize postmoderns. Here are four key areas where he remains instructive for contemporary Christians:

Patrick identified with the Irish people. The fact that he had once lived among them and had already endured harsh treatment from their tribal leaders helped Patrick greatly. But he evidently grew to love the people and see himself as one of them. By the time he writes his “Letter to the Soldiers of Coroticus” (excommunicating a British regiment for an “unspeakably horrible crime”), he is saying, “O most beautiful and loving brethren. . . . For them [Coroticus’ soldiers] it is shameful that we are Irish.”³⁸ He now sees himself as one of them. In discussing this, Larry Shelton remarked, “It takes a postmodern to understand a postmodern . . . they will not be won by those who have not been incarnated into their culture.”³⁹

Patrick understood their culture and communicated accordingly. His bold courage—his refusal to be afraid of them—and zealous campaign for transformation no doubt excited them and brought admiration; he exemplified some of their best warrior virtues. But further, “Patrick found a way of swimming down to the depths of the Irish psyche and warming and transforming Irish imagination—making it more humane and more noble while keeping it Irish.”⁴⁰ He communicated in ways that were uniquely Celtic. Similarly, Leonard Sweet notes that “Postmodern culture is image-driven. The modern world was word-based. . . . The church now enters a world where metaphor is at the heart of spirituality. Propositions are lost on postmodern ears; but metaphor they will hear, images they will see and understand.”⁴¹ If we expect to reach postmoderns, we cannot do so with methodology and speech they find irrelevant or even offensive. Story, metaphor, and imagery work; propositions, tenets, and bullet points don’t.

Patrick assimilated their culture wherever possible. Patrick built a unique brand of Christianity upon foundations already laid. For example, it is widely known that Celtic Christianity is profoundly Trinitarian,

³⁸Patrick, “St. Patrick’s Letter Against the Soliders of Coroticus” in *Saint Patrick’s World*, 112.

³⁹Larry Shelton, “Re(2): Celtic.” [Personal Communication: 17 Aug., 2001].

⁴⁰Cahill, 115.

⁴¹Leonard Sweet, “But Today It Is a Particular Kind of Community,” in *Christianity Today* (Fall 1999), 33.

and for good reason. When Patrick learned that, in Irish mythology, gods and goddesses often manifested in threes, and that one motif even portrayed a tri-faced god, he saw in this an opportunity and a means of communication, rather than an idolatry to oppose. The Celtic crosses found all over Europe are indicative of this approach as well. The pagan circular symbol Patrick Christianized with a new meaning (wholeness and the beauty of God's creation). Over and over throughout Patrick's ministry we find him taking what the Celts already knew and loved and finding a way to either redefine or Christianize it. Although this suggests syncretism, it may be a successful attempt at redemption—redeeming creation, redirecting idolatry back to the One who deserves true praise, etc. Says George Hunter, "the Christianity that Patrick brought affirmed and 'Christianized' their affinity with nature."⁴²

We have a strong tendency in today's Western world to tear down and uproot, then rebuild—whatever the cause or purpose and with little regard for the heritage and transcendent meaning those beliefs, perspectives, and landmarks have to those who built them and value them. Our sensitivity to syncretism's dangers is wise, but prudence also dictates that we look for prior success and find crossover points of commonality with people. With postmoderns, we risk destroying opportunities by disparaging their inconsistencies.

Patrick held an optimistic view of humanity. Call it Pelagian (or more appropriately, Semi-Pelagian) if you like, but an optimistic view of humanity is one of the most profoundly successful aspects of Patrick's approach. In contrast with the Roman perspective, Patrick saw potential in everyone. Augustine "looked into his own heart and found there the inexpressible anguish of each individual, which enabled him to articulate a theory of sin that has no equal—the dark side of Christianity. Patrick prayed, made peace with God, and then looked not only into his own heart but into the hearts of others. What he saw convinced him of the bright side—that even slave traders can turn into liberators, even murderers can act as peacemakers, even barbarians can take their places among the nobility of heaven."⁴³

This is the "Mars Hill" approach that will win postmoderns. The apostle Paul could have easily (and justifiably) said to the Athenian elite, "Your gods are false and your pantheon void of truth. Repent of your

⁴²Hunter, 87.

⁴³Cahill, 115.

idolatry and turn to the one true God.” But, instead, he affirmed them at their point of need, saying, “Men of Athens, I see that you are deeply religious. As I toured your places of worship, I even found an altar to an unknown God. Let me tell you about this One you do not know.”⁴⁴ Every fiber of empiricist “modern” thinking screams out, “No, Paul—you’re right. Stand your ground and declare the truth. Those who are willing will pursue it.” But, for the postmodern, it is the dialogue that matters . . . the experience . . . the journey.

Revisioning Missiology with the Celtic Model in Mind

John Finney, Anglican bishop and head of the Church of England’s “Decade of Evangelism” initiative, identifies three main shifts needed as we minister to postmoderns: (1) from the Damascus road to the road to Emmaus, (2) from doctrine to spirituality, and (3) from mission to missions.⁴⁵ Each is a shift from Roman to Celtic approaches. Regarding the first, he states: “The controlling biblical paradigm of conversion has been the story of the conversion of St. Paul on his way to Damascus . . . hence the urgent wish to ‘lead someone to Christ.’”⁴⁶ Evangelism among postmoderns, however, accepts the possibility of sudden conversion *and* makes space for those who come to Christ over time.

Postmoderns celebrate the mini-narrative—“Let me tell you about my story”; but the Damascus road style of evangelism assumes an intrusive metanarrative that postmoderns haven’t yet embraced or have previously rejected. By contrast, the encounter on the road to Emmaus portrays a “gradual opening up of faith.” As Finney reads it, “The two downcast men are walking away from Jerusalem—they are leaving the centre of faith. A stranger draws near and starts to talk, accompanying them on their journey. The stranger begins to speak of the person of Jesus and teaches them the tradition from the Scriptures. Realisation comes as the stranger breaks the bread in the familiar sacramental action. The Stranger, now recognised as God in action, then disappears. The couple turn and hurry back to the church gathered in Jerusalem.”⁴⁷ This is a beautiful depiction of the Celtic way of evangelism. It is also an accurate summary of what it will take to reach postmoderns.

⁴⁴Paraphrased from Acts 17:22-23.

⁴⁵Finney, 39-40.

⁴⁶Finney, 40.

⁴⁷Finney, 41.

TRIBUTE AND RESPONSE
The 2012 Lifetime Achievement Award
of the Wesleyan Theological Society



DR. SUSIE CUNNINGHAM STANLEY

Delivered at the annual WTS banquet on the campus of
Trevecca Nazarene University, Nashville, TN, March, 2012

An awareness of theological differences emerged at sixteen as Susie Cunningham became active in Youth for Christ. She confronted terms like predestination and rapture. YFCers felt free to employ the “heretic” label to describe Susie’s Arminianism. Despite the negative label, her peers elected her president of the largest club in Cleveland and president of the Cleveland area officers. Sexism, though, kept her from the position of captain of the Bible quiz team, even though she met the criteria of having the most points. Dealing with these theological differences and sexism prepared Susie for her future commitment to Wesleyan/Holiness the-

ology and biblical feminism. Her experience with these quintessential evangelicals also helps explain her refusal to accept that label for herself.

Susie was a stay-at-home mom when God called her to ministry at an Evangelical Women's Caucus (EWC) conference in 1975. She founded the Michigan chapter of EWC. Also, before seminary, she promoted the Equal Rights Amendment and women's health issues. Susie attended seminary at Iliff School of Theology and did her graduate work in a joint program at Iliff and University of Denver graduating in 1987.

The Church of God (Anderson) ordained Susie in 1983 as an Ecumenical Minister. She has fulfilled that designation by preaching in Presbyterian, Methodist, Lutheran, Brethren in Christ, and Nazarene congregations. She's even preached and distributed the Eucharist at a Roman Catholic Church. She's conducted workshops at national Seventh Day Adventist, Church of God and Evangelical Covenant churches and regional meetings for The Salvation Army, American Baptists, and Mennonites. She has preached at numerous universities and seminaries, including Asbury University, Seattle Pacific University, and Azusa Pacific. She has delivered lecture series on holiness themes at ten universities or seminaries. She has conducted faculty retreats on numerous topics.

In addition to her being a board member of Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon (a national Council of Churches affiliate), highlight of Dr. Stanley's ecumenical involvement was being the Wesleyan/Holiness delegate to the Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order in Spain sponsored by the World Council of Churches. Who knew that Rowan Williams who shared her sense of humor and whose assigned seat was directly behind hers would become the Archbishop of Canterbury?

Susie began her teaching career at Western Evangelical Seminary (now George Fox Evangelical Seminary) in 1983 and moved to Messiah College in 1995 where she retired in 2011. She's taught a variety of courses, primarily theology but also church history, new religious movements, Black theology, women's studies, chocolate and practical ministry courses. She has served as an adjunct professor at seven schools, including Drew, Iliff, Fuller, Canadian Theological Seminary and Nazarene Theological Seminary. The theme of love permeates her teaching. She began her theology classes with a session on love, incorporating contemporary music, art, crafts and even heart-shaped candy.

Susie's involvement in various academic societies reflects her broad interests. She has delivered papers at the Society for the Scientific Study of

Religion, the American Society of Church History, the National Women's Studies Association, Berkshire Conference on the History of Women, the Society for Pentecostal Studies as well as the American Academy of Religion where she also served on the steering committee of two sections and president of the Northwest AAR/SBL. Her research has benefited from grants awarded by Messiah College, the Lilly Foundation, the AAR Collaborative Research Grant, Louisville Institute, Wabash Center, and Pew Charitable Trust.

In terms of the Wesleyan Theological Society, her tenure as president resulted in putting the society back on strong financial footing and maintaining the journal's reputation. The idea of a joint Society for Pentecostal Studies (SPS)/WTS meeting had been floating around but it was Susie and Cheryl Bridges Johns, president of SPS at the same time who issued a call which resulted in the first joint meeting.

She authored a biography of Alma White. Her *Holy Boldness: Women's Autobiographies and the Sanctified Self* assessed books by 37 women preachers. Both books are still in print. She was the primary editor of *Faith and Gender Equity*, consisting of lesson plans promoting equality designed for general education classes. She has written 44 articles or book chapters and led over 110 workshops or presented papers at schools and conferences in the United States, Canada, and England.

Susie helped plan the first conference for women in ministry and missions in the Church of God. Subsequently, she led the organization and edited the newsletter from 1990-1992. On a larger scale, she founded Wesleyan/Holiness Women Clergy, Intl. and served as volunteer executive director for fifteen years. Sponsored by seven denominations, the group had a ¼ million dollar biannual budget. Several conferences averaged 600 participants. Many of you worked to see that women students interested in ministry attended. WHWC published a newsletter, created relevant booklets which sold in the thousands, organized a mentoring program for students, and maintained a web site with texts of over seventy articles written by Wesleyan/Holiness authors advocating women clergy.

Susie understands mentoring as a crucial component of what she does. She continues to mentor scholars, pastors and students. She values her professional relationships and the support of her leadership by Western Evangelical Seminary and Messiah College. She appreciates and especially thanks those mentors who are here tonight who have supported and encouraged her calling to ministry in its various expressions.

Response of Dr. Susie Stanley to Receiving the 2012 WTS Lifetime Achievement Award

As we've been reminded today, holiness is relational. I feel that way about this award as well. It wouldn't have been possible without the help of others. Many of you are here in this room. You invited me to speak or teach at your schools. You worked hard to send students to the Wesleyan/Holiness Women Clergy conferences. I know the time it takes to arrange for this—from securing the funds to dealing with all the details involved. Thank you.

My children deserve to be recognized as well. Mike and Mandy helped copy materials for dissertation research. This was before the era of computer searches. Mike taught me how to use the footnote software. Many of you know Mandy from her significant work at the WHWC conferences.

John, my husband and partner in ministry, has nourished my self-esteem when it was wounded. He has cheered me on when I was tempted to abandon the race. Practically speaking, he watched the kids while I spoke at schools and attended WTS meetings, putting my career ahead of his own. He critiqued every draft I wrote. At the seven WHWC conferences that I helped plan, he was behind the scenes at every one, helping with the numerous details that always needed addressed at the last minute. Thank you, John, for your love and support and for helping to make this award possible.

BOOK REVIEWS

Headley, Anthony J. *Family Crucible: The Influence of Family Dynamics in the Life and Ministry of John Wesley*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2010. 170 Pages. ISBN 978-1606080016.

Reviewed by Dean Blevins, Professor of Practical Theology and Christian Discipleship, Nazarene Theological Seminary, Kansas City, MO.

For readers who enjoyed previous psycho-biographical works like Erik H. Erikson's *Young Man Luther* or feel a keen interest in understanding the family heritage of John and Charles Wesley, Anthony Headley's *Family Crucible* proves a must read. Headley, relying on Alderian analysis and family systems theory, attempts to provide a comprehensive understanding of the family dynamics that shaped particularly John Wesley's leadership and personal family life. Headley states, "In essence, [Wesley's] setting and especially his family became a crucible that honed his gifts, graces, and vulnerabilities in life and ministry" (xi). Headley believes family stories and experiences deeply shape one's identity, preferences, and behaviors. Through a detailed look at the experiences, events, and major themes of the Wesley family, he unearths what he believes are clues to the relational patterns in Wesley's life and ministry. These relational patterns become the thrust of his book, and Headley assumes that similar family patterns influence the thinking, feeling, behavioral styles, and relationships of pastors in other ministry contexts. Therefore, he assumes that pastors and ministers who long to be effective in ministry must work to understand their own familial dynamics (x, 164-70).

Throughout his book, Headley uses the family theories of Murray Bowen and Alfred Adler to make major claims about the Wesley family and its influence on the life and ministry of John Wesley. Headley's motivation for the writing surfaces in part through a 1991 lecture series by James Fowler at Asbury Theological Seminary and other personal experiences that encouraged his investigation. Overall, Headley draws from a number of primary and secondary sources concerning the Wesley family (particularly the work of Maldwyn Edwards) and analyzes the information through psychologist Alfred Adler's theory of family constellation

and Adler's use of recollections (3, 61-68). In addition, Headley incorporates Murray Bowen's approach to family systems and employs a genogram to explore two generations of the Wesley family. He shares the life stories, patterns, and conditions of the Wesley family and asserts that these made John a key figure in his family. Headley also notes several negative generational patterns that persisted in the Wesley family, such as father Samuel's emotional distance (57-60, 117), a tendency that also influenced John and Charles in their adult lives.

The book begins by exploring a general historical backdrop to the Wesley family and then shifts to address a number of psychological issues from within the Wesley journey: the role of trauma in the family prior to John's birth, and John's recollection of his specialness as a "brand plucked from the burning." Headley reviews recurring familial themes across the Wesley generations, including an emphasis on religious vocation, a love of learning, and ongoing engagements with medicine/healing and music. Headley then turns to the relational patterns that shaped interactions both between family members (particularly the brothers John and Charles) as well as troubled patterns of intimacy that impacted John's life beyond the family in his engagement with women, marriage, and ministry. The book closes with a reflection on the implications arising from John Wesley's family in shaping his ministry and personal life. Overall, the book treats the Wesley family thematically, allowing specific family counseling theories to assess the various historical incidents, but often returns to these same historical events for reassessment in a later chapter through additional psychological frameworks.

Headley himself notes early that he approaches the task not as a trained historian but as a lover of history and also a theologian trained in psychology and family therapy (xi). The author's self-acknowledged limitation may invite a number of critiques on historical method, but he attempts to be careful in his use of sources, relying heavily on secondary treatises. It is surprising at times when Headley does leave out a key resource. For instance, he acknowledges a debt to James Fowler (x) but fails to include Fowler's own published treatise of Wesley's faith journey (in M. Douglas Meeks, 1985) either as a source or example of method. In addition, Headley's treatment of Grace Murray (95-96) includes a general reference to Henry D. Rack's *Reasonable Enthusiast*; however, Headley tends to overlook the historical custom of betrothal as a marriage contract that Rattenbury carefully details as a possible key component in the failed relationship.

Headley's organization also creates some redundancy in his analysis. While attempting to chart John and Charles through the life course (beginning with childhood and concluding with adulthood), Headley tends to be redundant with key assessments, such as father Samuel's influence on the vocational lives of the brothers Wesley (29-30, 75-76), Samuel's portrayal of Susannah when pregnant with Emilia (38, 82), John's trip to Georgia as a fulfillment of Samuel's missionary dream (30, 130), and the conflict between John and Charles over Mary Vazeille (101-2, 137), including their separation over the marriage (108, 133). Overall, the redundancies leave readers with the impression that the book began as a series of lectures that were later compiled into a monograph.

In addition, Headley's psychological treatments push him toward moments of speculation where he tends to "wonder" about the interior motivations for actions within the Wesley family (32, 48, 57, 71) or assign motivation based on behavior (45, 85, 87, 115, 128). The speculative quality of the work reflects a tendency in other earlier psychoanalytic works by Erik Erikson and the recent analysis of Jesus by Donald Capps (2000). In this sense, Headley's work reflects both the strength and limitation of his psychological hermeneutic: trusting family systems' theory to explain historical actions while risking that this lens obscures other historical interpretations. However, this risk occurs with any historical treatise that trusts a particular hermeneutic in dealing with England's eighteenth century, be it the early Marxist leanings of E. P. Thompson or the revisionist approach of J. C. D. Clark.

In all, Headley deals with the Wesley heritage in a responsible manner. His careful reconstruction of the Wesley family may answer a number of questions by those interested in those members closest to John and Charles. In addition, Headley does work hard to refrain from doing a disservice to John Wesley even as he explores potential negative aspects within the family. Several key points in his analysis seem quite plausible within the family systems matrix that governs the writing. Finally, Headley provides a historical reminder to contemporary ministers that family heritage may indeed affect ministry and personal relationships. In this sense, like Wesley himself, we may not all be mothers and fathers, but we all are indeed sons and daughters who carry a personal heritage into our ministerial lives.

Grudem, Wayne. *Politics According to the Bible: A Comprehensive Resource for Understanding Modern Political Issues in Light of Scripture*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010. 619 Pages. ISBN: 978-0310330295.

Reviewed by Bart B. Bruehler, Assistant Professor of New Testament, Indiana Wesleyan University, Marion, IN.

Wayne Grudem is best known for his *Systematic Theology*, which has been widely used in evangelical circles. In this recent volume, Grudem turns to practical theology, specifically to evaluate contemporary political issues in the light of Scripture. He provides a few prefatory comments that clarify the aims of this book. He states in the first paragraph (13), “I wrote this book because I was convinced that God intended the Bible to give guidance to every area of life—including how governments should function!” This provides a very broad and direct hermeneutic for the use of Scripture. The nature of the Bible is left open and Scripture’s guidance speaks (fairly directly) to all dimensions of human existence. His goal can be labeled evangelical, for he believes that, if a nation puts these biblical principles into practice, it will result in the good news of peace, justice, and freedom for all of its citizens (15).

Grudem divides the book into three main sections. The first (23-154) deals with “Basic Principles.” Here he claims that a biblical perspective on politics does not fuse or bifurcate faith and politics but urges Christians to have a significant influence on their national governments (ch. 2). This first section lays out foundational biblical perspectives on government: governments should punish evil and encourage good, God is sovereign over all, governments should protect human liberty, the Bible supports some form of democracy, and others. This section also sets forth some principles of a “biblical worldview”: God created everything, creation was originally very good, moral evil has infected the world, and others. This lays the groundwork for the bulk of the book found in Part 2: “Specific Issues” (157-553). This portion delves into a wide variety of policy issues currently debated in American politics: life, marriage, family, economics, the environment, freedom of speech, and many others. Part 3 (555-600) contains a series of “concluding observations.” Here, Grudem reflects on the problem of media bias toward liberal politics, reviews his own conclusions in light of the political platforms of the Republican and Democratic parties, explains his frequent support for Republican positions, and provides a reflective conclusion about the future of the United States. The book also contains substantive Scripture, name, and subject indexes.

Certain features of the book as a whole stand out. The cover, layout, and style of this book present it as a textbook for a class on Christians and contemporary political issues. Next, Grudem stands firmly on the right of the political spectrum. He advises the reader of this at the beginning of the book (13) and provides his rationale at the end, describing in his view how the Republican Party has consistently aligned itself with biblical perspectives largely rejected by Democrats (smaller government, the protection of life, individual responsibility, etc.). Even given these admissions, this reviewer was surprised by the almost entirely consistent support of planks in the Republican political platform: lower taxes boost the economy, global warming fears are unfounded, specific national security policies on phone taping and the CIA are good, “activist” judges are bad, America should support the nation of Israel, and others. If this was intended as a textbook, good classroom discussion would require additional and equally balanced reading from Christians on the other side of the political spectrum since Grudem often does a poor job representing the views of his dissenters and rarely critiques conservative political positions.

Finally, while the book is entitled *Politics According to the Bible*, the bulk of the book in Part 2 deals with the analysis of contemporary data on specific issues, which Grudem views through a small set of biblical passages or in light of some of the principles set forth in Part 1. For example, the chapter on the environment opens with a 5-6 page review of a biblical view of creation, but then it continues for 55 more pages filled with information on world population, deforestation rates, greenhouse gasses, and energy sources. The vast majority of the book contains arguments gleaned from current statistics that Grudem marshals to support conservative policy positions that are at best broadly derived from biblical perspectives as he interprets them.

Thus, the greatest weakness of this book is its lack of exegesis and hermeneutical reflection. Examples abound, but a few will suffice for this review. Grudem returns repeatedly to Genesis 9:5-6, Romans 13:1-7, and 1 Peter 2:13-14 to support a positive view of government that encourages good, punishes evil, and should be obeyed (see the first exposition of these passages on pp. 77-82 and the long list of citations in the index). However, even with these crucial passages, Grudem offers limited exegesis and almost no consideration of the hermeneutical issues involved in their application. Grudem sees Genesis 9:5-6 as a pre-Mosaic covenant mandate for capital punishment that is applicable to all human societies, and thus a ratification of the punishing power of government. He does

not consider the interpretive possibilities of the Hebrew preposition “*b*” in 9:6 (“by” a man, “for the sake of” a man, etc.), nor does he weigh whether this statement is descriptive (this is what *does* happen) or prescriptive (this is what God says *must* happen). Grudem says nothing about the difficulty of taking Romans 13:1-7 or 1 Peter 2:13-14 written to minority Christians living under an imperial form of government and applying them to a majority church living in a representative democracy. He offers no research on the key term “submit” (*hypotassō*) that appears in these passages and has been interpreted in very different ways.

Grudem relies on the work of James Hoffmeier (*The Immigration Crisis*) to distinguish between “legal” immigrants (*gēr*) and “illegal” immigrants in the OT (*nekhar* or *zar*; 470-72). However, he never mentions the other term commonly translated “stranger” in the OT (*tōshav*) and fails to note how the *nekhar/zar* is deemed harmful not because of a lack of legal status (no such formal immigration process existed in ancient Israel) but because of their association with idolatry or adultery. Grudem categorically declares that Matthew 5:39 (“Do not resist the one who is evil”) applies only to individuals and not to governments (82, 391), but he offers very little support for this position, and he never explains how a particular disciple might simultaneously obey this command *and* participate in a government that (justly) kills its enemies. Finally, Grudem can be very selective in his choice of biblical passages. He has a very optimistic view of wealth and the wealthy and supports business and productivity. He points out that the Bible values work and growth with a list of passages (Gen 1:28, Deut 8:7-10, 1 Tim 4:4). However, he fails to reflect upon passages that point out the corrupting dangers of wealth and that, in my purview, are much more common and intense in the Bible (e.g. Deut 8:17, Ezek 16:49, Luke ch. 16, and Luke 18:18-30).

As a Christian who is also a citizen, I found myself agreeing with Grudem on some points and disagreeing on others. In that role, I found that Grudem overemphasized debatable statistics and was too one-sided in his arguments. As a part of the Wesleyan movement, I can appreciate the engagement between the church and state that Grudem encourages, but I am concerned by his overwhelming support of one human party and want to see the church maintain its prophetic stance toward the institutions of this world. As a biblical scholar, I found Grudem’s book wanting both exegetically and hermeneutically. He has done an expansive amount of work exploring contemporary politics, but he has not provided his readers with thorough and thoughtful readings of Scripture. Thus, his work has not lived up to its title.

Jefferson, Anita Bingham, compiler. *Charles Price Jones, First Black Holiness Reformer, with a One Hundred Year Chronology of His Life*. Forward by John M. Perkins. Jackson, MS: n.p., 2011. 275 pages; and Anita Bingham Jefferson, editor. *Excellence Comes with Great Labor: Writings of Bishop Charles Price Jones*. Pearl, MS: n.p., 2009. 102 pages. Both available for order through irasonic@aol.com.

Reviewed by David D. Bundy, co-editor, *Journal of World Christianity*, Research Professor of World Christian Studies, New York Theological Seminary.

Charles Price Jones (1865-1949) was one of the influential leaders of the Holiness traditions in North America for more than five decades. In 1885, after several years of working as a farm worker and construction worker, he was baptized in a Baptist church and soon thereafter began his life of preaching and pastoring. He studied at Arkansas Baptist College, edited the *Vanguard* (the official paper of the Arkansas Baptist Association), and honed his preaching skills. Within a short time he was nationally recognized as an influential preacher. He experienced sanctification in 1894 and accepted the Holiness movement's understanding of healing and abstinence. His periodical *Truth* was established in 1896, as was "The Young Men's League." Jones, with support from three colleagues (Charles H. Mason, who would later split with Jones and found the Church of God in Christ, J. A. Jeter, and W. S. Pleasant) organized a "Holiness Convention" in 1897 which drew people from all over the South. The controversy this convention caused led to the expulsion of Jones and Mason from the Baptist association. The name of the denomination which resulted from this exclusion was the Church of Christ (Holiness) USA.

In addition to writing several books, Jones authored more than a thousand hymns. He always pastored churches, first in Arkansas, then in Jackson, Mississippi, and Los Angeles, California. He was buried in Evergreen Cemetery, Los Angeles, the final resting place of a number of Black and White Holiness leaders.

The two volumes produced by Anita Bingham Jefferson provide an important view into the life and ministry of Charles Price Jones as understood within the Church of Christ (Holiness) through more than a century. This will be an enduring value of the two works. *Excellence Comes with Great Labor* assembles a number of smaller essays, poems and sermons of Jones, unfortunately most without sources and rarely with dates. The texts are interspersed with period photos (identified) and more recent photos that are not always identified. The section on his music (84-

102) includes not only an edition of Jones's instructions for singing, but a number of his more popular hymns with music. This volume is possible only through the huge effort of Anita Bingham Jefferson in collecting the work of Bishop Jones. These were not collected by libraries, and finding them was certainly a longterm labor of love.

The volume, *Charles Price Jones, First Black Holiness Reformer*, also provides lots of information about Jones that is not commonly available. The compiler assembled testimonies about Jones dating from 1901 to the present. The chronological chart provides in convenient format details of Jones's life, together with contemporary events in the state of his residence and nation. The narratives taken from various sources describe and analyze the impact of Jones and provide a structured profile of his life and ministry. It is a very helpful baseline for future research. The bibliography (273-275) is extensive and quite helpful. However, a number of items missed the list, and these are important.

First, there is the work of David D. Daniels, *The Cultural Renewal of Slave Religion: Charles Price Jones and the Emergence of the Holiness Movement in Mississippi* (Ph.D. diss., Union Theological Seminary, New York, 1992) with its crucial chapters on the legal and ecclesial struggles of Jones at the Mount Helm Baptist Church in Jackson, MS, as well as Daniels's thesis that the Holiness movement provided a new approach to African-American religion. In addition, there is the publication of Jones's "Autobiographical Sketch of Founder of the Church of Christ (Holiness) USA," *Journal of Black Sacred Music* 2 (Fall 1988):52-82, as well as three articles examining Jones's musical contributions by Jon Michael Spencer: "Jesus Only, Nos. 1 and 2: A Review," *Journal of Black Sacred Music* 2 (Fall 1988):83-87; *idem*, "Introduction: O Black and Unknown Bards," *Black Sacred Music: A Journal of Theomusicology* 4 (Spring 1990):1-15; and, *idem*, "The Hymnody of Charles Price Jones and the Church of Christ (Holiness) USA," *Black Sacred Music: A Journal of Theomusicology* 4 (Fall 1990):14-29.

These lacunae aside, the two volumes constitute an essential contribution to our knowledge of this important Holiness leader, theologian, and musician. His significance for the history of American Christianity and culture can be overstated only with difficulty. His theological, cultural, and musical insights and his friends produced many of the "Sanctified Churches." He was certainly not the only African-American Holiness leader of his time, but his work was in many ways definitive. Fortunately, thanks to the work of Anita Bingham Jefferson, there are now more materials available for understanding Jones. It is to be hoped that more studies will be forthcoming.

Wimberly, Edward P. *No Shame in Wesley's Gospel: A Twenty-First Century Pastoral Theology*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2011. 109 pages. ISBN-13:978-1-61097-193-5.

Reviewed by Rev. Margaret Ena Bryce, D.Min. cand., Ashland Theological Seminary; Pastor, Attica United Methodist Church, Attica, MI; Adjunct Professor, Nazarene Bible College, Colorado Springs, CO.

Edward P. Wimberly's *No Shame in Wesley's Gospel: A Twenty-First Century Pastoral Theology* provides a portion of an ongoing conversation within American United Methodism, that of whether and how John Wesley's gospel is useful in the twenty-first century. More than that, this work addresses how personal holiness is intended to impact social holiness.

Wimberly connects John Wesley's gospel through the use of the motivational rhetoric of his sermons. The connection is directly to the ills of the United States in the present century, namely, an overly materialistic culture that pushes people toward a false experience of love. He offers a brilliant description of the consumer industry's attempts to convert humanity into walking wallets: if your wallet is not full enough, then you are not worthy of love. When life's status cannot afford the bill, a sense of personal shame ensues, leaving its victims with a strong sense of being unlovable for who they are, as opposed to the guilt one feels because of things done or left undone. Wimberly firmly points to Wesley's gospel both as a cure for these ills on a personal level and also as a solution to recapturing a vital discipleship that goes on to impact the surrounding culture (91).

Wimberly draws on several of Wesley's sermons to discuss how well an orator may connect with an audience and the actual needs of this time. These very sermons were also used as aids within small groups to enable their members to grow toward a mature faith of loving God and neighbor. The challenge for today, Wimberly adds, is that communities are no longer intact. People are cut off and isolated from one another, further fostering the prevailing shame offered and served up by the current culture (66). At the same time, Wimberly advocates a recapturing of the small group. He joins many similar voices calling for this community-driven solution to the crisis of immaturity of faith and for the keen sense of isolation and shame many experience today. Here Wimberly inserts the twenty-first century ills of "status anxiety" and "narcissism epidemic." While Wimberly discusses how Wesley's message has intrinsic value for

the African-American culture, his work also addresses the broader materialistic and self-reliant culture. He defines shame as less than honorable “because there is absence of wealth, power, influence, prestige and status” (34). With the ongoing economic shift, the message of having value because of one’s identity in God can offer new avenues of hope, regardless of gender, class or race.

Using Wesley’s “More Excellent Way,” he makes the same earnest appeal as Wesley, that of choosing a higher order of faith, a growing faith that is nurtured and sustained with others of like pursuit. The author provides real-life examples of those who laid aside their personal materialistic pursuits as the result of God’s transformation through the Wesleyan model of growth. These lives were transformed in total, not in part, and they impacted the lives of others through the gospel that they lived out (4).

Further, Wimberly offers a chapter tracing the African-American historic experience of slavery as oppression. Wesley’s encounter with slavery gave him pause for both the soul of the slave owner as well as the slave. Wimberly echoes Wesley in this way: trusting in empire-building off of other people results in a sin-sick self-sufficiency that draws others away from God. For those oppressed, negative self-worth created by the system creates a wedge away from God. Both messages are needed today. And while Wimberly primarily paints this picture in an African-American context, this culture is rampant today with similar pictures of oppression, especially those of class and gender. Wimberly joins Wesley in seeing the same solution for both oppressor and oppressed: a growing faith in God (80).

Wimberly indicates how African-American conversion dealt creatively with the issue of personal shame by tracking the similar thinking of John Wesley and Martin Luther King, Jr.: they both saw citizenship in two worlds. For Wesley, he saw people as either working in the material world or working toward “laying up treasures in heaven.” King depicted it this way: walking in both time and eternity. King becomes the contemporary example of how the call to personal fidelity in Christ can influence surrounding evil cultures.

Any of the divisive social issues of the day—race, gender and class—provide more than enough streams of stratification. Today, the issue of class is brought to the forefront as people in the United States are pushed toward not only “keeping up with the Joneses” but toward lives of luxury. To have is to be worthy of love; to be beautiful is to be worthy of love.

While some would argue that the solution is to fix systems in such a way as to legislate toward eliminating shame, Wimberly well articulates how personal holiness contributes better toward social holiness, how being unlovable by the culture is negated by the true and loving Church (101). This is the gospel plot that God intends. Legislation only confounds that plot and never challenges people to be reliant on God for being more than what they currently are. Legislation encourages that lower order of Christian that Wesley described in “A More Excellent Way.”

The solution offered is to recapture what the twenty-first century lacks: community (42-44). As technology advances and face-to-face community is limited, the call to reflect and invest in human contact through community brings us back home. To say there is no need for human community, and human community that calls us to the ideals of Christ, means corporate fixes are sufficient. There is no need for people to live lives in answer to God. There is little need for God. So what Wimberly has successfully completed is a treatise for how both oppressor and oppressed can take the necessary and challenging journey toward God in order that the world around them can become New Creation. God works through transformed hearts that live out what it means to love both God and fellow humans. It is through that path that systems of injustice may be addressed because the evil in human hearts will also be addressed.

Wimberly's work is worthy of several readings to unveil the many levels of meaning. For those who would seek to re-invent Wesley, this work is a solid reminder of how Wesley's rhetoric transcends time, speaking directly to the ills of our own day. Further, Wimberly reminds us of Wesley's strong commitment to a personal holiness that is to be fully lived out and not hoarded as a misguided sense of personal satisfaction. Personal holiness was always intended to fully express itself in a socially-impacting holiness. Wimberly aptly captures the relevance and power of the words of John Wesley who sought to bring all people (oppressed and oppressor) into heart-changing encounters with God.

Vickers, Jason E. *Minding the Good Ground: A Theology for Church Renewal*. Waco: Baylor University Press, 2011. 141 pages. ISBN 978-1602583603.

Reviewed by Daniel Castelo, Associate Professor of Theology, Seattle Pacific University, Seattle, WA.

Although one could grow wary of hearing how the challenges, maybe even the crises, of the contemporary church scene are significantly grave given the history of Christianity, such an aversion should not prevail to blind one to the significance of the circumstances at play. In this light, Jason Vickers's most recent work does not shy away from noting that the present-day, North American, ecclesial ethos is marked by a detectable anxiety, one that has its roots in declining church membership and attendance as well as the ambiguity persistent in certain parachurch figures and movements. It is not that structural and charismatic (or to use Wesleyan phrasing, priestly and prophetic) features of church life are necessarily wrong, but discernment of the Holy Spirit's work in and through these is essential. Without discernment of the Spirit's work in the life of the church, Christianity has little hope for a vibrant future. Put another way, discernment and renewal are integrally tied.

What Vickers wants to offer appears "parable-like" in the sense that the claims he makes are simple to follow in terms of their logic, yet they are pressingly difficult both to appreciate in all of their depth as well as to implement, partly because their cultivation is counterintuitive to contemporary sensibilities regarding institutional organization and self-rationalization. His call is to mind the pneumatological basis of the church's nature, mission, and sacramental life. In short, Vickers considers church renewal as a kind of spiritual discipline, and I think this move is appropriately Wesleyan (although not exclusively so).

In terms of the church's nature, Vickers is careful not to conflate the theme with the church's mission, a move that he sees too many church leaders promoting. To speak of what the church *is* requires a rubric for description, and he appeals to a number of notions, including the long-standing marks of the church found in the Nicene Creed: that the church is one, holy, catholic, and apostolic. As is well known, what these terms suggest and what the church often is occasion a problem of correspondence; the tendency by most is to say that the church is called to be one thing and yet inhabits and promotes another. Vickers wishes to propound a healthy dose of realism so as not to lead the believer either to deny the

church's shortcomings or to despair because of them. That is, his strategy is to return to the Pentecostal origins of the church, for in locating the church's beginnings with the events surrounding Acts 2, Vickers hopes to re-enchant the church's perception of itself.

The church began in the midst of turmoil, anxiety, and disillusionment, and yet the transformative work of the Holy Spirit illuminated the early disciples' vision, impassioned their hearts, and made them see and feel anew in such a fashion that they were disposed to witness and proclaim the acts of God. However, this transformation took place in the midst of tarrying in prayer. The church, then, is an "actively waiting" community, one whose sheer existence, possibility, and efficacy rest on the animating presence and work of the Holy Spirit. The church is called to inhabit a modality of continual *epiclesis*.

From this basis, Vickers continues with the church's mission and sacramental life. In terms of the former, he suggests that the mission of the church is tied to the rationale for Pentecost, which he believes is constituted by both the worship of God and the witness to Christ in word and deed. Throughout these discussions, the author has some helpful reflections on the pitfalls to avoid and a sobering assessment relevant to when the church falls short in both tasks. As for the church's sacramental life, Vickers asks anew what the church has to offer the world and highlights the way the church is instrumental (and not incidental) to salvation. *Extra ecclesiam nulla salus* is a tag that Protestants can affirm.

The work overall is a lovingly critical and doggedly hopeful account of church renewal that makes a call for all Christians to rethink what they are about collectively. Undoubtedly, its reception by some will be tepid because of overarching concerns like, "How does this look on the ground?" and "Are these proposals effective?" I think the same questions could be asked of spiritual disciplines, and part of the process of renewal, both individual and corporate, is the purgation (I would even go so far as to say the "crucifixion") of these sensibilities as they belie a penchant for instrumentalizing and commodifying the grace-laden works (*charismata*) of God in our lives. Such dispositions and actions may in fact be the fatal move behind our anxiety and the inhibitors to the renewal we all desperately need.

Raedel, Christoph, ed. *Als Beschenkte miteinander unterwegs: Methodistisch-katholische Beziehungen auf Weltebene*. Reutlinger Theologische Studien Band 7. Göttingen: Edition Ruprecht, 2011. 252 pages. ISBN-13: 978-3767571419.

Reviewed by Kenneth J. Collins, Professor of Historical Theology and Wesley Studies, Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore, KY.

In order to explore the dialogue taking place between Methodism and the Roman Catholic Church for over forty years, Christoph Raedel has assembled a number of scholars to consider it through the lens of the Methodist church (EmK) in Germany. This significant conversation between Methodists and Roman Catholics, however, is hardly known in German-speaking lands since the Methodist Church is situated in traditionally Protestant areas with the exception of Austria.

The focus of this edited work is on the theological discussions that have taken place between the World Methodist Council (WMC) and the Roman Catholic Church as early as 1967, in the wake of Vatican II, and as expressed in the following formal reports: Denver 1971, Dublin 1976, Honolulu 1981, Nairobi 1986, Singapur 1991, Rio de Janeiro 1996, Brighton 2001, and Seoul 2006. After several interpretive essays, the book concludes with a German translation of the Seoul report. Interestingly enough, as Johannes Oeldemann observes, Methodism may actually be in a good position for such ecumenical talks since there has been no historical, formal separation between Methodists and Catholics (56).

These bilateral discussions became even more significant in October 1999 when the WMC executive committee hailed the Joint Declaration on Justification between the Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church. Moreover, "The full membership of the WMC," as Manfred Marquardt notes, "confirmed this judgment of the executive committee in its July 2001 meeting in Brighton, England" (110), though the Methodist German Bishop, Walter Klaiber, wryly noted that, "if we are united in justifying grace, we cannot be refused at the Lord's Table" (119).

Raedel points out that the goal of this broad ecumenical endeavor, since the Nairobi report (1986), has been "complete communion in terms of faith, mission and sacramental life" (24). However, in order to understand the nature as well as the parameters of these discussions, one must take into account the important encyclical of John Paul II, *Ut Unam Sint* (1995). In it, the Bishop of Rome declares that ecumenical dialogue is not only an exchange of ideas; it is also "an exchange of gifts" (84).

Though Wolfgang Thönissen in his essay underscores the importance of religious freedom as a leading principle in terms of the relations of Christians with one another, that freedom appears to be weakened, at least in some respect, by the public teaching of the Roman Catholic Church itself. When Protestants think of religious liberty, they often imagine the free movement of members from one Christian tradition to the other, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, with no negative soteriological consequences for the one who so moves. In such a view, Lutherans who appreciate their own heritage may nevertheless be led by the Holy Spirit to become Methodist or Roman Catholic. All of this is freely and graciously accepted by Protestants under the larger heading of religious liberty.

Rome, however, views such developments very differently, a difference that has not been fully discerned by the authors of *Als Beschenkte miteinander unterwegs*. On this matter, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* clearly and emphatically states, "Hence they could not be saved who, knowing that the Catholic Church was founded as necessary by God through Christ, would refuse either to enter it or to remain in it" [par. 846]. In this Roman Catholic declaration, which by the way is marked by historiographical error, the view held by many Protestants—that a Christian may believe, in a very ecumenical way, that the Roman Catholic church is indeed a true church and yet be called by the Holy Spirit, through the empowering leading of conscience and conviction, to become a member of a different Christian tradition—can only be deemed mistaken and, in the end, damnable. Such a judgment does not foster religious liberty.

The critical and prophetic voice of this volume, however, is much more evident in terms of grappling with the Roman Catholic insistence, championed by John Paul II, that Protestant Christians must be excluded from receiving the elements at the Catholic Lord's Supper. Raedel adds his voice to that of Bishop Klaiber, cited earlier, and maintains that the pain of separation at the table still burns. Moreover, the Roman requirements for intercommunion, as delineated in the Seoul report, reveal ironically that, precisely at the place where the Body of Christ should display a unity of love and Spirit to the world, instead parochialism and separation rule the day. Put another way, the Roman Catholic church has taken much later historical developments (for example, the particular way Christ is present in Holy Communion, otherwise known as transubstantiation) and have made them decisive.

Naturally, German Protestants have chafed under these restrictions that run contrary to the leading and wisdom of the Holy Spirit who is abundantly present in those *turned away* from the Lord's Table. They have, therefore, taken a public stand most notably at the *Kirchentag* (church day) celebration organized in Berlin in May, 2003, where the preacher for that day, Brigitte Enzner-Probst, a Lutheran pastor, declared that the debate concerning intercommunion "has no meaning" (90) for the mass held that evening. Beyond this, the priest present at this same celebration, Gotthold Hasenhüttl, deeply mindful of the graciousness of the gospel, proclaimed, "The one who excludes the other excludes him or herself from the presence of Christ" (90). But perhaps Friedrich Schorlemmer, former pastor of the parish church of Martin Luther in Wittenberg, said it best when he observed that it is "Christ who invites the participants to the mass, not the church authorities. We are not the lords of the Lord's Table. The Lord is the inviter; we are the guests" (91).

In an ecumenical context where the Roman Catholic church is at the table, so to speak, Protestants must bear in mind that Rome distinguishes what is necessary for *intercommunion*, that is, for a joint celebration of the Lord's Supper from what is required for *full communion* between the respective ecclesiastical traditions. That is, the latter terminology of full communion naturally entails more elements, such as a proper understanding of Holy Tradition, than does the former language which is simply focused on the requisites surrounding the Lord's Supper. To be sure, what would be necessary for full communion would include all of the following: a precise understanding of the sacramental character of ordination, an affirmation of the distinct presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper, the teaching authority of the bishops in the apostolic succession, the certainty of definite authoritative acts of teaching (including infallibility), as well as the significance of the Petrine office (99).

With this distinction between intercommunion and full communion in mind, in reading this volume of carefully crafted essays from German scholars, one gets the distinct sense that Roman Catholicism is remarkably straightforward in its identity that is aided by centuries of experience, and it therefore is also very focused in terms of its requirements for full communion. Methodism, on the other hand, appears to be less clear on both counts, that is, in terms of its own identity across a span of three centuries and with respect to its own understanding of what would lead to full communion.

Part of the problem here may be that historically Methodism has been understood as a reforming movement within the broader catholic church, a genuine *ecclesiolae in ecclesia*. However, that reforming nature, integral to the identity of historic Methodism, appears to be somewhat muted in the contemporary ecumenical context in which Roman Catholicism is present. In other words, it may be that the nature of the ecumenical setting itself, with its emphasis on affability, has silenced the Methodist voice of reform while allowing Roman Catholicism to be its centuries-old, tradition-bound self. In these conversations dating back to the 1960s, the Methodists sitting at the table did not *stress* what Wesley himself stressed: the importance of being a real Christian, as opposed to a nominal one; and that the proper Christian faith ever embraces freedom from both the guilt and power of sin.

When the Methodists at these discussions, especially in the Seoul Report, did in fact underscore such things as the direct witness of the Holy Spirit as the common privilege of believers, as Wesley himself had done in the eighteenth century, they were met with a surprising response from the Roman Catholic side. It unswervingly insisted even here on a necessary understanding of the church as a rightly ordained ministry in apostolic succession offering valid sacraments: "Can the church not have a corporate assurance in terms of the liturgical actions of its ordained ministers?" [par. 133]. Such a response is to turn the nature of the *direct* witness of the Holy Spirit, championed by historic Methodism, on its head by directing the faithful not to God but, once again, to a mediating clergy and its actions. Is such assurance misplaced? Surely John Wesley thought so.

Beyond this, the role and status of women in the church has not played a great role in these decades-long ecumenical discussions or in this current volume. This state of affairs exists despite the fact that women are clearly the majority of those in the pews in both Roman Catholic and Methodist churches. This issue may have fallen by the wayside in the Methodist effort, once again, not to give offense to Catholic sensibilities and judgments. Indeed, John Paul II declared that the issue of women's ordination is not even to be discussed; the whole matter is *forever* closed. Many Catholics have not viewed the pope's pronouncement as excessive since the ordination of women, if it occurred, would strike at the very heart of how the Roman church has defined the priesthood throughout the centuries in a very male way by claiming, among other things, that females cannot properly represent Christ in the mass.

When the Methodists were asked in the Seoul Report [par. 73] to take a fresh look at the sacrificial aspect of the Eucharist and the ministry conceived as priesthood, imbedded in these constructs is a theology that will invariably undermine the full and gracious role of women in the life of the church. Indeed, Rome repeatedly attaches a far greater significance to maleness than it can rightfully bear, especially when such a judgment repudiates the clear historical evidence that women were in fact ordained in the early church as deacons. Thus, in refusing to recognize this basic truth, Rome is left to offer the *pretense* that women have forever been excluded from ordained ministry. Put another way, in this and other areas, what Rome brings forth as “gifts” to be received by Methodists should actually be viewed more accurately as suitable items for *reform*.

At any rate, Raedel’s new book introduces both Methodists and Roman Catholics to an important, decades-long dialogue in a very able and engaging way. Attentiveness to this conversation, though painful at times, may become the means by which Methodists may not only come to a greater understanding of their own mission and purpose but also realize in a fresh way the importance of bearing witness to those both inside and outside the church of the graciousness of the gospel and, to use Wesley’s own words, the necessity of “reforming the nation.”

Rieger, Joerg. *No Rising Tide: Theology, Economics, and the Future*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009. 191 pages. ISBN-13: 078-0-8006-6459-6.

Reviewed by Nathan Crawford, Director of Youth and Young Adults, Trinity United Methodist Church, Plymouth, IN.

In *No Rising Tide*, Joerg Rieger offers a religious and theological critique of the economic mindset that led to the financial crisis of 2008. He views that crisis as repeating itself in the continued promulgation of free-market, consumer capitalism. His critique focuses on the development of a “bottom-up logic” that acts as counter to what he views as the “top-down logic” of much modern theology and contemporary economics. Rieger’s critical theology shows the idolatrous understanding of free-market capitalism while also pointing to a Christian understanding of God as proper counter to such idolatry.

Rieger’s argument takes two simultaneous, equal tracks. The first details his critique of the “top-down logic” employed by those who advocate for free-market capitalism. This logic is based on the economic principle that there will be a “trickle-down” effect that occurs, where the wealthy spend their fortunes and this money moves through the different classes to finally reach the poor. The idea is that the more wealth that is held in total will eventually raise the economic levels of all people. This view is perpetuated through a “theological” view of the market. Rieger says the market contains a number of doctrines that function similarly to that of theology. One such doctrine is the mysterious “free hand of the market” that supporters say guides the market in a seemingly omniscient way. In this doctrine one finds that the market always knows best, even when it does not seem that this is the case; thus, any critique of the market is void because the market knows best. Building on the free hand of the market, Rieger also points to the transcendence of the market, saying that the market is an entity that is beyond being questioned. Due to the fact that the market knows best and acts in the best interests of all, the market is beyond human understanding and always acts in a rational way, even when people cannot see that. While people can formulate theories and understandings of the market, it is so vast that it always escapes human comprehension. Thus, for Rieger, advocates of a free-market capitalism situate the market in the place of God, ultimately making them idolatrous.

The second track offers a rebuttal to the first through the development of a “bottom-up logic.” This is based on the incarnation of Jesus

Christ. Drawing on the Christological hymn of Phil. 2, Rieger understands the logic of Christianity to begin with the giving up of power, taking on the form of the lowliest, and working from the underside. The logic of the incarnation provides an alternative to that of the ruling classes, offering hope to those whose interests have been neglected or forgotten completely. Rieger's "bottom-up" logic draws on the person of Jesus to challenge paradigms of power that only benefit those who already have. The leadership that Jesus shows begins with those who have not as a critique of the power of those who have. Theology that begins from the incarnation cannot go from the "greatest to the least" but must move from the "least to the greatest." Through the development of this "bottom-up" logic, theology can now offer images of God that are not indebted to the top-down power structures present in much of the history of theology. The relationship of God to the world must be rethought in light of the incarnation, reflecting the fact that God's first initiative is to take the form of (and, thus, the interests of) the servant, the poor, the un-represented, the downtrodden, etc. Rieger says, "This God comes as a surprise, because this Other God is in solidarity with those who suffer, with the weak, the widows, and the orphans of the Old Testament; and with those on the margins of society in the New Testament" (159-60). Ultimately, then, Rieger's bottom-up theology offers a series of constructive theological insights that can reshape the imagination in order to produce a way of thinking that confronts the top-down approaches to theology and economics.

Through his development of these two tracks simultaneously, Rieger is able to offer a way of thinking theologically that is simultaneously critical and constructive. He gives a series of insights that ultimately help theology in the context of late capitalism. Even if one is not inclined to agree with Rieger's approach or conclusions, one cannot ignore the power and precision of his criticism of theology's indebtedness to capitalism through his two-track approach. Thus, *No Rising Tide*, like much of Rieger's previous work, is trenchant yet careful in its analysis. It is not a text for the faint of heart or those who do not have some familiarity with contemporary theology. However, it is also quite readable and gives detailed attention to ensuring that the reader can follow the argument. Rieger also opens various avenues of practical involvement in light of his arguments, most notably his continued struggle for workers' rights in north Texas. In all, *No Rising Tide* offers many rewards to readers who are willing to engage in a conversation with the argument.

Scorgie, Glen G., ed. *Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011. 852 pages. ISBN-13: 978-0310290667.

Reviewed by Don W. Dunnington, Professor of Theology and Ministry, Southern Nazarene University, Bethany, OK.

The *Dictionary of Christian Spirituality* (DCS) is a substantial volume including 34 essays introducing the broad spectrum of Christian spirituality (the first 240 pages) and nearly 700 alphabetized entries that include most persons, movements, ideas, practices and concepts associated with the study and practice of the Christian life. Glen Scorgie (Bethel Seminary, San Diego) is the General Editor, and Simon Chan (Trinity Theological College, Singapore), Gordon Smith (resource Leadership International, British Columbia), and James D. Smith III (Bethel Seminary, San Diego) are consulting editors. Contributors to the DCS (numbering 209 persons in all) represent a wide array of both evangelical and global perspectives. A number of articles come from highly recognized names in the field of spiritual formation (e.g., Dallas Willard, Eugene Peterson, Glenn Hinson, and Ruth Barton), and several contributions come from Wesleyan scholars (e.g., Kevin Mannoia, Brad Strawn, and Michael Lodahl).

Recognizing the “wafting experientialism” of much that is currently marketed as “spirituality,” the editors affirm that one of the purposes of the DCS is to help readers “reunite their heads with their hearts” (7). Acknowledging the wide range of resources already available in this area, the editors also address the need for a dictionary that “will offer a discerning orientation to the wealth of ecumenical resources available while still highlighting the distinct heritage and affirming the core grace-centered values of classic evangelical spirituality” (8). I think this volume accomplishes that goal.

The “Integrative Perspectives” articles cover much of what might be found in any good introductory volume on Christian spirituality—Old and New Testament foundations, a review of “spiritual theology,” the role of education in spiritual development, several articles reviewing a history of Christian spirituality, and articles on a variety of major issues (prayer, experience, disciplines, transformation, etc.). Each article offers a well-balanced perspective, gives a good overview of the subject matter, and offers a helpful bibliography for additional research and study. This part of the DCS alone would work quite well as an introductory text for courses or seminars on Christian spirituality.

The alphabetized articles cover a wide range of topics, including a number of helpful biographical entries for significant persons in the his-

tory of Christian spirituality. While obviously aimed at a broad, evangelical audience, the included topics represent a broad, ecumenical cross-section of the Christian world. The articles are concise, fair, and informative, including those addressing issues and persons associated with a Wesleyan perspective. For example, the article on “Methodist Spirituality” by Elaine Heath (Southern Methodist University) offers a good introduction to the early spiritual practices and emphases of the Wesleys, including “the integration of disciplined practices of spiritual formation, community formation and social justice, with a goal of holiness of heart and life, for the transformation of the world” (613).

Additional articles throughout the *DCS* addressing issues of particular interest to Wesleyans include entries on holiness and the holiness movement by Kevin Mannoia (Azusa Pacific University), John Wesley by Geordan Hammond (Manchester Wesley Research Center at Nazarene Theological College, Manchester), Charles Wesley by John Tyson (Houghton College), and perfection and perfectionism by Brad Strawn (Southern Nazarene University). As one would expect from these contributors, these entries were consistent with broadly accepted Wesleyan perspectives. This comment, for example, from the article by Wil Hernandez on “Perfectionism,” affirms a distinctly Wesleyan understanding of Jesus’ instruction in the Sermon on the Mount to “be perfect” (Matt. 5:48): “Perfection . . . is really all about love and not some impossible moral standard we are to attain.

This was how John Wesley, the most popular advocate of this controversial concept, understood its meaning” (666). He ends the article with this: “Thus, persons who are growing in love are moving toward completeness, wholeness, and integration—toward that ‘perfection’ in holiness to which they were called” (666). At the same time, the *DCS* might be a stronger resource if articles on “assurance” and “sanctification” had included Wesleyan perspectives in their respective surveys. Wesleyans interested in Christian spirituality would also likely miss seeing articles on topics like prevenient grace or the means of grace.

In summary, the *DCS* seems useful, accessible, and potentially helpful to a wide range of readers in churches, colleges and seminaries. On several occasions I found myself going from article to article, learning, enjoying and being quite grateful for the wide ranges of persons, movements and practices used by God in the past and present God in the formation of disciples. It is a good resource when you are looking for something specific and a great source of pleasure to simply open and explore! I fully agree with a comment by Marva Dawn: “The more I read in the *Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, the more I wanted to read more!”

Powell, Samuel M. *Discovering Our Christian Faith: An Introduction to Theology*. Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 2008. 348 pages. ISBN-13: 978-0834123540.

Reviewed by W. Stephen Gunter, Associate Dean and Research Professor of Evangelism and Wesleyan Studies, Duke Divinity School, Durham, North Carolina.

Powell's book is an important addition to the rather scant list of resources for teaching theology to college students and laity from a historic Wesleyan perspective. He is upfront about his stance as one who stands "within the Wesleyan tradition of Protestant Christianity." His goal is to describe "normative Christian faith," but working consciously from a defined perspective. He clearly understands that for two hundred years Wesleyans have likely learned their theology best by singing it, so he sets the theological agenda for each chapter by beginning with a Wesley hymn. At the same time, he confesses that he is not attempting to write a comprehensive Wesleyan apologetic that takes into account multiple Wesleyan voices: "This volume presents only one of those voices and does not assume to be the only voice of the tradition."

While not unique to his book, but Powell's step of presenting the Christian faith by following the order of the biblical narrative is not typical of theological surveys. This is not the same as "biblical theology" of an earlier era, however, for he proceeds simultaneously to interface the biblical material with the classical doctrines of the orthodox Christian faith. To a large extent, theology in the modern era (nineteenth century onward) has been characterized by a "hermeneutic of suspicion"—that is, at best with a healthy dose of skepticism. This type of theologizing has not served the church well, and Powell is well aware that one can be a careful and analytic scholar of the tradition without tingeing the narrative with doubt and doubt-filled assertions. To this end, he asserts, "Theology is not simply to provide information but is instead to be an instrument in the transformation of our minds as we seek to have the same mind that was in Jesus Christ" (11). In accord with this, he is not shy to say that Christian theology should convey a normative content. In this sense, the book is not an introduction to the bare facts of Christian theological assertions, but rather intends "to introduce readers to the Christian faith" (12).

Powell's approach requires patience on the part of the reader because some doctrines, such as creation and sin (following the biblical sequence), are partially introduced in early chapters, only to be finally fleshed out as

doctrinal formulations in subsequent chapters. The reader looking for capsule statements will be frustrated. The advantage of Powell's approach is that this approach is that it is much more historically and biblically honest. This is actually how the church has worked out its theology through the centuries.

Powell's intended audience is basically students and thoughtful laity, an attempt to introduce them formally to the Christian faith. In some ways his methodology will likely prove a challenge to students and thoughtful laity alike. This does not mean that he should not have taken this approach, but it does imply that the reader should be aware that a "patience pill" might be required to get the absolute most out of the book. The intended audience will likely be pleased to see that the author has foregone footnotes. He is not trying to impress a scholarly guild of professionals. Rather, he seeks to guide those with "faith seeking understanding"—a time-honored approach in historic Christianity.

The intended audience should profit greatly from the inclusion of "summary statements" at the end of each chapter that will inform a re-reading of the chapter to gain clarity of insight. In addition, there are additional "questions for reflection" that could well serve as discussion topics for highly intentional small groups willing to take on the task of delving deeply into the Christian faith in a formal manner. Indeed, at the beginning of each chapter, one will find a set of listed "objectives" as well as "key words to understand" and "questions to consider as you read." These are superb pedagogical devices that make this book ideal for studying together in a Wesleyan "accountability group."

The only suggestion that might strengthen the pedagogical value of this book is offered with a slight hesitation. The author advises the reader that there are key words to understand, the definitions for which can be discerned (one would assume) by a careful reading of the chapter. But what if one needs that definition later? Well, perhaps one could go to the rather lengthy index. I decided to try that. I chose the word "freedom," a rather important concept in Wesleyan theology. The index lists no less than thirteen references throughout the book, but it does not indicate that the term is listed on page 65 as a key word for Chapter Three: "Human Beings Made by God." In my estimation, it would help the reader if the page numbers where the definitions of these key words appear were lighted in the index or if there was a glossary for the book, since the reading audience is not apt to have in their own memory a working theological vocabulary.

This is an impressive teaching tool for the church, and I recommend it without hesitation.

Knight, Henry H., III, ed. *From Aldersgate to Azusa Street: Wesleyan, Holiness, and Pentecostal Visions of the New Creation*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2010. 371 pages. ISBN-13: 978-1-60608-988-0.

Reviewed by Randy L. Maddox, Professor of Wesleyan and Methodist Studies, Divinity School, Duke University, Durham, NC.

This is a very welcome book which deserves wide use in courses on religion in North America in general, as well as in the study of the component traditions named in the subtitle. Prospective readers should be aware that this is *not* a scholarly monograph providing a detailed theological or institutional tracing of the connections running from the Wesleyan revival in eighteenth-century England, through the trans-Atlantic Holiness revival of the nineteenth century, and culminating in the emergence of Pentecostalism in the twentieth century. The short introductions to the first four parts of the book provide quick sketches of such connections, but the bulk of the book is devoted to individual essays on a number of persons scattered through the three centuries and through the various streams of the tradition. The essays are by multiple scholars and grow out of a multi-year Wesleyan/Pentecostal consultation.

I hasten to add that the design of the book is not dictated by its origin; it is not a typical set of proceedings from a consultation! Rather, the contributors consciously chose to focus on providing “snapshots” of the emerging and evolving streams of the tradition. This decision may reflect the judgment that the foundations have not yet been laid for a detailed monograph. But their expressed concern was to avoid the temptation of jumping too quickly to generalizations. They opted instead to help readers encounter representative persons contextually—showing both how they were shaped by their particular contexts and how they helped shape those contexts (often by modeling an alternative to the dominant culture!). This strategic decision is commendable, and results in a book that can engage a wide range of readers.

The contributors and editor are also to be commended for the variety of persons that were chosen to provide windows into the movements under consideration. They range from well-known leaders and founders of institutions to dissenting voices challenging the mainstream even in their individual traditions. There is a good mix by gender, and contributors include several African-American representatives. Of course, as in any such selection, readers will be ready to nominate other voices that could have been included. Rather than propose my own alternative list, I

would express the hope that this collection will encourage others to enrich the picture by adding studies of these additional voices. I would stress the importance of retaining attention to contextuality in these studies—indeed, going deeper into such contextual issues than these brief treatments were often able to do.

Having stressed its value, let me turn to some reflections that emerged in reading this collection. First, the goal of the book is to draw greater attention to the connections between and shared convictions within the three traditions. The tone is set in the introduction, which is titled “*The Wesleyan, Holiness, and Pentecostal Family*” (emphasis added). I resonate strongly with this general goal, but found myself wondering at times whether it overreached a bit. For example, the holiness teachings of Charles Finney are described in passing as an instance of Wesleyan ideas taking root in denominations outside of Methodism (59). This seems to imply that the notion of holiness is distinctively Wesleyan. Surely the influences leading Finney to talk about holiness came from a range of sources (just as they had for Wesley). Similarly, the introduction to the section on Pentecostalism concedes that some parts of the Pentecostal family reject the Wesleyan emphasis on entire sanctification, presenting this as a case of an inheritance being set aside (see 204–8). Why not attribute this (at least in part) to the fact that the early Pentecostal revival drew into its fold people from a range of earlier traditions, some of whom would never have shared this Wesleyan emphasis? My point is that every family is in actuality made up of a number of overlapping families knit together by marriage as much as they have been extended by procreation, and it is often impossible to determine with certainty what family traits came from which ancestors.

Whatever their source, certain family traits are passed down through the generations and some become central to the character of a family. What is the most characteristic trait of “the Wesleyan, Holiness, and Pentecostal family” (or network of families)? While accepting that they are part of the larger evangelical branch of Christianity, this collection emphasizes two deeply characteristic emphases shared among the three groups: (1) a strong sense of the immanence of the divine in their lives and world; and (2) a firm belief in the present power of God to transform their lives—and, at least in the initial years, their world (4). Threaded through the various essays is repeated emphasis on how a sense of divine empowerment impelled representatives of these traditions not only to

moral transformation in their lives but to social confrontation with racial or gender inequity, economic critique, etc. (hence, “the new creation” in the subtitle). This emphasis seems right, and was again very welcome. But I was struck by the infrequency with which this transforming “divine immanence” was named specifically as the Holy Spirit! By contrast, it was clear to John Wesley’s contemporaries that he invoked the Holy Spirit much more than was common in Anglicanism, leading at least one critic to label him “Montanist reborn.” As the label suggests, there is a potential danger in such emphasis on the Spirit becoming disengaged from other Christian commitments. But it would seem best to own the emphasis explicitly, then reflect on how it is simultaneously a valuable contribution and the besetting danger of our “family.”

This brings me to a third reflection. While the central goal of this collection is to display the common vision that characterizes the Wesleyan, Holiness, and Pentecostal family, the authors are not content to remain in descriptive mode. Running through the analysis is a shared judgment that the initial transformative vision (which they value) has been progressively weakened or lost in later generations—affecting first the continuing Methodist communities, then Holiness churches, and most recently Pentecostalism (cf. 294). One of the stated goals in studying earlier representatives of the various movements is to help reclaim their vision, in hopes of revitalizing theology and practice in the contemporary church (2). The problem that this agenda faces is that much of the analysis displays how the weakening of the original vision was tied to the economic success, changing social location, and accommodation of the movements to their culture. Sociologists would surely question whether such historical and ethnographic studies are sufficient to help offset these larger dynamics.

One last reflection. The most surprising lacunae in this collection, for me, was lack of attention to the characteristic emphasis on song and worship within this family of Christian traditions. One of the common comments about early Methodists was that they were a “singing people.” It is arguable that the hymns of Charles Wesley shaped the masses of the movement more than the sermons and treatises of John Wesley (or John Fletcher!). Yet there is no treatment of Charles, or of the dynamics and implications of the shift from his hymns toward “gospel songs” in the Holiness and Pentecostal settings, or of the more recent shift toward “worship songs” fueled significantly by the Charismatic renewal. Indeed, the Charismatic renewal is largely absent itself from this volume, leading

one to wonder whether it is viewed as a separate phenomenon or as part of the “decline” of the Pentecostal phase of the family?

I hope it is clear that these reflections are less criticisms of the present collection than pointers to the work that lies ahead of us in gaining a richer sense of the Wesleyan, Holiness, and Pentecostal family, and in discerning how best to nurture continuing and deeper faithfulness in life and witness within this family. I offer my thanks to all involved in this collection, both for what it has accomplished and for the future work it will serve to evoke and guide.

Van Pelt, Miles V. *English Grammar to Ace Biblical Hebrew*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010. 106 pages. ISBN 0310318316.

Reviewed by Mitchel Modine, Associate Professor of Old Testament, Asia-Pacific Nazarene Theological Seminary, Taytay, Rizal, Philippines.

Professors of Hebrew face a dual challenge. Not only must they help students understand the elements of ancient Hebrew grammar, but they must do so employing grammatical concepts that are themselves as foreign to students as anything in a Hebrew textbook. Put another way, native speakers of English know how to speak without knowing *how* to speak. Communication itself poses little problem, but describing the process of communication or the parts of an English sentence is often a mystery. In light of this, Miles Van Pelt's slim volume, *English Grammar to Ace Biblical Hebrew*, seeks to explain foreign-sounding concepts like direct object, antecedent, pronoun, preposition, and many others in order to help students draw the necessary connections that will make the original language of the Old Testament come to life. Van Pelt explains that, in addition to Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek, he "often finds [himself] teaching a fourth foreign language in the classroom, the language of English grammar" (11). In other words, he has designed this book as a legend to the grammar "map" used to teach biblical Hebrew.

After the short introduction, the book is divided into fourteen chapters and a glossary of grammatical terms. Each chapter describes a particular grammatical concept. These are the highlights of grammar familiar to professors of Hebrew, mainly due to their significant differences from English grammar. Chapters 1-2 deal with the alphabet and vowels. Chapter 3 concerns itself with nouns. Chapter 4 includes the definite article, conjunctions, and the word "of." Chapters 5-7 detail prepositions, adjectives, and pronouns. Chapter 8, in a way, puts all of these elements together to describe sentences. The remainder of the chapters are devoted to verbs: mood, tense, and aspect; voice and action; imperative; infinitives; and participles. Each chapter includes a reference to the section of the author's *Basics of Biblical Hebrew*, co-authored with Gary D. Pratico and also published by Zondervan (2nd ed., 2007). However, one could profitably use this book alongside any standard Hebrew grammar.

Within each of the fourteen principal chapters, the organization is fairly consistent. Van Pelt first briefly introduces the respective concept, usually with some or other reference to American popular culture (more on this below). Next, he discusses how English utilizes the particular

grammatical feature, keeping in mind that his presentation is only selective. Following this, he similarly briefly describes how the grammatical feature functions in Hebrew. Finally, at the end of most chapters are some exercises to reinforce the discussion. In every case, these refer exclusively to English grammatical concepts. The scant three times Hebrew is mentioned in the exercises are only for the purpose of comparing how Hebrew is similar to and (usually) different from English (19, 36, 73). The exercises themselves seem rather rudimentary. Then again, for most of those for whom the book may prove a help, rudimentary review is perhaps just what is required.

Most to be commended about *English Grammar to Ace Biblical Hebrew* is that it presents its subject matter in (mostly) clear, easy-to-understand terms. It would seem counterproductive to this reviewer, in a resource such as this, to communicate English grammatical concepts in a comprehensive manner, for such things generally tend toward the abstruse. Van Pelt clearly recognizes that learning Hebrew is already difficult enough; it simply would not do to make English just as difficult. Van Pelt suggests that his book can be used in multiple ways, depending on the needs of the reader (12-13). First, one could read the entire book before opening a Hebrew grammar, thus providing a foundation of knowledge with which to approach the difficulties and differences of Hebrew. Second, one may work through the first half of the book—dealing with nouns and related things—then proceed to a Hebrew grammar and work through the similar material, returning afterward to the supplemental volume's treatment of verbs, and finally to a Hebrew grammar's treatment of verbs. Finally, one may work through the book topic-by-topic, alongside the topics presented in a Hebrew grammar. In the reviewer's estimation, this last would perhaps be best in a classroom setting, though there certainly are merits to the other two approaches.

This strength aside, the book also has some major weaknesses in the mind of this reviewer. First, not only may this book be used alongside *Basics of Biblical Hebrew* or something similar, but it *must* be so used; it cannot stand on its own. Since it is therefore a supplemental volume, the reviewer recommends it not be required for student purchase, but instead perhaps be provided as a reference volume in the library. Second, the many Americanisms may serve only to confuse readers from other countries. This would particularly be the case in an institution such as the one in which the reviewer serves—an English-language seminary in Asia in which most students are not native speakers of English. In his favor, Van

Pelt does recognize “that many students who study biblical languages in an English-speaking context may not be native speakers. . . . I hope that this book will serve their needs too” (12). In the opinion of the reviewer, however, this book will probably fail to do so because, even without realizing it, Van Pelt has added a fifth language to Hebrew, Greek, Aramaic, and English: American!

References to the earliest computers (15), pinch hitters, union scabs, stunt doubles (47), Sesame Street (75), and even old fast-food commercials (55) will undoubtedly cause just as much confusion as discussing infinitives, passive participles, and direct objects. More alarming than these, however, is the following statement in the discussion of Hebrew verb conjugations: “Hey, if you grew up suffering from dyslexia, this might actually make sense” (71). Certainly, the author, editor, or publisher could have found a more appropriate allusion or illustration than this!

In summary, the reviewer can only provisionally recommend this book. Since it does highlight a critical issue that should be addressed in the teaching of biblical Hebrew, it may well be useful for teachers of Hebrew in Wesleyan academic settings in the West. In Asia and other cultural contexts, however, it will raise more questions than it answers.

Leclerc, Diane and Maddix, Mark A., eds. *Spiritual Formation: A Wesleyan Paradigm*. Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2011. 222 pages. ISBN 978-0834126138.

Reviewed by Robert Moore-Jumonville, Professor of Christian Spirituality, Spring Arbor University, Spring Arbor, MI.

Spiritual Formation: A Wesleyan Paradigm consists of twenty essays contributed by the faculty of Northwest Nazarene University that cover a wide variety of topics. Short chapters (ranging between 8-15 pages), discussion questions at the end of each chapter, and the breadth covered, all serve the practical aim of the book: “to be formational, even transformational” (16). Many of the essays offer practical insights and perspectives so that the book might easily serve as an introduction for college students, pastors, or laity.

Some of the most intriguing essays the book features interconnect spiritual formation with practical areas of life (as spiritual formation should): for instance, Michael Kipp’s suggestions for spiritually forming adolescents, Gene Schandorff’s ideas concerning college students, and Rhonda L. Carrim’s good overview of spiritual direction and mentoring.

Of course, editing a book of essays involves at least two difficulties: ensuring consistent quality among the essays and achieving overall unity within the volume. It goes without saying that any book of essays will exhibit unevenness in writing, but what about coherence? Considering the extensive range of subjects traversed, the authors make a valiant effort to return frequently to their thematic Wesleyan signposts: the means of grace, preventive grace, and sanctifying grace.

The fact that *Spiritual Formation* emerges unapologetically from a Nazarene perspective should not be a criticism of the book, for all theology develops from within some tradition, and clarity and honesty come from declaring one’s standpoint. Nevertheless, consider interpreting the subtitle, *A Wesleyan Paradigm*, as merely indicating a paradigm of spiritual formation *informed by a Wesleyan perspective* (rather than a more all-inclusive claim to represent all Wesleyans). For if we include Nazarenes, Wesleyans, Free Methodists, some charismatics, and the wide range of theological opinion represented by United Methodists, we cannot claim a single “Wesleyan perspective” on any topic that would satisfy all these communities.

More importantly, *Spiritual Formation* implicitly raises a number of key questions about the way we Protestants approach formation. The

book might, in fact, serve as a mirror for us, wherein we can see things we might rather like to overlook. Let me focus on two questions the book raises. First, one of the strengths of the book lies in the thematic attention given to “means of grace,” a term John Wesley used to refer to those divinely infused practices that offer followers of Christ spiritual sustenance. One suspects, incidentally, that what the authors are often referring to when they use the phrase “means of grace” might more accurately have been labeled “spiritual disciplines,” a term popularized in the recent Protestant world through the work of Richard Foster.

What the reader notices, in any case, is that every author in the book articulates his or her own particular list of “means of grace,” so that it becomes clear that different “means” (or disciplines) could be added here or subtracted there. While it is true that Wesley himself was fluid when it came to enumerating such means of grace, eventually it seems that almost anything practical could be included in one’s list of spiritual disciplines.

Actually, the more serious question is whether or not we as evangelical Wesleyans have fallen prey to the culture’s consumerist mentality where we choose according to what best fulfills us personally. For American Protestants, spiritual formation can mean almost anything that appears “helpful,” thereby devolving too easily into mere “Self Help.” As if at a buffet, we pick those disciplines or “means of grace” that best meet our needs or suit our tastes.

I am reminded of an experience I had a few years ago attending an Orthodox infant baptism of a friend’s child, perhaps the most aesthetically beautiful theological worship I have ever encountered. I had been reading books on the “emergent church,” pondering how as a United Methodist minister I might draw upon the rich liturgical resources of Christian tradition to deepen a rather bland and stagnant mainline protestant worship service. Every slice of this Orthodox baptismal service seamlessly combined deep-rooted theology with a colorful and vivid symbolism. Those of us visiting witnessed, for instance, an “exorcism” that included spitting on the devil at the door of the church and the priest blowing on the child three times in the shape of a cross. For most of the service, the child was held by the godparents to indicate the dear responsibility of the congregation. Then, at the high point of the service, the priest took the child, processed with him into the holy of holies, and reappeared laying him on the ground (as if on an altar) at the center door of the Iconostasis or icon screen—where the parents embraced their child for the first time in the service. Those of us visiting were transported into

a drama of liturgical worship as pure gift: one into which we simply entered, one that had been going on long before us and that would continue after we were gone. I began thinking about what a Protestant minister might “extract” from that service—what symbolism or liturgy—to enhance and deepen worship at one’s own church. But what would one select and why? Because every element of that service held together as part of a single fabric—woven by theology, practice, and community life—isolated elements would not make sense.

Might we draw a parallel from the way many of us “use” spiritual disciplines, culled from a half dozen or more books or sources, applied to our lives as we feel the need or have the time? A good friend of mine has convinced me that “the” key spiritual discipline, without which no other discipline makes sense, is obedience. But the question cries out to us: Obey whom, or obedience to what? Have we become our own spiritual authority?

A second question has to do with spiritual formation pedagogy and how we see that evolving in our culture. *Spiritual Formation* hopes to be a practical book, one encouraging transformation. While it certainly includes practical and transformational elements, the book remains primarily informational—telling us about spiritual formation, recommending ideas, new ways of interpreting, or helpful theological models. Books like these that stress theological foundations are important. But we also need to distinguish between theology and praxis. Christian spiritual writing can sometimes offer both information and transformation, both theology and praxis, but usually the emphasis falls mainly into one category or the other. For instance, relatively speaking, Thomas Merton’s writing surfaced more as ground breaking contemplative theology, while Henri Nouwen’s served more as practical guidance for the heart. Or consider that, if Dallas Willard appeared as Evangelicalism’s spiritual theologian, many general readers found his writing difficult, leading John Ortberg to write as a sort of translator of Willard’s ideas, simplifying, using illustrations, and telling stories. What follows in the wake of Ortberg, one imagines, would feel more like a spiritual formation workbook that leads the reader further into application.

Spiritual formation, it can be argued, is best mediated incarnationally—through retreats, small groups, spiritual direction, or group lectio. Wasn’t this Wesley’s way—his bands and classes? It is as if our spiritual formation books ought to come with a “saint” attached—someone to lead, direct, and model the Christlikeness we seek. *Spiritual Formation* could be the kind of book to use in this sort of hands-on way.

Green, Joel B., gen. ed. *Dictionary of Scripture and Ethics*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011. xix + 889 pages. ISBN-13: 978-0801034060.

Reviewed by Aaron Perry, Pastor of Christian Education, Centennial Road Church, Brockville, ON.

The *Dictionary of Scripture and Ethics* (DSE) is a collection of articles that aims to educate, encourage, and orient its readers to the relation of Scripture and ethics. The growth of literature relating the two fields over the last forty years has been significant and warrants this volume that has been put together by Joel B. Green (general editor), Jacqueline Lapsley, Rebekah Miles, and Allen Verhey (associate editors). DSE seeks to educate students through reviewing literature and introducing the relevancy of Scripture to contemporary issues; to encourage pastors to preach, teach, and counsel more effectively; and to introduce specialists to other disciplines while being relevant and focused on contemporary discussions. Beyond serving as a reference tool, DSE also has an evangelical element. The expressed desire is that, through its work, God's Word will become a light to the path of its readers (Ps 119:105b).

DSE reflects a commitment to serious and critical reflection on moral conduct and character as well as a faithful commitment to a scriptural emphasis on "God's will and God's way" (5). DSE alphabetically arranges over four hundred succinct article entries of three kinds: articles covering "certain modes of moral reasoning and their appeals to Scripture in Christian ethics" (3) (e.g., Wesleyan ethics); articles addressing ethics within Scripture (e.g., Mark; biblical accounts of creation); and articles dealing with categorical issues in Christian ethics and particular issues within these categories (e.g., political ethics, just war theory, pacifism). With such an array of articles, the DSE aims for dialogue rather than univocity. As Scripture has a multiplicity of voices and perspectives, the articles seek for appropriate disagreement rather than agreement. Likewise, entries that reflect contemporary issues outside the scope of biblical material attempt to open avenues for further reflection and conversation in light of Scripture. This is reflected in its valuable bibliographies.

Several factors make DSE a fine resource and impressive accomplishment. First, articles dealing with topics such as just wage, bioethics, pornography, homelessness, and ethical uses of media (found under "media") exemplify the project's stated intention to address the most contemporary of issues. The readers have serendipitous moments where they are directed to related articles in the book that they may not have consid-

ered to continue their research. Second, the *DSE* welcomes multiple voices as contributions to this volume, including multiple theological backgrounds, ethnicities, and both women and men, thereby exemplifying its desire for conversation.

Naturally, the editors' ambition opens the *DSE* to specific critiques of articles where Scripture and ethics are not overtly related. Individual readers may be wishing for a stronger scriptural component in certain entries. However, the *DSE* has been intentional about engaging subjects that otherwise may not have been engaged scripturally or theologically. The nature of a dictionary also opens it to critique on what is not included. Curiously, the *DSE* does not include an entry on *ascension*, though entries on incarnation and resurrection are present. One might have expected such an entry, given the general editor's extensive background in Luke-Acts and the ascension's prominent place in passages of Scripture with ethical imperatives (e.g., Colossians 3:1-3) and its theological foundation of the mission of the church and gift of the Holy Spirit.

The *DSE* is a wonderful resource for students and pastors. Students will find a wide array of articles to guide their further learning and research. Pastors will be encouraged in their ministries to provide resources to parishioners in various ethical challenges, as well as be introduced to subjects possibly not covered in their professional training from reputable scholars. Specialists will find a resource they can recommend to their students, along with bibliographies to introduce them to fields into which they may be taking initial steps.

Clapper, Gregory S. *The Renewal of the Heart Is the Mission of the Church*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2010. 150 pages. ISBN-13: 978-1-60608-542-4.

Reviewed by Daryll Gordon Stanton, Chair of Religion Department, Africa Nazarene University, Nairobi, Kenya.

How relevant is John Wesley's concern for heart religion in the twenty-first century? Those who deal with the practical side of Wesleyan theology and address the question—"What is the mission of the Church?"—will readily discover the significance of this book. Herein, Gregory Clapper affirms: "*The Renewal of the Heart Is the Mission of the Church*."

Clapper begins by helping his readers to ask the question: "Who is a Christian?" For those of us in the Wesleyan tradition, understanding John Wesley's three essential doctrines of repentance, faith, and holiness (see *Works*, 9:227) is crucial to answering this question. As in Wesley's day, these three doctrines are "most important for the foundational formation of disciples" (6-7). Believers must understand these doctrines before the church can guide them to a "thorough change and renovation of mind and heart," leading to "a new and holy life" (16).

Clapper sees the heart as the "arena of the individual person where Christian truth is either exhibited or found wanting." While acknowledging that in all things Christians are impacted by God's prevenient grace, Clapper argues that, due to free will, "the final shape or form of our heart" is determined in large part by our own "evaluations, judgments and decisions about how we choose to cooperate with God's grace" (18). Thus, the church must also assist believers in the growth and development of their hearts (19).

In the second part of the book, Clapper focuses on some obstacles to such growth and development, especially as related to emotional theory. Those who are less familiar with emotional theory will need to spend more time with this section. Clapper clarifies what Wesley meant by "affections" and what is currently understood as "emotions" due to "the shift in vocabulary in concepts between the eighteenth and twenty-first centuries" (34). He asserts that "we must bracket what our modern world has invited us to believe about 'emotions' and try to see them as Wesley did, through the conceptualities that gave rise to the terminology of 'affections'" (37). The author appropriates the work of renowned philosopher and psychologist Martha Nussbaum in considering emotions as

“cognitive evaluations” (41). Clapper notes that one can also find a “cognitive understanding of affectivity” (43). The cognitive dimension of emotion is seen in its “intentional” or “transitive” nature. Emotions take objects that are “defined by certain beliefs, judgments or construals” (50). G. D. Marshall also guides Clapper in trying to help us distinguish between the object, occasion, and cause of an emotion (44). Furthermore, Clapper builds on Paul Lauritzen’s discussion of the “intentional” character of emotions to show us how distinctive communities have power to shape self-understandings and how “distinctive communities” such as the church can be expected to have distinctive emotions (49).

In chapter four, Clapper also addresses the topic, “Why Depth of Emotion Is Not the Same as Intensity of Feeling.” He affirms that “an emotion entails the underlying judgment or construal that makes possible the occasional experience of feeling” (66). He introduces readers to “orthokardia,” a term he has adopted to help his readers understand both the “genesis and telos of affections.” By “orthokardia,” Clapper means his conception of Wesley’s “vision of the right heart” (68). The genesis of this is “object-related.” He shows that affections are not “inherent” and “independent” but are “the result of being formed in the Christian rule of life” (75). Again, Clapper insists that the renewal of the heart can only occur in the community. One must understand the proper end or telos of “the properly shaped heart” (76). Christians pattern their lives after Christ, especially Christ’s self-denial, symbolized in the cross (78). Clapper chose Wesley’s Sermon 87 (“The Danger of Riches”) to illustrate this. Wesley urged Methodists to “gain all you can, save all you can, give all you can” (82). However, Wesley warned not to gain and save without giving to others. So, “after grace has thus led us to faith, we are naturally led to do the ‘works of mercy’ by the love of God and neighbor which has grown within us.” Thus, Clapper argues the affections have not only their genesis outside of the self, but the telos as well (86-87).

The third part of Clapper’s work describes how this vision of heart religion might impact the church today. He insists on “Teaching for the Renewal of the Heart.” Although there may be some current misuse of the term “practice,” as teachers or practical theologians we can nurture and help shape worldviews that appropriately frame the temperament and practice of believers’ lives (91-93). An ongoing twofold task of clarification is necessary. First, rather than perceiving religious “affections” or “tempers” as simply episodic, intense feelings, these must be perceived as dispositions for all of life as master passions that shape all behavior,

whether or not they are consciously felt. Secondly, one must not emphasize a practice that leads to a “deadening moralism” and ignores the heart’s yearning for holiness. We must “act from the love of God” rather than from the “love of praise.”

The Christian life is not simply a collection of deeds to do, but it also entails “a distinctive manner of doing them” (95-96). For those of us still in classrooms, teaching for the renewal of the heart might better begin with a series of questions applicable to our students’ lives. Clapper offers several good examples (100). Teaching for the renewal of the heart may also require “devoting significant parts of our theology classes to helping our students see the renewed hearts in some of the saints who have gone before us,” and helping them see the reality that is forming the experience of ones we imitate. Thereafter, we may try to help them “understand the logic or grammar of this gospel that renews hearts” (102-3).

Appropriately, in the final chapter Clapper guides the readers “beyond the classroom, in the real world, and in a truly practical way” (106). Readers can find ways to renew the heart through traditional pastoral tasks like preaching, counseling, and evangelism. Clapper recommends preaching Wesley’s “house of religion” by “offering them Christ” (116-20). Counseling and pastoral care must seek to shape the hearts of those we serve. Again, readers are offered a series of relevant guiding questions. Clapper concludes his work by promoting a Wesleyan evangelism. This is not a one-time act, but requires us to involve believers in “a life-long process of being continually conformed to the image of God.” Practically speaking, we help them embark on “a life-long project of renewing the heart” (125). Obviously, all of us who are leading others in this evangelism must “cooperate with God” in the process with sanctified lives (130-31).

Hunter, James Davison. *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010. 358 pages. ISBN 978-0-19-973080-3.

Reviewed by Michael Tapper, Ph.D. candidate in Historical Theology, Saint Paul University, Ottawa, Canada.

To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World provides a glimpse into the mind of sociologist James Davison Hunter. Throughout his illustrious career in sociology, Hunter has expressed his concern that modern Americans, fiercely polarized on contemporary topics (e.g., abortion, homosexuality, censorship, and gun control), are animated by an overemphasis on Hegelian ideology that undermines the way in which history and institutions shape these social issues. In this his most recent book, Hunter's main contention is that American evangelicals have adopted a flawed ideology concerning the process of cultural change. He argues that changing the world is difficult—much more complex than people are willing to admit—and that the contemporary approaches to change are destined to fail (6-17).

The book unfolds in the form of three extended essays that represent the outcome of a decisive lecture Hunter presented for The Trinity Forum in 2002. In the first essay, Hunter confronts the pervasive notion among American evangelicals that cultural change occurs by convincing an increasing number of individuals to embrace ideals about the Christian common good. This view supposes that, as Christians effectively engage in personal evangelism, political action, and social reform, culture will change (30). However, history suggests that cultural change is not determined individually, willed, or democratic. Instead, culture, quite resistant to change, is generally transformed by the influence of elites and the networks in which they are engaged (42-43). Hunter argues that evangelicals have lingered on the periphery of these culture-shaping influences and been relatively non-influential.

In his second essay, Hunter contends that all of American evangelical life has become narrowly interpreted, to its detriment, through a predominantly political lens (102-8). Issues related to family, war, reproduction, sexuality, and even faith itself have become the battleground in the ultimate conquest for political power. To demonstrate this, Hunter takes aim at three manifestations of evangelicalism in America—the Christian Right (111-31), the Christian Left (132-49), and the neo-Anabaptists (150-66). On the one hand, the Christian Right, led by politically-conservative lead-

ers like Pat Robertson and Chuck Colson, is driven by a nostalgic ideology that assumes a once-Christian-America and promotes a reclamation of traditional moral values by means of political engagement and civil religion. On the other hand, the Christian Left, led by progressives like Jim Wallis, is preoccupied with a politically-oriented ideological notion of justice and equality for the poor, abused, and marginalized. Even the neo-Anabaptists, distinguished by key figures like John Howard Yoder and Stanley Hauerwas, do not escape Hunter's critique. While neo-Anabaptists decry the violence imposed by the state-driven free-market system, Hunter argues that they contribute to their own demise by failing to define themselves in any way other than the political terms they seek to avoid.

The final essay of Hunter's book outlines an alternative form of Christian engagement that he calls "faithful presence" (243-48). This approach provides theological affirmation for God's creative initiative and common grace throughout the world, including the fulfillment of the biblical commandment to love one's neighbor. Faithful presence demands that evangelicals unite together in a community of resistance against ideologies that fail to manifest the *shalom* of God (227-30). Drawing upon the examples of the Incarnate Christ (241), the exiled Israelites in Jeremiah 29 (276), and several contemporary expressions of faithful presence (266-69), Hunter ends the book with a call for evangelicals to humbly engage their culture while avoiding the compulsion to dominate or conquer. Hunter modestly concedes that, by participating in a united, alternative community that practices sacrificial love (and even self-imposed silence for a time, if necessary), Christians may *slightly* change the world for the better (286).

There are many things to commend in Hunter's skillful analysis of cultural change and American evangelicalism. In particular, his arguments challenging the common view of cultural change are especially poignant. Contemporary evangelicalism has too often embraced a politicized—even, at times, militantly so—approach that regularly proves inadequate for transforming society. Although some may say that Hunter's appraisal of the Christian Right is particularly harsh, it should be noted that neither the Christian Left nor neo-Anabaptists escape his stark assessment. Using an impressive amount of relevant examples, Hunter successfully cuts through the jargon of each group to challenge some potentially disconcerting and insidious motives among them.

One of the book's most persuasive arguments is the contention that *ressentiment* (107-8) has come to define the climate in American evangel-

icalism. All three Christian groups, Hunter argues, are incapacitated by a bitter *ressentiment* of each other that energizes a sense of perceived injustice and a fear of future injury. It is particularly this sense of injury that perpetuates and magnifies the perceived need to defend, accuse, blame, and attack. Hunter's insinuation that evangelicals are "functional Nietzscheans" (175) is a bold, yet potentially accurate, statement. The paradox that exists in evangelicalism between a co-opting pursuit of political power and a debilitated stance of victimization demands further consideration. Hunter has done well to isolate this problem so future scholars can examine this issue further.

However, Hunter's controversial work prompts some unanswered questions, particularly for contemporary Methodists. Although it may be true that cultural elites or networks of elites do, in fact, represent a strong force for change, can this be held as categorically true? Could it not be said that the early Methodist movement serves as a poignant example of a group of *peripheral sideliners* arousing significant cultural change, particularly in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century? Others may argue that, although examples of *faithful presence* are generously provided in the last section of the book, innovative examples of an evangelical's appropriate engagement in politics, if it truly exists, seem underdeveloped in the book. Here, some might argue a careful reappropriation of Wesley's complex relationship with the British monarchy can serve as a perennial example of what a notion of *faithful, political presence* looks like today. Further, although it is beyond the scope of this book, one wonders how Hunter's arguments about *ressentiment* and the will to power manifest themselves beyond the evangelical context in the United States.

Regardless, all those who read Hunter's book may be challenged to consider what it means to live *faithfully present* in the world. This remains an ambition to consider seriously, and it merits further discussion among communities of faith. It is intriguing to speculate what an engaged Christian life would look like free from ahistorical, ideological, and political trappings. Whether or not this consideration suffers, ironically, from an ideology of its own demise remains to be seen. At any rate, *To Change the World* is likely to challenge both pew-sitting and scholastic evangelicals alike. It stands to provoke discussion among contemporary evangelicals today.

Powe, F. Douglas, Jr. *Just Us or Justice? Moving Toward a Pan-Methodist Theology*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2009. 137 pages. ISBN 978-068746553.

Reviewed by M. Brandon Winstead, Adjunct Professor, St. Paul School of Theology, Kansas City, MO.

A basic assumption of this work is that the theological chasm between Wesleyan theology and African American theology is deep and wide. F. Douglas Powe, Jr., maps out some primary factors that have caused this divide and sketches a Pan-Methodist theology to help bridge the theological gap. In particular, Powe is concerned with overcoming the “just-us” issues of both camps by building a theological paradigm that analyzes “justice-related” concerns through a focus on soteriology (xii).

In order to meet this end, Powe first outlines the definition of “just-us.” By this, the author means that each side seeks its own good for their own community while failing to work for justice for the broader Pan-Methodist body. This focus on “just-us” issues, as he argues in chapter one, is based on historical factors that shaped the unfolding of Methodism in the United States. For example, he states that white Wesleyans’ support of slavery, along with northern ecclesiastical racism, the general societal beliefs in the innate superiority of blacks, the social belief of the incompatibility of whites and blacks, the narrow moral focus of white Wesleyans on personal holiness, and the colonizing efforts of some whites and Methodists to remove free blacks to Africa, all contributed to the racial and theological divide between whites and blacks.

After this, Powe states in chapter two, that the chasm between Wesleyans and African American theologians is also caused by a difference over theological methodology. He argues that white Wesleyans often focus on Wesley’s insistence that personal experiences should help mold one into Christlikeness, while African-American theologians begin with the premise that salvation is shaped by Jesus’ desire to transform oppressive structures and to liberate humans who suffer from oppression.

In chapter three the author delineates the various views of soteriology among Wesleyan theologians. He maps out the age-old debate between whether or not justification and renewal take place gradually or in a moment of conversion. He then details Ted Runyon’s emphasis on the renewal of creation as a part of Wesleyan soteriology, as well some of the more recent Wesleyan feminist soteriological views. In sum, Powe argues that all these attempts are short-sighted and incomplete because they do

not “rethink Wesleyan soteriology within the United States to reflect a love of neighbor that moves beyond universal categories. . .that continue to perpetuate whiteness” (53).

After this, Powe outlines the main soteriological models of African-American theologians. In particular, he mentions three main schools of thought: the liberation school, the reconciliation school, and the survivalist school. Utilizing the work of James Cone, Powe maintains that the liberation school utilizes black sources and Jesus’ life to argue that Christian salvation is tied to liberation of oppressed blacks in the United States. Likewise, the survivalist school draws upon the experiences of black women to argue that the salvation and transformation of African Americans and the rest of humanity rest on human flourishing in the “wildernesses” of life. Moreover, although the reconciliation camp promotes black liberation, advocates do so with the idea that reconciliation between whites and blacks is necessary for true Christian salvation. According to Powe, all three positions contain much truth, but are limited because the first two advocate for physical separation between the oppressed (i.e., blacks) and the oppressors (i.e., whites) that is not possible in the United States, while reconciliationists often fail to see the need for some distance between whites and blacks for real reconciliation to occur.

From here, Powe offers a Pan-Methodist soteriology that overcomes the different soteriological approaches and “just-us” concerns of Wesleyan and African-American theologians. In particular, he advocates an embodied soteriology based on Jesus’ life. He argues that both parties could agree that the incarnation of Jesus reveals a concern for human liberation and a divine desire to redeem the sins and moral image of humans. Powe also states that the humanity of Jesus reveals that the goal of human life is to become more Christlike by embodying God’s love and justice. At the same time, Powe states that the post-resurrection wounds of Jesus point to the pain of transformation and God’s ongoing work to sanctify and transform creation.

Powe concludes his work by arguing that the stories of Mark Twain’s *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple* help us understand that reconciliation and Pan-Methodist soteriology will take place in the United States only when racial power dynamics are recognized and deconstructed. For that to happen, Powe states that both parties must embody an engaging friendship where whites do not shame blacks, where they work together equally to transform racial injustice,

and where they learn to dwell together in mutuality to model God's justice and love.

For the most part, Powe accomplishes what he sets out to do in his work. Specifically, he reveals the historical and ongoing power dynamics that shaped the two theological camps and helps the reader see the need for a soteriological shift if there is going to be racial reconciliation in Pan-Methodism. He convincingly shows that a shift must be concrete and reflect an ongoing mutuality between both parties that seeks to respect the other and overcome the ways racism has shaped Pan-Methodism in the United States. Moreover, I agree that, if Pan-Methodists are going to work out their salvation together, it will only be through a mutual friendship that shares power and listens to the position of the other as they both seek to overcome just-us issues and reflect God's justice.

It is hard to refute Powe at this point because he takes seriously the role of historical particularity when constructing a Pan-Methodist soteriology. That seriousness allows him to show the impracticalities of some liberation theologians—primarily James Cone—who have hinted at separating from whites to actualize Jesus' liberation for African Americans. As Powe knows, partly from his understanding of the American Colonization Society of the nineteenth century (13-15), a mass separation of emigration of African Americans from the United States simply will not happen. Therefore, there needs to be ongoing efforts by African-American theologians, and particularly those in Pan-Methodism, to work alongside white Wesleyans to creatively transform the oppressive racial, social, and ecclesiastical realities in the United States.

At the same time, the blindness of white Wesleyan theologians to their own perspective needs to be deconstructed through a Christology (83-104) that seeks to address racial oppression, highlight what it means to be truly human, and pursue God's justice and liberation. In other words, Powe is able to convince the reader that, if Wesleyans are going to live out an embodied soteriology among friends, they must seek a redemption of the political image (along with the moral image) of humanity, which works to transform and sanctify creation.

Yet, despite the forcefulness of this work, there are a few critiques one could raise after reading Powe's work. First, when discussing some of the historical factors that shaped the soteriological divide in Pan-Methodism, Powe overlooks the history of the Central Jurisdiction, the national segregated judicatory of the United Methodist Church (1939 to early 1970s), thus failing to tackle a major historical reality that gave shape to

the racial divide in Pan-Methodism. Moreover, by overlooking this matter, the author fails to offer a concrete example that white and black Methodists could seek to address in an effort to live out a mutual and engaging friendship that he describes in chapter six.

Second, one questions whether Powe has adequately described the diversity of African-American soteriological positions in chapter four. For the most part, Powe uses one author as a source to represent each strand of African-American theology. For instance, James Cone is utilized to be representative of black liberation, while J. Deotis Roberts and Delores Williams are seen to be representatives of the reconciliation school of thought and the survivalist strand. Besides Williams, the other two scholars represent only the first generation of black theologians, so the reader does not see how other generations of black theologians like Dwight Hopkins and Kelly Brown Douglas addressed the issue of African-American Christians embodying engaging friendships with other people groups to bring about God's liberation for all.

Finally, one is left to wonder what an engaging friendship would exactly look like in Pan-Methodism. How would bishops, from say the African Methodist Episcopal Church and the United Methodist Church, seek to embody friendships among their constituents and persuade them to work towards reconciliation both inside and outside the church? How would leaders convince laity from various Pan-Methodist bodies to live out engaging friendships in their congregations? Such concrete questions are not addressed in the final chapter, which leaves the reader to question the practicality of his soteriology. Yet, maybe such questions are not ready to be answered and should be left to a sequel that Powe may hopefully compose in the near future.

Ruelas, Abraham. *Women and the Landscape of American Higher Education: Wesleyan Holiness and Pentecostal Founders*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2010. 166 pages. ISBN-13: 978-1606088692.

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.

Although much work has been done over the last generation in recovering women's history, much more remains to be done. The history of the Wesleyan-Holiness movement is no exception here. Ruelas's book follows a trajectory already well established academically by Susie Stanley and continued on a popular level by the various publications of the Wesleyan-Holiness Women Clergy organization. The book is aimed mainly at a popular audience; it could certainly be profitably read by members of local churches in the Holiness and Pentecostal movements who are curious about women in their history who have ignored or treated lightly in official accounts of history.

Ruelas is a social scientist by profession and a Pentecostal by religious tradition who teaches at Patten University (a school founded by one leader whom this book profiles, Bebe Patten). He became interested in the topic through preparing a paper for the 2009 Society for Pentecostal Studies conference, which he later expanded into this book. In the words of Susie Stanley's introduction, the book seeks to document systematically "the prominent place of Wesleyan Holiness and Pentecostal women in establishing Christian academic institutions between 1855 and 1970 to prepare individuals for ministry" (ix). In each case, Ruelas tells the life story of the woman in question and then focuses in detail on how she came to found the academic institution associated with her. In some cases, this involved a great deal of "digging," since later historical statements have often obscured the credit that these founders deserved.

Ruelas begins by outlining the involvement of women in American education beginning in colonial days—how they were educated and how they strove to educate others. He notes some nineteenth-century founders of women's seminaries and (drawing heavily on Stanley's work) foregrounds the importance of the doctrine of entire sanctification in empowering women to take public roles in ministry, including the founding of Bible colleges. He then moves on to discuss "early pioneers" in Christian

education in the Wesleyan-Holiness movement. This section includes names hopefully familiar to those of us formed in the Holiness tradition: Lucy Rider Meyer, Iva Vennard, Mary Lee Cagle, Alma White, and Lela McConnell. But other less familiar women are also featured, including Emma Dryer (influential in the early establishment of Moody Bible Institute), Fannie Suddarth (first principal of Arkansas Holiness College), the women's prayer circle that convinced Phineas Bresee to start Pacific Bible College and became part of its first Board of Trustees, Ruth Kerr (founder of Western Bible College, now Westmont College), and Mattie Hoke and Mattie Mallory, both of whom were influential in establishing institutions that later became part of Southern Nazarene University.

The final section of the book discusses fourteen Pentecostal women who founded colleges and institutes. Carrie Judd Montgomery (Shalom Training Center) and Aimee Semple McPherson (Echo Park Institute, now Life Pacific College) are the most notable names here, but also told are the stories of Elizabeth Baker (Rochester Bible Training School), Virginia Moss (Beulah Heights School), Minnie Tingley Draper (Bethel Bible Training School, now part of Central Bible Institute), Nora Chambers (Lee University), Mary Craig (Bethany University), Christine Amelia Gibson (Zion Bible College), Alice Luce (Latin American Bible Institute), Mary Keith (Keith Bible Institute), Bebe Patten (Patten University), Alta Washburn (American Indian College), Violet Kiteley (Shiloh Bible College), and Freda Lindsay (Christ for the Nations Institute).

In many ways, this is a valuable book as a preliminary exploration of these women and the issues associated with their work. Quite a few of these stories have been previously obscured, especially to readers at the local church level. Certainly most of the Pentecostal founders and their institutions were previously unknown to me. Furthermore, the author relates the stories in an entertaining style. There is a clear and helpful concluding timeline, and the bibliography is thorough (although a division within the bibliography would have been helpful between the primary sources—primarily biographies, autobiographies, and school histories—and secondary scholarly reflections by the likes of Stanley, Rosemary Skinner Keller, Susan Hill Lindley, Grant Wacker, and Timothy Smith). The book is likely to challenge many of its readers to further explore these stories and to uncover other hidden women's histories.

Given its potential usefulness, it is unfortunate that the book is frequently marred by typographical and grammatical errors, as well as by inconsistencies in editing. For example, something as simple as heading

each sketch with the birth and death dates and places of the woman or women involved would have been extremely helpful. When this information is reported, which it is not always, it tends to be buried in the body of the sketches.

Also, Ruelas' generally unquestioning attitude towards his sources is in keeping with his apologetic aim, which is to present these women as empowered by the Holy Spirit and as theologically and administratively capable of heading institutions of higher education. However, the book and its sources raise as many questions as they answer. What social and cultural, as well as spiritual, factors influenced the lives of these women? Are their stories only narratives of the Holy Spirit acting in the face of cultural pressures, or does looking at the tension between religion and culture complicate those stories? (This would have particularly illumined the stories of White—whose conflicting and paradoxical political views Ruelas enumerates, but does not attempt to resolve—and McPherson, whose “brief flirtation with the cinematic world” [111] deserves a larger place as an interpretative lens than Ruelas gives it.) What role did ordination or official sanction play—who sought it, who did not, and why? Why did many (though by no means all) of these women find their marriage and their faith to be in conflict? What lessons may be learned from their stories by those who may not share their theological presuppositions? And if, as Ruelas maintains in his conclusion, a woman was considered to be “stepping out of her place” (149) when she stepped into a classroom, why were so many women active in grammar school-level and Sunday School educational contexts, while their influence on higher education was seen as being in tension with this? These are all areas that those who build on the raw data that Ruelas has provided here need to explore.

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IF CURRENTLY A STUDENT, indicate school and current degree program:

MEMBERSHIP in religious or professional societies:

BOOKS OR SCHOLARLY ARTICLES RECENTLY PUBLISHED:

MAJOR RESEARCH COMPLETED OR IN PROGRESS: _____

FIELD(S) OF SPECIAL THEOLOGICAL OR RESEARCH INTEREST:

CHURCH AFFILIATION: _____

MEMBERSHIP REQUESTED (payment enclosed):