

WESLEYAN THEOLOGICAL JOURNAL



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

© Copyright 2013 by the
Wesleyan Theological Society

ISSN-0092-4245

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

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

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

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

Printed by
Old Paths Tract Society
Shoals, Indiana 47581

CONTENTS

EDITOR'S NOTES	5
A HEART STRANGELY WARMED ON THE MIDDLE WAY? THE WESLEYAN WITNESS IN A PLURALISTIC WORLD	7
Amos Yong	
I BELIEVE: CREEDAL EVANGELISM IN A PLURALISTIC WORLD	28
Elaine A. Heath	
GRACE ABOUND: THE MISSIOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS OF JOHN WESLEY'S INCLUSIVE THEOLOGY OF OTHER RELIGIONS.....	38
Joe Gorman	
THE WESLEYAN TRILATERAL: PREVENIENT GRACE, CATHOLIC SPIRIT, AND RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE	54
Kelly Diehl Yates	
ONLY EXCLUSIVISM WILL DO: GAVIN D'COSTA'S CHANGE OF MIND....	62
Thomas A. Noble	
WAS JOHN WESLEY ARGUING FOR PREVENIENT GRACE AS REGENERATIVE?	73
Stan Rodes	
INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE WITHIN THE PARADIGM OF ARMINIUS' FIRST PRINCIPLE OF THEOLOGICAL DISCOURSE	86
Nathan Napier	
HOW "TRUTH" LIMITS INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE: WHAT WESLEYANS MIGHT LEARN FROM BUDDHISM.....	99
Wm. Andrew Schwartz	
"PURE RELIGION AND UNDEFINED": A WESLEYAN ANALYSIS OF IBN TUFAYL'S <i>HALEBN YOKDAN</i>	106
Mark Murphree	
ROB BELL AND JOHN WESLEY ON THE FATE OF THE LOST AND THOSE WHO NEVER HEARD THE GOSPEL.....	117
Kenneth W. Brewer	
DARK GREEN RELIGION AND THE WESLEYAN TRADITION: HARMONY AND DISSONANCE	135
Matthew Seaman	
INTERPRETING IDOLATRY: READING SCRIPTURE WITH THE FATHERS, WESLEY, AND CONTEMPORARY EXEGESIS	149
Scott Dermer and Stephen Riley	
BOOK REVIEWS AND ADVERTISING	163

CONTRIBUTORS TO THIS NUMBER

ARTICLE WRITERS:

Kenneth W. Brewer	Spring Arbor University
Scott Dermer	Saint Louis University
Joe Gorman	Northwest Nazarene University
Elaine A. Heath	Perkins School of Theology, SMU
Nathan Napier	Pastor, First Church of the Nazarene, Cleveland, TN
Mark Murphree	Toccoa Falls College
Thomas A. Noble	Nazarene Theological Seminary
Stephen Riley	Northwest Nazarene University
Stan Rodes	Intermountain District, Church of the Nazarene
Wm. Andrew Schwartz	Claremont Graduate University
Matthew Seaman	The University of Queensland, Australia
Kelly Diehl Yates	Nazarene Theological College, Manchester, UK
Amos Yong	Regent University School of Divinity

BOOK REVIEWERS:

Kiersten Beagan, Mark Glen Bilby, Peter Benjamin Boeckel,
Rustin E. Brian, David Bundy, Michael G. Cartwright, Katherine Fitch,
James H. Hunter, Jackson Lashier, Mark Murphree, Amy L. B. Peeler,
Aaron Perry, Harold E. Raser, David Rightmire, and Andrew C. Thompson

EDITOR'S NOTES

The 2012 annual meeting of the Wesleyan Theological Society convened on the campus of Trevecca Nazarene University, Nashville, Tennessee, March 2-3, 2012. Under the direction of program chair Michael Lodahl, numerous presentations illuminated the overall theme, "On Faith(s): The Wesleyan Tradition and the World's Religious." The articles in this issue are selections from these presentations. They include the plenary address of Amos Yong and the presidential address of Elaine A. Heath. Issues that surface often in these pages are the current reality of religious pluralism and the important role played by prevenient grace in the story of God's salvation efforts on behalf of all humanity.

Looking ahead, the 2013 annual meeting of the Society convenes on the campus of Seattle Pacific University on March 21-23, 2013. It is a joint meeting with the Society of Pentecostal Studies featuring the common theme of "Holiness." Issue 49:1 (Spring 2014) of this journal will carry select materials from this particularly significant meeting.

The identity of the current officers of the Wesleyan Theological Society 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* and much more information about the Society itself, past and present.

Efficient communication is important. Therefore, note the following WTS officers to contact for particular needs that you may have (email addresses available elsewhere in this issue:

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

Barry L. Callen, Editor
March, 2013

A HEART STRANGELY WARMED ON THE MIDDLE WAY? THE WESLEYAN WITNESS IN A PLURALISTIC WORLD

by

Amos Yong

I suggest that central themes of Wesleyan theology, including the doctrine of prevenient grace, the emphasis on heart religiosity, and the goal of holiness and Christian perfection, equip Wesleyans with a wide range of theological predispositions to engage with religious others on their own terms. Intimations of how these theological themes open up to a dialogical encounter with Buddhist traditions are presented here. The result is a more fundamental grounding of Wesleyan attitudes and practices relevant for the pluralistic world of the twenty-first century.

John Wesley was neither a systematic theologian nor someone who engaged with or thought extensively about a theology of other religions. Rather, he was a practical theologian who, with the exception of twenty-two months in America, spent his life focused on renewing the Church of England and urging nominal and other Christians on toward holiness.¹ Yet, although we should not read Wesley as a theologian of the religions, we might be able to, in dialogue with central themes of his theological legacy, tease out insights for a theology of interfaith encounter today.

Each of the three sections below will begin with a contemporary Wesleyan practice and central doctrine in a pluralistic world and explore how these might meaningfully contribute to a Wesleyan theology of interfaith relations. We then will conduct a thought experiment regarding a Wesleyan dialogue with Buddhism.² My thesis will be that there are dis-

¹Lynne Price, *Interfaith Encounter and Dialogue: A Methodist Pilgrimage*, Studies in the Intercultural History of Christianity 70 (Frankfurt, New York, and Paris: Peter Lang, 1989), 132.

²Among the world's faiths, Buddhism is the one I know best; see my books, *Pneumatology and the Christian-Buddhist Dialogue: Does the Spirit Blow through the Middle Way?*, Studies in Systematic Theology 11 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2012), and *The Cosmic Breath: Spirit and Nature in the Christianity-Buddhism-Science Trialogue*, Philosophical Studies in Science & Religion 4 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2012).

tinctive Wesleyan commitments related to prevenient grace, heart religiosity, and holy love that invite a more hospitable, dialogical, and appropriate missional engagement with other faiths than may be theologically validated in other evangelical Christian traditions.

My central thesis proceeds from the groundwork laid by many other Wesleyan theologians.³ To be sure, I am under no illusions that all Wesleyans think alike on anything, much less on this topic,⁴ especially since one finds in Wesley's writings a spectrum of attitudes and ideas about the world of religions.⁵ Further, I am technically a pentecostal theologian rather than a Wesleyan scholar, and so am no more than a "grandchild" in the guild of Wesleyan scholarship.⁶ Yet, as a grandson, I have found much in the legacy left by the generation of my grandparents in the faith, especially as appropriated by my "cousins" (contemporary Wesleyan scholars and theologians) that has been helpful for thinking about a theology of religions and a theology of interfaith encounter.⁷ I therefore present these reflections, hoping that they will be received by my relatives on the Wesleyan side of the family for what they are intended, a prod to think more

³Beginning with Kenneth Cracknell and Susan J. White, *An Introduction to World Methodism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), ch. 10, Tim Macquiban, ed., *Pure, Universal Love: Reflections on the Wesleys and Inter-faith Dialogue*, Westminster Wesley Series 3 ([Oxford]: Applied Theology Center, 1995), and Stephen Skuce, "A Firm and Generous Faith?: Towards an Authentic Wesleyan Inter-Faith Understanding," *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue* 19 (2009): 66-80. Others will be cited in the pages to come.

⁴Roy I. Sano, "The Local Church and the World: Ecumenical and Interreligious Agenda of The United Methodist Church," in Russell E. Richey, ed., *Ecumenical and Interreligious Perspectives: Globalization in Theological Education* (Nashville: QR [Quarterly Review] Books, 1992), 31-44, nicely lays out the spectrum of views among those who consider themselves part of the Wesleyan and Methodist traditions.

⁵An excellent overview of the range of Wesley's thinking about "Mahometanism," for example, is catalogued by Tony Richie, "John Wesley and Mohammed: A Contemporary Inquiry Concerning Islam," *The Asbury Theological Journal* 58:2 (2003): 79-99.

⁶Assuming that the genealogy running from Wesley to pentecostalism is mediated through the American Holiness Movement, as argued by scholars such as Donald W. Dayton, *Theological Roots of Pentecostalism* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1987).

⁷See my *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), ch. 6.

deeply about the religiously plural world that we inhabit, and to do so in part in dialogue with our Buddhist neighbors and friends.⁸

Prevenient Grace: Does It Cover the Middle Path?

Some Christians divide up the world neatly into twos: Christian and non-Christian, the elect and those not, those going to heaven and those not, etc. Most Wesleyans I know do not meet strangers and respond initially in this dualistic fashion. The most important labels are not usually these categories. I wonder if that is because of the Wesleyan doctrine of prevenient grace.

What is it about the doctrine of prevenient grace that might predispose Wesleyans to respond to the world in a much less “us” versus “them” manner? There is no space here to provide a full exposition, especially in light of Gregory Crofford’s recent book on the topic.⁹ Summarizing the breadth of research across Wesley’s extant works, Crofford highlights a number of central features characterizing Wesley’s understanding. Particularly pertinent for our purposes are the following.

First, prevenient grace is available and accessible universally to all human beings and is what enables all human goodness, even after the fall. Second, prevenient grace also empowers human moral responsibility, in part by activating the law of conscience inscribed within human hearts. Third, while there are ordinary means through which prevenient grace is nurtured, there are also extraordinary means through the Holy Spirit that make possible human response to God’s initiatives (of course, human beings, with their freedom, may also choose to resist such initiatives).¹⁰

⁸Wesleyan theologians the stature of Michael Lodahl have already opened up lines of dialogue with Jewish and Muslim traditions respectively—e.g., Michael E. Lodahl, *Shekinah Spirit: Divine Presence in Jewish and Christian Religion* (New York and Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1992), and *Claiming Abraham: Reading the Bible and the Qur’an Side by Side* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2010). See also Mark Gear Mann, “Religious Pluralism,” in Thomas Jay Oord, ed., *Philosophy of Religion: Introductory Essays* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 2003), 259-74.

⁹J. Gregory Crofford, *Streams of Mercy: Prevenient Grace in the Theology of John and Charles Wesley* (Wilmore, Ky.: Emeth Press, 2010).

¹⁰Theodore Runyon, *The New Creation: John Wesley’s Theology Today* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 218, suggests in his sketch of a Wesleyan approach to pluralism that the Spirit works “in and through *prevenient grace*” so that others are to be understood together rather than distinctively.

Crofford clarifies that, while there is some overlap between the Wesleyan doctrine of prevenient grace and the Reformed doctrine of common grace, there is a major difference: the former may lead people to salvation while the latter never does so—it can only convict people of sin.¹¹

Here is one way that theological variance may make a difference in a pluralistic world. Reformed evangelical traditions in a sense already have decided. Given the distinction between the non-elect (beneficiaries of common grace) and elect (recipients and respondents to special grace), those in other faiths by definition fit into the former category. In other words, if common grace only condemns and the other religions are by definition devoid of special grace, then there is already a theological template predefining the nature of non-Christians even before we know anything about them. Such an *a priori* approach certainly has been adopted across large segments of evangelical Christianity, even for those who are not confessionally Reformed per se.

The Wesleyan doctrine of prevenient grace, however, invites an *a posteriori* engagement with the religions. Not only do Wesleyan instincts reject the dichotomy of common and special grace, but God's grace in Christ is usually understood as "establishing and completing divine revelation in creation."¹² The reason is that, by definition, the world as a whole exists within the prevenient and providential grace of God. In this case, it would be arbitrary to say that there are certain select domains—i.e., the religious one—excluded from the operations of prevenient grace. So someone might be a Buddhist, but her Buddhism is bound up to a greater or lesser degree with the cultural-linguistic, socio-political, economic, and other dimensions of her life. Any religious label is complex, involving a broad spectrum of ideas, doctrines, practices, institutions, and associations. The doctrine of prevenient grace does not say that all things are equal everywhere about everything. But affirming such a doctrine does invite further questions about how whatever it is we are inquiring about may manifest prevenient grace.

With regard to the religions, Al Truesdale queries: "To what extent does the religion in question serve the purposes of prevenient grace?"¹³

¹¹Crofford, *Streams of Mercy*, 193-94.

¹²Randy L. Maddox, "Wesley and the Question of Truth or Salvation through Other Religions," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 27 (1992): 7-29, quotation from 13.

¹³Al Truesdale with Keri Mitchell, *With Chords of Love: A Wesleyan Response to Religious Pluralism* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 2006), 154.

Such a question opens up the possibility of developing a theology of religions. Religions, in this case, are no longer merely or only non-Christian, forms of common grace that can condemn but do not lead to salvation. Of course, the doctrine of prevenient grace neither affirms nor asserts that the religions are salvific. Other religions do not nurture the hope for Christian salvation, so there is no reason to say that they lead to the beatific vision of the triune God or to Christian holiness. Yet, might it still be possible that aspects of other faiths could be expressions of prevenient grace? This is a theological question requiring a careful look at other religions before proffering however tentative a response.

Hence, we are invited to approach people of other faiths less as representatives of religious labels than as people made in the image of God and existing within the realm of prevenient grace. While labels may be significant, the degree of their significance varies from person to person. We cannot presume that we know exactly where people are in their relationships with God merely on the basis of knowing one aspect of their self-identification. Only careful a posteriori interaction with people can enable discernment of what kind of religious persons, if at all, they are. This will involve, minimally, attentiveness to their perspective, openness to their narrative (their witness), and sensitivity to their concerns. For all of these reasons, then, belief in the prevenient grace of God orients Wesleyans toward a religiously plural world in distinctive ways among other evangelicals.¹⁴

What would it mean, then, to ask Truesdale's question of Buddhism? Well, first, the very notion of any kind of reified Buddhism would need to be interrogated. We would have to be ready to question stereotypical understandings and be willing to ask fresh questions. In fact, we might have to proceed to ask Buddhists themselves to tell us about their "faith" or their tradition. Of course, along the way, we are still asking a very specific Christian question: how does this form of Buddhism, whatever that might mean to our Buddhist discussants, serve the purposes of prevenient grace. A similar question may be that of how Buddhism might serve as a preparation for the gospel. Either of these questions involves a very careful dialectical inquiry. On the one hand, we are bringing very specific Wesleyan and Christian theological concerns to the discussion table; on

¹⁴Floyd T. Cunningham, "Interreligious Dialogue: A Wesleyan Holiness Perspective," in S. Mark Heim, *Grounds for Understanding: Ecumenical Resources for Responses to Religious Pluralism* (Grand Rapids, and Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 188-207.

the other hand, we are also wondering what Buddhists might tell us that may shed some light on our questions, maybe even cause us to understand our questions differently.

Let me propose in the following thought experiment three interrelated sets of possible responses by Buddhists. The first thing we might hear is that, whatever else Buddhism might be, it is first and foremost a psychology rather than a religion.¹⁵ The argument here would be that the human condition is wracked by ignorance and delusion. Thus, Buddhist meditation is designed, like psychotherapeutic practice, to clear and awaken the mind to reality as it truly is. This involves refining the human psyche from its accumulated obscurities and potentially freeing the mind from the self-imposed captivities that perpetuate human suffering. This is why meditation is so important for Buddhist practitioners. The problem lies in the obfuscations of the human mind, and the solution involves liberation of the mind from its stultifying habits.

Whatever else Buddhism is, it is a tradition of wisdom rather than a religion.¹⁶ This is not to say that Buddhism is a philosophical tradition since, as we shall see also in the next section, many Buddhists reject the notion that doctrines are central to a Buddhist self-understanding. The point, instead, is that the attainment of wisdom “involves an active stance of cultivating the mind’s eye to enable one to see things as they truly are.”¹⁷ It is to say that the goal of Buddhism is less knowledge that is discursively articulated than practiced. Buddhist sages are less proponents of doctrines or teachings than they are of a form and way of life. For many Buddhists, this is the Eightfold Path, involving right views, right intentions, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration. Buddhist wisdom is encapsulated thus in

¹⁵The classic texts here are Rune E. A. Johansson, *The Psychology of Nirvana: A Comparative Study of the Natural Goal of Buddhism and the Aims of Modern Western Psychology* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1970), and Padmasiri de Silva, *An Introduction to Buddhist Psychology*, 4th ed. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005). More recently, see John Welwood, *Toward a Psychology of Awakening: Buddhism, Psychotherapy, and the Path of Personal Spiritual Transformation* (Boston and London: Shambhala, 2000).

¹⁶So called by Christmas Humphreys, ed., *The Wisdom of Buddhism* (London: Curzon and The Buddhist Society, and Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1987).

¹⁷Ruben L. F. Habito, *Experiencing Buddhism: Ways of Wisdom and Compassion* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2005), 78.

knowing how to live rightly rather than in how to codify such a way of life in propositions, formulas, or doctrines. This might be parallel to Polanyi's knowing *how* as opposed to the knowing *that*.

Along this path, yes, we might indeed hear Buddhists talking about *philosophia*. But again, this would be less in terms of philosophical doctrines and more in terms of the teachings or *dharma* of the Buddha. Rather than being focused on the topics of abstract metaphysical speculation found in the Western tradition, or even in the preceding Brahmanic intellectual traditions, the *dharma* of Buddhism is more oriented toward the wisdom of right living. For Buddhists, the "Middle Way" teaching is precisely about carving out a *via media* of action amidst extreme philosophical views that might otherwise paralyze human life.¹⁸

Notice then what has happened amidst this dialogue. First, the Wesleyan conviction that prevenient grace is at work invites them to pay attention to what is actually happening in the lives of their Buddhist interlocutors. Second, then, they might be led to ask if any of these aspects of the Buddhist tradition might serve the purposes of prevenient grace, even preparing the way for the gospel. Of course, to engage that question seriously, the dialogue will need to go much deeper than what the preceding merely sketches. However, the point is that the dialogue is now under way. And along the way, Wesleyan Christians may actually come to appreciate, learn from, and even receive something of value from their conversation partners. Equally certain, Wesleyans may also get the opportunity to bear witness to the gospel of Christ that is at the center of their Christian faith. We will return to this matter at the end of this essay.

A Heart Strangely Warmed: Possible Under the Bo Tree?

As already indicated, many conservative evangelical traditions divide the world into two according to the confession of faith. Those who have made such confessions, i.e., have made "decisions for Christ," are "in" or are "with us," whereas those who have not are "out" or "against us."¹⁹ This

¹⁸E.g., is Christmas Humphreys, *Studies in the Middle Way: Being Thoughts on Buddhism Applied*, 3rd ed. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1959), and The Dalai Lama, *The Middle Way: Faith Grounded in Reason*, trans., Thupten Jinpa (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2009).

¹⁹For a phenomenology of the evangelical practice of obtaining confessions of or "decisions for Christ," see David E. Fitch, *The End of Evangelicalism: Discerning a New Faithfulness for Mission towards an Evangelical Political Theology* (Eugene, Ore.: Cascade Books, 2011), ch. 4.

intellectualistic way of organizing Christian commitments is used sometimes even “within” Christian circles, separating “us” evangelicals from “those” non-evangelicals (whether they be mainline Protestants, liberals, Catholics, or others). I certainly do not wish to argue against the importance of confessing the faith. I believe that this is an essential part of bearing Christian witness in a pluralistic world and should occur at some point even in the interreligious dialogue. I wonder, however, whether the tendency to define religious faith doctrinally undermines our ability to approach non-Christian others in their full humanity. My sense is that our own predisposition to understand ourselves according to our religious beliefs will lead us to approach others from the standpoint of their religious doctrines, even if these may be secondary to the religious identities of those in other faiths.

Here is where I believe Wesleyans may have another bridge toward encountering religious others at least on equal if not on their own terms. I am referring to the Wesleyan spirituality of the heart. At the center of Wesleyanism is Wesley’s own experience on 24 May 1738, of his heart being strangely warmed. Wesleyan scholars have debated for over 250 years about whether this was Wesley’s conversion experience.²⁰ It certainly has all the marks of his evangelical conversion, resulting in a life reoriented by encounter with the Holy Spirit.²¹ When set within the broader context of his soteriology, we might not wish to label this his Christian conversion, although there is also no reason to minimize its import for Wesley’s life and subsequent ministry.²² After all, it is from this foundation that Wesley came to emphasize religion as being primarily not

²⁰The issues were nicely summarized two generations ago in J. Ernest Rattenbury, *The Conversion of the Wesleys: A Critical Study* (London: Epworth Press, 1938); Wesleyan scholars continue to make arguments on either side of this question.

²¹See Philip S. Watson, *Anatomy of a Conversion: The Message and Mission of John & Charles Wesley* (1984; reprint, Grand Rapids: Francis & Taylor Press, 1990), ch. 1.

²²Particularly if we understand Wesley as formulating a *via salutis* that involved various crisis experiences or encounters with God, as in John H. Tyson, “John Wesley’s Conversion at Aldersgate,” in Kenneth J. Collins and John H. Tyson, eds., *Conversion in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001), 27–42. For my own articulation of such a more dynamic Wesleyan soteriology, see my *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh*, ch. 2.

of the head but of the heart.²³ Yet within this scheme of things, knowledge itself may be misdirected or, worse, result in a vacuous religious life. The question concerns how knowledge, religious or otherwise, makes a difference in human hearts and lives. Wesley's question is whether or not humans are made holy and transformed into the image of Christ. And he saw that such transformation was at least as much a matter of sanctifying and redirecting the heart as it was a matter of informational processing. Sanctification as a matter of the heart involves not just the mind but the renewal of the affections, habits, and desires of the heart, and the reformation of the works of the hands.

How might this make a difference in the interreligious encounter? Let me suggest three possible implications. First, a focus on the heart spotlights not just confessions or beliefs (the community's religious doctrines) but the whole identity of religious persons. A recognition of the heart's capacity to be strangely warmed will alert us especially to the domain of affectivity that is central to a holistic human life. As Wesley insisted, "true religion, in the very essence of it, is nothing short of holy tempers. Consequently, all other religion, whatever name it bears, whether Pagan, Mahometan, Jewish or Christian: and whether Popish or Protestant, Lutheran or Reformed; without these [holy tempers] is lighter than vanity itself."²⁴ Our first questions then will not revolve around what people believe but around the feeling, emotions, and desires that shape religious lives. We are invited thereby not just to listen to what others say but to feel what they feel and to be moved by what they are moved by, for good or ill. At this deeper level, we will begin to engage their joys and their fears, their hopes and their disappointments. In short, focusing on the heart invites, even requires, that we attend not just to the confessions of others but to their narratives, the details of which constitute the complexities of life.²⁵

²³E.g., Gregory S. Clapper, *John Wesley on Religious Affections: His Views on Experience and Emotion and Their Role in the Christian Life and Theology*, Pietist & Wesleyan Studies 1 (Metuchen, NJ, and London: The Scarecrow Press, 1989).

²⁴John Wesley, "Sermon 91: On Charity," in Albert C. Outler, ed., *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 3 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1986), 290-307, quotation from 306.

²⁵Gregory S. Clapper, *The Renewal of the Heart Is the Mission of the Church: Wesley's Heart Religion in the Twenty-First Century* (Eugene, Ore.: Cascade Books, 2010).

Second, a focus on the heart will also sensitize us to the dynamically habituated character of human identities. Confessions draw a line in the sand so that revisions or denials of such confessions re-draw the boundaries of group membership, and they do not usually enable us to register shifts prior to or after such conversion events, even if those shifts are significant. Engaging the religiosity of the heart, however, alerts us to its dynamic and fluid nature. Our habits are constantly being realigned as they are always open to reformation. Further, habitual dispositions open up to trajectories of human sojourning, sometimes the ends of which are dimly, if at all, discernible in advance. In other words, hearts are not only open to being warmed (as Wesley's was), but they are also, to continue the metaphor, liable to being further heated, or, we ought to admit, they could even grow cold.

Heart religion is thereby messy, messier than a simple "Yes, I am a Buddhist" or "Yes, I am a Christian" unveils. But that is the point, that a heart-to-heart engagement enables people to undertake journeys together with others, at least in some respects. Someone who is on the way is much more amenable to honestly engaging others whom they might meet than someone who feels like he or she has already "arrived." In some respects the journey will be risky, certainly, since Christians on their way may be tempted to follow new friends down unanticipated paths. But the risk cuts both ways: others might be habitually reoriented along their way after meeting with Christians.²⁶

At a third level, the Wesleyan religion of the heart seeks to love God and the neighbor. Thus, interactions with neighbors have to be guided by love, and this involves Christians not just having good feelings for their neighbors but concretely meeting their neighbors' needs with works of mercy. If, for some evangelical traditions, the end of the encounter with the other is the conversion of the other and the attainment of his or her confession of faith, for Wesleyans, such faith is defined not only proposi-

²⁶So unlike the Calvinist framework that divides non-Christians between the savable and the unsavable (elect and non-elect), Wesleyan prevenient grace urges Christians to "approach all with the belief that grace is available to all," and this itself reorients our missionary and evangelistic stance and posture. See Terry C. Muck, "John Wesley's Eighteenth-Century Contributions to the Twenty-First-Century Theology of Religions," in Darrell L. Whiteman and Gerald H. Anderson, eds., *World Mission in the Wesleyan Spirit*, American Society of Missiology series 144 (Franklin, Tenn.: Providence House Publishers, 2009), 93-101, quote from 99.

tionally but especially practically. Faith is less a set of doctrines than the means to or expression of love.²⁷ Further, faith is not just about what the neighbor believes but about the relationship of love that Christians have with their neighbors. In this, then, Wesleyans could affirm that, “truly saving religion consists in the transformation of hearts and lives, and can properly be defined as ‘faith active in love,’ whatever the species of faith.”²⁸

None of this is to deny that there is a confessional character to Christian faith as well as a role for propositions in defining Christian beliefs. The question is whether doctrines precede or define the religion of the heart or whether they emerge from the latter. Putting the question this way already begs that we transcend such a dichotomous framing of the issues. There is no denying that the heart of Christian faith is formed in substantial respects by a doctrinal way of life structured congregationally, liturgically, and devotionally.²⁹ Yet the reality is that, for most evangelicals, scarce consideration is given to exploring the implications of heart spirituality for Christian self-understanding. My point is that in the interfaith context, Wesleyans can lead the way to show how such an orientation to the religious life opens up new spaces and modes for interacting with non-Christian neighbors.

What happens in living out this heart religiosity in a pluralistic world? More specifically, what are the possibilities for interfaith dialogue with Buddhists who we might meet covered by the shade of the famous Bo tree in Bodh Gaya (in the state of Bihar, India) under which Siddharta Gautama was said to have found awakening?³⁰ Are there any possible

²⁷Gregory S. Clapper, *As If the Heart Mattered: A Wesleyan Spirituality* (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 1997), 100.

²⁸Philip R. Meadows, “‘Candidates for Heaven’: Wesleyan Resources for a Theology of Religions,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 35:1 (2000): 99-129, quotation from 125.

²⁹As argued by George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Doctrine in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984).

³⁰The Bo tree also now flourishes throughout Sri Lanka, where it is considered a sacred site representing the Buddha’s enlightenment. See Tessa J. Bartholomeusz, *Women under the Bō Tree: Buddhist Nuns in Sri Lanka*, Cambridge Studies in Religious Traditions 5 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 98, and cf. my “From Azusa Street to the Bo Tree and Back: Strange Babblings and Interreligious Interpretations in the Pentecostal Encounter with Buddhism,” in Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, ed., *The Spirit in the World: Emerging Pentecostal Theologies in Global Contexts* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 203-26.

points of contact between the Wesleyan heart strangely warmed and the Buddhist insistence that the problem of the human condition is our deluded and obfuscated minds?

At one level, it would seem that a religious tradition that identifies the human problem as one that consists of mental ignorance would emphasize the importance of knowledge for curing such a condition. Yet the Zen koan, “do not confuse the pointing finger with the moon,” captures the truth that all too often, human beings end up focusing on the finger—the koan, or the doctrine—rather than on the reality to which it points. The unfortunate fact is that, in some cases, an over-reliance on words may actually hinder appropriate responses to and engagements with reality.

The *Majjhima-Nikāya* recounts the story of the man who was wounded with a poisonous arrow and insisted to the doctor that he wanted all the details about the person who shot the arrow, during which time he expires.³¹ Thus words are not to be absolutized. Rather, if they are to be used at all—and sometimes it is better to be silent than to encourage idle talk that keeps us trapped in our wrong views³²—they are no more than what are considered skillful means to diagnose the human condition and enable people at different phases and walks of life to advance toward enlightenment. So even what appears to be the most abstruse metaphysical speculations are teachings designed to enable the cultivation of mindfulness and compassion for others.³³ If Wesley was a practical theologian focused on saving and sanctifying souls rather than on elaborating a metaphysical system of theology, so was the Buddha a physician of the mind and of the heart of the human condition hoping to awaken people to the nature of things rather than desiring to construct a set of philosophical and religious doctrines.

More precisely, Buddhist practices are designed to enable the overcoming of dis-ease or suffering (*dukkha*). Whereas Theravada traditions

³¹See Sutta 63, “Minor Discourse with Mālunkyāputta,” in David W. Evans, trans., *The Discourses of Gotama Buddha Middle Collection: New Translation in an Abridged Form of the Majjhima-Nikāya Taken from the Pali Text Society Edition 1888-1902* (London: Janus Publishing Company, 1992), 185-86.

³²See Raimundo Panikkar, *The Silence of God: The Answer of the Buddha*, trans. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1989), 148-56.

³³See John W. Schroeder, *Skillful Means: The Heart of Buddhist Compassion*, Society for Asian and Comparative Philosophy 18 (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2001).

are focused on recognizing the dis-ease or dis-quiet in one's own life and mind, Mahayana traditions have highlighted that the awakened mind can never be at rest until the suffering of all sentient beings is stilled. This is because suffering is never merely an isolated experience of individuals living in silos. On the contrary, not only does suffering bind sufferers together, but awakened minds also come to see and experience the depth of solidarity binding all sentient beings to that point that an "infinite compassion" for all is awakened.³⁴ The bodhisattva of the Mahayana tradition is thus the symbol of the fully enlightened Buddha who puts off entry into Nirvana, or the Pure Land of enlightened bliss, because enlightenment brings about a heart full of compassion for a world caught up in the cycle of suffering.

So, if in fact there is a way to escape the *dukkha* that troubles all sentient life, then it makes sense that those who have been awakened to that route would work to achieve the liberation of all. Bodhisattvas are such compassionate ones, committed to seek the awakening of all creatures so that the wheel of suffering can be terminated. More importantly, the bodhisattvic symbol invites Buddhist practitioners to embrace and embody the compassion of these awakened and enlightened ones. The goal is not just to know about how bodhisattvas are compassionate, but to cultivate and live out the compassion they represent to a suffering world.³⁵ Here again there would be plenty for Wesleyans and Buddhists under the Bo Tree to discuss, especially in terms of how affective and compassionate praxis is the goal of religious life.

Of course, for Buddhists, life does not come to a standstill under the Bo Tree. True, the Bo Tree symbolizes the profound experience of awakening that oftentimes represents a crisis experience. In that sense, there is a once-for-all character to becoming enlightened.³⁶ On the other hand, Buddhists also recognize that such crisis moments are merely part of a

³⁴Clarence H. Hamilton, *Buddhism: A Religion of Infinite Compassion* (New York: The Liberal Arts Press, 1952), esp. xv-xxiii.

³⁵See Taigen Dan Leighton, *Faces of Compassion: Classic Bodhisattva Archetypes and Their Modern Expression* (Somerville, Mass.: Wisdom Publications, 2003).

³⁶As argued by Sung Bae Park, *Buddhist Faith and Sudden Enlightenment* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983), in dialogue with Northern Chinese schools of Buddhism, as opposed to the Southern Chinese perspective that emphasizes the gradual nature of achieving enlightenment.

wider tapestry of life events. Buddhist compassion, in other words, cannot be self-contained at any point in time, no matter how rich is the experience engendering such powerful affections. Instead, the heart of compassion connects the sage to the rest of the world.³⁷

Wesley, of course, was moved similarly by his encounter with the Spirit of the God and of Jesus Christ to reenter into the world, which he considered his parish.³⁸ Heart religion, both Buddhist and Christian, cannot be contained individualistically. Instead, human hearts touched by the Spirit of God or compassionately enlightened to the way the world truly is, cannot but be lived out on behalf of others. This leads to another possible point of contact for Wesleyans with religious others in a pluralistic world.

Holy Love for God and Neighbor: Can It Blossom from the Lotus?

For John Wesley, the prevenient grace of God and the holy affections are all directed, ultimately, toward the salvation of the world. Yet Wesley understood this salvation less in other-worldly and eschatological terms than in terms of holy love manifest in transformed hearts, lives, and communities of faith. Holy and perfect love characterizes the goal of the Christian way of life. This involves not only justification but also sanctification. Christian salvation means not only a declaration of forgiveness of sins but also a transformation of the heart, mind, and hands so that the follower of Christ stops sinning. In other words, salvation combines crisis and process elements. This does not divide neatly into justification (crisis) and sanctification (process) but pertains also to the perfecting work of the Spirit in the lives of believers. Sanctification can also involve both crisis and process elements so as to shape believers in holiness. What emerges is a rather fluid *via salutis* in which the saving work of God transforms, purifies, and sanctifies human lives variously and over time.³⁹

To focus only on the crisis aspects of Christian conversion seduces us to categorize those we meet as either “saved” or “unsaved.” If process

³⁷E.g., Patrick G. Henry and Donald K. Swearer, *For the Sake of the World: The Spirit of Buddhist and Christian Monasticism* (Minneapolis: Fortress, and Collegeville: Liturgical, 1989).

³⁸See Basil Miller, *John Wesley: The World His Parish* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1943).

³⁹As brilliantly explicated by Kenneth J. Collins, *The Scripture Way of Salvation: The Heart of John Wesley's Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997).

categories are prioritized, however, people are not so easily classified. We, as well as others, would be more-or-less saved or unsaved, although always along the way. This is one way to understand the point Wesley attempts to make in his sermon "On Faith," wherein he distinguishes between various degrees of every-increasing faith, from deists, to "heathen" (which he understood to include "Mahometans") to Jews (which he understood to include the Roman Catholics of his day), and finally to Protestants.⁴⁰ Within this scheme of things, Wesley realizes that it is possible that those with a lesser degree of faith, understood in terms of knowledge, might still reflect another level of faith in terms of their way of life: ". . . with heathens, Mahometans, and Jews. . . , only we may wish that their lives did not shame many of us that are called Christians."⁴¹ In any case, faith involves a journey, perhaps one increasingly engaged with whatever light God choses to shine upon those who might otherwise be unevangelized.⁴²

Following Wesley in this regard makes it more difficult for us to raise monies for missionary ventures understood primarily in terms of proselytization. However, it also more accurately captures the reality that conversion, in the lives of most people, occurs over a lifetime, even if punctuated by a series of crisis experiences.⁴³ This would also hold true

⁴⁰John Wesley, "Sermon 106: On Faith, Hebrews 11:6," in Albert C. Outler, ed., *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 3 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1986), 491-501.

⁴¹Wesley, "Sermon 106: On Faith," 500.

⁴²Wesley, in his sermon "On Charity," 295-96, also mused: "But it may be asked, 'If there be no true love of our neighbour, but that which springs from the love of God; and if the love of God flows from no other fountain than faith in the Son of God; does it not follow that the whole heathen world is excluded from all possibility of salvation? Seeing they are cut off from faith; for faith cometh by hearing; and how shall they hear without a preacher?' I answer, St. Paul's words, spoken on another occasion, are applicable to this: 'What the law speaketh, it speaketh to them that are under the law.' Accordingly, that sentence, 'He that believeth not shall be damned,' is spoken of them to whom the Gospel is preached. Others it does not concern; and we are not required to determine anything touching their final state. How it will please God, the Judge of all, to deal with *them*, we may leave to God himself. But this we know, that he is not the God of the Christians only, but the God of the Heathens also; that he is 'rich in mercy to all that call upon him,' according to the light they have; and that 'in every nation, he that feareth God and worketh righteousness is accepted of him'" (italics original).

⁴³See here Donald L. Gelpi, *The Conversion Experience: A Reflective Process for RCIA Participants and Others* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1998).

for people of other faiths, who are always more or less inculturated, inserted, and formed in their religious traditions. It also means that we cannot determine *a priori* where people are on their journeys without paying attention to their narratives. And this requires that we privilege their own telling of their story.

But there is a second level of holiness, and this relates to our neighbors. For Wesley, the love of God and the love of neighbor are intertwined inextricably. To be made perfect in the love of God necessarily has consequences for how the people of God relate to their neighbors. Holiness, in other words, is necessarily relational.⁴⁴ There is no possibility of experiencing the holy and perfect love of God without believers also being transformed in how they feel toward and interact with their neighbors. There is a social and communal dimension to the call to holiness. Holy affections, set afire by the Spirit of God, inevitably have in mind the common good. Perfect love brings with it a social conscience. Thus, the strangely warmed heart is now empowered to be obedient to the call to love the neighbor, and even the enemy.

It is no wonder that Wesleyan traditions have been socially alert and engaged. From abolition to women's suffrage, from slum work to prison philanthropy, from conscientious objection to what were felt to be unjust wars to programs engaging unemployment,⁴⁵ Wesleyans seemingly always have been socially engaged, both as critics of the social order and its status quo, and as those seeking to "spread scriptural holiness across the land," as Wesley himself urged.⁴⁶ Personal holiness, involving the call to love one's neighbor, does not stop with physical neighbors next door. Rather, the love of neighbor extends beyond the neighborhood to society at large. Scriptural holiness, then, involves not only interpersonal relationships but also has an ecclesial and social dimension. Sometimes this includes taking actions that result in justice for neighbor, near and far.

⁴⁴See Thomas Jay Oord and Michael Lodahl, *Relational Holiness: Responding to the Call of Love* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 2005).

⁴⁵Timothy L. Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform in Mid-19th-Century America* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1957), and Norris Magnuson, *Salvation in the Slums: Evangelical Social Work 1865-1920* (1977; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker Book Company, 1990).

⁴⁶"Minutes of Several Conversations between the Rev. Mr. Wesley and Others from the Year 1744 to the year 1789," Q.3, in *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 8, *Addresses, Essays, Letters* (1872; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), 299-338, quotation from "Q3," 299.

The pursuit of holiness, therefore, has social ramifications that in turn impinge on our relationship with people of other faiths. If achieving goals related to the common good require public collaboration, then the call to scriptural holiness invites Wesleyans to consider potential partnerships with all people of good will, regardless of their religious commitments. Changing the world might require dialogue in order that common cause can be discerned in the face of broken lives and institutions. If some forms of personal holiness require Christians to set themselves apart from the world, other forms of social holiness actually urge the opposite, an engagement with the world in order to make a difference in the lives of those who are marginalized, oppressed, and less able to help themselves.

Evangelical traditions lacking such a call to scriptural holiness will lack this level of theological motivation to encounter and seek common cause with religious others. Such opportunities should not be underestimated since the world's faiths are the source of the deepest ethical insights and commitments known to humankind. In a world broken in so many ways, the lack of Christian ecumenical unity and the fragmentation of interreligious relations undercut the capacity of religious people of good will to make a difference when needed.

Such a Wesleyan orientation toward working out and achieving scriptural holiness across the land resonates with certain sensibilities inculcated within Buddhist traditions.⁴⁷ For starters, the Buddhist Eight-fold Path is also designed to achieve a certain kind of perfection, one that enables transcendence over conventional ways of living in and engaging the world.⁴⁸ To be sure, Wesley's goal of holy love and the Buddhist telos of awakened mindfulness are quite distinct, both with regard to their foundations and goals, and we should not blur over the differences in our eagerness to find points of contact. Nevertheless both ideals point up to the quest for a holiness and perfection that animate the commended religious paths and practices.

⁴⁷As explicated by Lai Pan-chiu, "Inter-Religious Dialogue and Social Justice: Cobb's Wesleyan Process Theology in East Asian Perspective," *Asia Journal of Theology* 25:1 (2011): 82-102. Note though that Cobb confesses that he goes beyond Wesley in his own constructive approach to theology of religions of interfaith encounter; see John B. Cobb, Jr., *Grace and Responsibility: A Wesleyan Theology for Today* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 151-53 (thanks to Tony Richie for calling this passage to my attention).

⁴⁸See Shanta Ratnayaka's comparison of faith in Buddhaghosa, a fifth-century Theravadan Buddhist monk, and Wesley in his *Two Ways of Perfection: Buddhist and Christian* (Colombo: Lake House Investments, 1978).

Beyond its focus on achieving individual enlightenment and awakening, a social vision has also emerged within Buddhist traditions during the last generation amidst our increasingly shrinking global village. This vision is tied to the compassionate heart of the bodhisattva. Within a rapidly globalizing context, Buddhist compassion is now being translated into a social ethic sensitive to human economic, political, and social systems. Buddhist peace movements thus are sensitive to issues of justice that are interrelated with the quest for peace, even as initiatives of social activism are mindful of root causes that dictate how systems react to fluctuations and economic interventions are alert to how market dynamics affect different groups of people very differently.⁴⁹ In short, socially engaged Buddhism is driven by the bodhisattvic vision of compassion in ways similar to how social holiness in Wesleyan traditions is driven by the mandate to spread scriptural holiness throughout the land.

As there are both personal and social levels of holiness aspired to within Wesleyan traditions, so are there multiple levels of application of Buddhist compassion. Beyond the social realm, is the environmental or cosmic domain. As already indicated, the compassion of the bodhisattva extends not only to all human beings but also to all sentient beings.⁵⁰ Within Buddhist cosmologies, of course, the wheel of rebirth means that grasping forms of life that do not escape the cycle of *dukkha* inevitably return, either in human or in lower or higher life forms, depending on one's karma. This is why the bodhisattva's heart of compassion extends to all living creatures. Apart from dharmic interventions, ignorance will not only persist but will be exacerbated, regardless of the form of life. Hence, the compassion of the bodhisattva leads to the vow to save all sentient beings, as the persistent ignorance in any being thus hinders the liberation of all. This means that socially engaged Buddhism expands toward

⁴⁹Fred Eppsteiner, ed., *The Path of Compassion: Writings on Socially Engaged Buddhism* (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1988).

⁵⁰See Tony Page, *Buddhism and Animals: A Buddhist Vision of Humanity's Rightful Relationship with the Animal Kingdom* (London: UKAVIS, 1999). For a comparative analysis that notes how religions, including Buddhist traditions, paradoxically affirm compassionate care for animals on the one hand but yet also insist on the moral superiority of humans over animals on the other hand, see Paul Waldau, *The Specter of Speciesism: Buddhist and Christian Views of Animals* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

an ecological consciousness that is concerned about all forms of non-human life as well.⁵¹

An ecologically engaged Buddhism, because of its keen sensitivity to the interdependent nature of all things, also opens up to an environmental ethic concerned with non-sentient forms of life.⁵² Life forms of all sorts are dependent on the environment for their sustenance and flourishing. Hence, any focus on human rights at the expense of animal rights or the earth and its atmosphere as a whole will be counter-productive in the long run. The awakening of one bodhisattva thus precipitates a heart of compassion that extends to all sentient beings and to the cosmos as a whole. The vitality of the one is interconnected with the vitality of the many. Buddhist wisdom and compassion are thus designed to cultivate mindfulness of and for the common good, without neglecting the particulars of the many. Awakening to enlightenment thus has cosmic applications, if not consequences.

Such an environmentally and cosmically attuned Buddhist practice suggests that its central symbol of the lotus should be understood afresh in our time. Originally, the purity and brilliance of the lotus represented the progress of the soul from the muddy materialism of embodiment toward the enlightened sunlight above the pond.⁵³ In contemporary par-

⁵¹Interestingly, Wesley himself speculated about the ultimate redemption of even the animals as part of the eschatological renewal of all things. See his "Sermon 60: The General Deliverance," in Albert C. Outler, ed., *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 2: *Sermons II 34-70* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985), 436-50, esp. 445-48.

⁵²E.g., Allan Hunt Badiner, ed., *Dharma Gaia: A Harvest of Essays in Buddhism and Ecology* (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1990); Martine Batchelor and Kerry Brown, eds., *Buddhism and Ecology* (New York: Cassell, 1992); Mary Evelyn Tucker and Duncan Ryuken Williams, eds., *Buddhism and Ecology: The Interconnection of Dharma and Deeds* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997); Amy Morgante, ed., *Buddhist Perspectives on the Earth Charter* (Cambridge, Mass.: Boston Research Center for the 21st Century, 1997); and Stephanie Kaza and Kenneth Kraft, eds., *Dharma Rain: Sources of Buddhist Environmentalism* (Boston and London: Shambhala, 2000), among other books.

⁵³See Luis O. Gomez, "Contributions to the Methodological Clarification of Interfaith Dialogue among Buddhists and Christians," in G. W. Houston, ed., *The Cross and the Lotus: Christianity and Buddhism in Dialogue* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1985), 127-208, esp. 163-64; also Meher McArthur, *Reading Buddhist Art: An Illustrated Guide to Buddhist Signs and Symbols* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2002), 124-25.

lance, however, the light of the dharma illumines even the mud of the pond so that nothing lies beyond the reach of the bodhisattva's heart of compassion.

This emphasis on the cosmic scope of Buddhist awakening should not minimize the importance of individual enlightenment. Each and every human mind will otherwise remain caught up in the cycle of greed and delusion. It is to say that the awakening of the bodhisattva is precisely what opens up the cosmic horizon. Similarly, the Wesleyan heart strangely warmed now responds to the love of God precisely by loving his or her neighbor, to the ends of the earth. My point is that it is the strangely warmed heart and the compassionate heart that can forge common cause at this intersection where Christianity meets Buddhism. Might it be possible for scriptural holiness to extend not only throughout the land but also across the ponds out of which lotuses blossom? To ask this question is not to say that both traditions are equal, that they believe the same things, or that there are no differences that matter. It is to say that these differences become secondary—even if they remain important matters for secondary adjudication—amidst the causes requiring and inviting common attention.

Transitions: Wesleyan Practices in a Pluralistic World

Nothing of the foregoing that invites engaging people of other faiths on their terms requires abandonment of core Wesleyan and Christian convictions.⁵⁴ What I have proposed is an important feature for life in a pluralistic world. We are not merely talking about tolerance for tolerance's sake, since this often devolves into a mere putting up with others and their differences while resenting their presence.⁵⁵ Instead, the preceding attempts to articulate the theological bases for a hospitable Wesleyan posture toward those in other faiths. The best of the Wesleyan tradition already depicts such virtues in action, virtues that do not bear false witness about neighbors from other faiths and which affirm love and com-

⁵⁴Adrian Hastings, "Pluralism: The Relation of Theology to Religious Studies," in M. Douglas Meeks, ed., *What Should Methodists Teach? Wesleyan Tradition and Modern Diversity* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1990), 118-30.

⁵⁵Luke Bretherton, *Hospitality as Holiness: Christian Witness Amid Moral Diversity* (Aldershot, UK, and Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2006), 147-50.

passion wherever such is found.⁵⁶ It is important to ground Christian attitudes and practices, especially those related to strangers and those who are members of other faiths, on theological premises. This essay provides a preliminary sketch of how three fundamental Wesleyan theological commitments, those related to the doctrine of prevenient grace, an understanding of heart religiosity, and a view of holiness, provide a theological platform for engaging people of other faiths in an *a posteriori* manner. This is a specific form and expression of Christian mission in a pluralistic world.

But what about inviting those in other faiths to make commitments to Christ? Are such invitations appropriate in a pluralistic society?⁵⁷ As a Christian, I think such is not only appropriate but irrepressible. No substantive encounter between faiths can proceed for long without serious consideration of what is at stake. In my mind, the Christian should be open to the possibility that dialogue at some point invites commitment. Dialogue emphasizing deep differences and inviting honest engagement presents opportunity for teaching and learning, and this sometimes involves the changing of minds.⁵⁸ Discerning when this is the case is precisely what life in the Spirit requires. Of course, in any substantive dialogue about things that matter ultimately, it is always possible that Christians also might seriously consider what other faiths have to offer. But as likely, Christian dialogue with those in other traditions often results in an enriched understanding of the home faith. That in itself is important for life in a pluralistic world.⁵⁹

⁵⁶As documented as far back as in Adam Clarke's encounter with Buddhists, which changed his mind about who they actually were and what they actually believed. See Elizabeth Harris, "Wesleyan Witness in an Interreligious Context," in Philip R. Meadows, ed., *Windows on Wesley: Wesleyan Theology in Today's World* (Oxford: Applied Theology Press, 1997), 53-86.

⁵⁷Robert E. Coleman, *"Nothing to Do But to Save Souls": John Wesley's Charge to His Preachers* (Wilmore, Ky.: Wesley Heritage Press, 1990).

⁵⁸Cobb, *Grace and Responsibility*, ch. 8.

⁵⁹I am grateful to Michael Lodahl for the invitation to present this essay at a plenary session of the Wesleyan Theological Society meeting for 2012. Thanks also to Vincent Le, Thomas Jay Oord, Henry "Hal" Knight III, Christopher Stephenson, and Tony Richie for their comments on a previous version of this paper; none of them should be held responsible, though, for the opinions expressed therein.

I BELIEVE: CREEDAL EVANGELISM IN A PLURALISTIC WORLD

by

Elaine A. Heath

The 2012 WTS Presidential Address

The potential for the Apostles' Creed in preparation for missional life came home to me again when I was on my way to speak at two events. The first conference was in Reno, Nevada, an unlikely place for a clergy gathering, to be sure, but apropos for my topic of missional ecclesiology. A casino resort did seem the kind of place one would find Jesus, I reasoned, looking around at the slot machines, bars, and endless buffets. His detractors had accused him of being a glutton and a drunk. After Reno I flew to Washington, D.C., to speak about Methodist understandings of sanctification and gender at a Foundation for Religious Diplomacy conference featuring Mormons and Methodists in dialogue.¹ It was while I was enroute to these events that I encountered three strangers, each from different faith traditions, and each with a clear set of questions that had everything to do with my credo—with what I believe.

A Tale of Three Strangers

I was standing at the airport waiting for the shuttle to take me to the hotel when I met the first stranger. He was well into his seventies, had fading red hair, and from the looks of things had had a rough life. He stood smoking, gazing thoughtfully into space. As I approached, he greeted me in a strong Boston accent. We began to chat and I learned that he had come out for a special treat, a whole week of playing video poker. It was a gift from his wife. He asked what I do. I told him I was a theologian.

Immediately he wanted me to know that, although he is an utterly lapsed Catholic and has no use for the church, he has a lot of theological questions. So I smiled in what I hoped was an encouraging manner. He

¹For more about the Foundation for Religious Diplomacy and the event at Wesley Theological Seminary, see <http://fidweb.org/> (accessed March 12, 2012).

told me he had been reading Elaine Pagels, Peter Gomes, and other controversial authors. He had just finished a book that “proves the Bible is not unique and Christianity is fake” because all the major religions of the world and a few of the not so major ones have creation myths, flood myths, and the like.

Through a haze of smoke, he fixed on me with a gimlet eye, asking, “So what do you think about that? Have you heard of any of that?”

“Of course!” I said. “I studied all of that in my graduate theological education. It was fascinating.” He was clearly disappointed, I suppose because he had been looking for a Christian whom he could stun and dismantle with his powerful new knowledge. I wondered what lay behind his desire to leave the church and read the Gnostic Gospels in his spare time.

I said to the man, “I think that what the universality of these stories in various religions tells us is that they are grounded in true events and in universal intuitions about God. The idea of a massive flood has been found in religions around the world since antiquity. The same thing with creation stories. Although the details vary, these stories all assume that the world came from some type of God or gods. There is a universal consciousness that there is a divine being that is active in the world, both in the seen and unseen realms of creation, and that it matters how we relate to this divine being. The Bible is in good company.”

I could see that he hadn’t thought about it this way. He stared, unblinking, waiting for more.

“But,” I said, with a mischievous smile, “there is one thing about Christianity that is unique.”

“There is? What’s that?” he asked hopefully, forgetting his cynicism for a moment.

“Well,” I said, “Christianity is about the God of the universe who becomes a human expressly so that God can suffer with us, to the point of the worst injustice imaginable, to the point of being murdered, really dead, to the point of all the hellishness that a human could experience. And then he rose from the pit of that hell, that death, and in his rising reaches out to lift the whole world from its hell and death. This is the gospel, the God of the universe coming to suffer with us and to lead us out of hell.”

The man stood, amazed, his mouth agape with surprise. For a moment he was lost in the beauty and mystery of this God who suffers with us and can lead us out of death. Then the bus pulled up and the moment was over. We waved goodbye and wished each other well. I actually said to him, “Have fun gambling!”

A few days later I boarded the plane to head for Washington D.C. The plane was just leaving the gate when the second stranger, a man sitting next to me, wanted to know where I was going and what I do for a living. When I told him that I am a professor of evangelism, he said I would have a lot in common with his grandfather, who loves to preach hellfire and brimstone. I said I'm not all about that, but that I do believe that we should preach holiness among God's people. "When we live holy lives we will attract others toward God," I added. "The quality of our lives will be beautiful, inviting."

The man told me that he came from a long line of prominent Methodists, but that his father and grandfather are Baptists. He launched into a long explanation of how Baptists are not related to any part of the Protestant church but *are* the primitive church, the pure church. The Apostles were Baptists. He asked me if I knew anything about that, his manner suggesting that he was pretty sure I didn't know much about anything.

So I told him that the Orthodox Church is the oldest church, then the Catholic, and finally the various strands of the reformations. I gave him a two-minute tour of the history of schisms. His eyes narrowed suspiciously. I went on about Menno Simons and how Baptists are descendants from the radicals of the reformation. He said he would have to ask his grandfather about that. It did not matter to him that I hold a Ph.D. in theology. His hellfire and damnation grandfather was the authoritative source for all theological knowledge.

He asked more . . . where was it that I said I teach?

"Southern Methodist University. Oh, and I'm ordained in the United Methodist Church, too," I said. "I was a pastor before I went to work in the academy."

His voice was cold. "Well that is where we part ways."

I smiled politely and turned to read my book, *The Oxford Handbook of Methodist Studies*. But he seemed unable to stop questioning me, loudly, and now with a sneer on his face. He moved to the subject of politics, wanting to know if I thought President Obama would appoint Hillary Clinton as his new Vice President. I looked out the window into the blur of clouds and said that time would tell, but I thought Hillary would leave office to engage in significant humanitarian work as her husband has done. My companion's distaste deepened visibly, and he made a rude comment about the Clintons and the Obamas. The clouds receded as we gained altitude in the azure sky. I said that I was proud of the Obamas.

He snarled, "We part ways there, too." His voice was quite loud by now. "Hey, isn't Obama a Methodist, like you?"

"Oh Lord," I silently prayed. "Lord, Lord, Lord."

"No, he is not Methodist. He is a member of the United Church of Christ, though. He is a Christian."

"Right. That's what he *says*," the man spit, bristling with anger.

I tried to return to my book and glanced around the cabin, thinking about moving to a different seat. The man was relentless. "So how did you get into teaching, anyway?"

I said, "God called me."

"No, I don't mean that. How did *you* do it?"

I turned in my seat to face him directly. "God called me, clearly and vividly. It's a long and wondrous story, but since you said you don't believe in what I am doing, I am not going to share the details of that story with you. I was a pastor before I was a professor and I have been a professor now for many years." And with that our conversation drew to a close.

Though I'm usually quite willing to share my story with others, my companion's hostility made it impossible. Because he had already made up his mind that I was wrong, he would not be able to hear my story of conversion and call, or the ways over the years I struggled to answer God's call in contexts that denied equality to women. What would he do with the precious story of the Holy Spirit empowering me, encouraging me, delivering me from much oppression, and sending me into the world with the good news? My story would be as lost on this man as pearls to a swine.

I returned to my book, disturbed by the man's disrespect for me, a fellow Christian, and in public no less. My gender, theology, and political views rendered me "unclean" in his eyes, an object of contempt. I cringed as I thought about the people sitting in front of us who surely could hear our conversation. What did these comments say to them about our faith? I thought briefly about the stranger I met in Reno, who liked video poker and the Gnostic Gospels. Had he simply grown tired of judgments and labels in his church?

An hour later I met the third stranger, the cab driver in Washington D.C. "Are you here for work or a vacation?" he asked, smiling warmly. I told him I am a professor of theology and was in town to take part in a theology conference. He said, "You are a religious person. That is very good! That means you think carefully about how you live, about how to make good choices." I asked his religion. He said he was from Bangladesh

and is Muslim, but that since coming to the U. S. 20 years ago he has not been active in a mosque or any faith community.

He said his faith in God guides his daily life but that so much in religion is confusing and causes people to stay locked up in their religious worlds and in hostility against themselves and others. This removes them from the wider community of the world where God wants us to engage our neighbors in loving ways. He said, "You know, it's all about community."

Then he went on to use the analogy of the freeways and various roads that lead to the center of the city. All of them lead in that one direction. He said that the religions are like that, with people heading toward God, their home. When people go against the appropriate flow of traffic on the freeway, he said, they cause accidents that hurt themselves and others. Continuing his analogy, he said that when people do not follow the teaching of their religion, they are like people driving the wrong way on a freeway, and they harm themselves and others and will be punished by God after this life.

The man continued very earnestly. "Every day I have many choices," he said, "to notice and help other people. I can drive courteously or I can ignore people and only care about myself. I can take people by a more expensive route to their destination and get more money from them, or I can take them a more economic and faster route and help them. No one knows but God and me who I'm really serving, but I must answer to God in the end. So I try to do what is right. Every night before I go to sleep I pray about the day. I remember where I did what was right and I thank God. I remember where I didn't help someone, didn't do what was right and I ask God to forgive me." As we wove through the city to Wesley Seminary I noticed that he unconsciously drove with an eye for others, stopping to let others pull out in front of him from parking lots, for example, and smiling and waving in a friendly way to other drivers.

"It all boils down to two things," he finished. "First, you have to try to avoid harming people and doing wrong things. Second, you do good every chance you get. That is how God wants us to live."

"This is so interesting," I said. "We have a number of beliefs and practices in common. You know the way you said you pray every night? We have the same kind of prayer in our Christian tradition. It's called the Prayer of Examen. I pray that way at night. Oh, and the two most important things that you said—do no harm and do all the good you can—those are part of my Methodist tradition as well. John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, called them "the General Rules." In addition to the two that you said, there is one more, "Use the practices that help you pay

attention to God.” This was my paraphrase of Wesley’s third rule to attend upon the ordinances of God. The driver smiled broadly, his eyes twinkling delight in the rear view mirror.

“You know,” I continued, “you are right about how easy it is for theology to become more complicated than it needs to be. It is always a temptation for religious people to use theology to control and divide people. At the end of the day, what really demonstrates our love for God is the way we love our neighbor. How we treat our neighbor *is* our theological statement. And here I am saying this, and I am a professional theologian!” We both laughed heartily.

The cab pulled into the parking lot of Wesley Seminary. There was no time for me to tell him why I think faith should be lived in community, or to explore with him why he had chosen to leave corporate religion behind. But as I took my bag from him and he closed the trunk of the cab, he bowed slightly, formally, and reached out to shake my hand. “Ma’am,” he said with deepest respect, “may God bless you in all your work. It has been a pleasure to talk with you and to serve you.”

I cannot help but compare the conversations with these three strangers . . . one a lapsed Catholic, one a lapsed Muslim, and one an angry evangelical Christian. One was a skeptic and cynic, like the hard-bitten ghost in C. S. Lewis’ allegory *The Great Divorce*. One was a thoughtful, contemplative man whose rule of life had several parallels to mine. He was, as Jesus says in Luke 10:5-7, a “person of peace.” One was my fellow Christian, ready and looking for a fight.

The taxi driver shared his pearls with me, and it was my responsibility to honor them, to admire their beauty. Because he was a person of peace I could also share my pearls with him. The atmosphere between us was one of hospitality, openness, kindness, reciprocity, goodwill. In that mutual, non-coercive space, we could each become vulnerable and transparent about the reasons for the way we live. Our theological discourse was not about doctrine, but praxis. It was a narrative of our daily lives, the distillation of essential belief. *Credo*.

Whereas the red haired man from Boston and the angry Baptist Texan wanted to fight about doctrine, the cab driver was interested in life. With all their differences, all three of them wanted to know, one way or another, what I believe.

The Creed

Diana Butler Bass tells the story of her daughter’s confirmation class and how the curriculum focused overwhelmingly on intellectual assent to the

doctrinal statements of the Nicene Creed.² She reminds us that the word “believe” comes from a middle English word that actually means something like “love and trust,” rather than merely intellectual assent to an abstract idea. And she asks, what would it be like if in the creeds of the church we said “I love” or “I trust” rather than “I believe”? What would be different?

The Apostles’ Creed, which is the ecumenical baptismal credo dating to antiquity, was not developed to be used as a line in the sand, for saying and doing violent things against those who had a different creed. It was meant for orientation, for living. There were multiple versions of the Apostles’ Creed in the early years of its formation as local bishops used them to prepare catechumens for baptism in local churches.³ The new Christians learned in distilled, catechetical form a basic Trinitarian and scriptural system of belief that was the essence of what they were committing their lives to as new Christians. To borrow from Diana Butler Bass, they were saying, “I love and trust God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and I love and trust Jesus Christ. . . .”

What would it mean for us to love and trust—to actually live—the Apostles’ Creed, to live in a posture of love and trust toward the triune God whom the creed describes? What difference might this make to people like the three strangers? The Apostles’ Creed is a short narrative of a missional God. It is story-like in its telling, generous in spirit, potent in its beckoning of the church to missional life.

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.

I believe, I love and trust the inherent sanctity of creation and all people, for “this is our father’s world” as the old hymn says. And God is “Father Almighty.” For Hans Urs von Balthasar, God’s almightiness refers to God’s ability to respond to any challenge with overcoming love, with bringing life out of death. God does this through *kenosis*, self emptying. Balthasar calls this “love-almightiness,”⁴ most fully revealed in Christ.

²Diana Butler Bass shared these insights in a lecture about her forthcoming book, “Christianity after Religion: Exploring the Three B’s of Faith: Belief, Behavior, and Belonging,” at Minister’s Week, Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, TX, February 7, 2012.

³Frances Young, *The Making of the Creeds* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1991), 4.

⁴Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Credo*, Introduction by Medard Kehl, trans. David Kipp (New York: Crossroad, 1990), 31, 69.

What does it mean for us then to believe in, to love and trust in, to become a living icon of this God of love-almightiness?

Jesus says that if we love only those who agree with us, those of our theological and political tribes, even the gentiles do that. The premier vocation of the Christian is to love our enemies, those who wish to harm us, to destroy us. We are to love *them*. What does this mean for us as we journey in a pluralistic world?

Jeanine Sparks is a guidance counselor in Wasilla, Alaska, where she also has a private practice as a therapist.⁵ A leading expert in adolescent suicide, which is epidemic in Alaska's native populations, Jeanine has helped countless individuals and communities to heal in the aftermath of suicide. She has helped to prevent suicide. Her daily life is a pouring out of compassion and wisdom through her vocation as a healer.

Jeanine tells me that the persons who have caused her to live the gospel the most are judgmental Christians. Over and over she has had to choose to turn the other cheek with them when they persecuted her for being gay. She has had to choose to respond with grace, compassion, patience, and kindness in the face of bigotry and hate, violent words and actions. Because she believes in love almightiness, she is living into it, in direct response to angry Christians.

Love almightiness is a life of prayer, hospitality, and justice, the three-legged, load-bearing stool that gives credibility to our words. All three legs must be present or our theological words come crashing to the ground.

***And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord; who was conceived
by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under
Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried.***

Conceived, born, suffered. Crucified, dead, buried. Over and over in our lives we are conceived, born, and suffer, we are crucified, dead and buried, from one season of our lives into the next. For the Christian, these are cycles that can lead us "from glory to glory."⁶ This rhythm of conception, birth, and death is also true of our church in its history. I love and trust Jesus, who was conceived, born, and suffered, crucified, dead, and buried, the God who came to suffer with us.

I love and trust Jesus' life lived in cooperation with the Holy Ghost, lived in conjunction with Mary, lived in response to all that Pilate repre-

⁵Jeanine has given me permission to share this story and has been a trusted conversation partner as I have developed some of the ideas in this essay.

⁶2 Corinthians 3:18.

sents . . . all of this was willful participation on Jesus' part, the complete incarnation of love almightiness.

When Jesus died, he was really dead. To say that I believe in Jesus Christ who was dead and buried means that I love and trust in his solidarity with our utter deadness in all its manifestations. The deadness of individuals, the deadness of nations, of people groups, of religions, of the church, and of the academy. Real death. Real mystery. Real solidarity.

He descended into hell; the third day he rose again from the dead.

All the hells only humans could create, all the torment, the despair, the alienation, the dark night . . . I love and trust the Jesus who comes there, descends there, to suffer with and for us, to lead us out.

What might this mean for the three strangers, if it could be communicated to them in a way they could understand? What does it mean for me? Is there anyone I think deserves permanent torment? That is the one to whom Jesus descends in solidarity, in resurrection power. This is the meaning of the gospel.

How can I best communicate the passion, the love almightiness of this Jesus to my neighbors, to the lapsed Catholic, the half-lapsed Muslim, the angry Christian? The only way I can is to descend into their hells, to join Christ in his suffering with and for them there, and to reach for resurrection power for them and with them from that place. This is the meaning of the gospel.

He ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

Let me get things straight about judgment. Jesus is judge. The Holy Ghost (*paraclete*) is defense attorney. Jesus is at the right hand of the Father as the executor of the Father's will. The Trinity is in one accord, determined to save us, silencing the Father of all Lies, putting to shame the Accuser of our souls.

"For God sent not his son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved" (John 3:17).

"The Lord is not slow about his promise, is patient, not wanting any to perish" (2 Peter 3:9).

"Nothing can separate us from the love of God" (Romans 8:39).

"If I make my bed in hell, you are there" (Psalm 139:8).

Could it be that judgment and mercy are the same thing in God's economy—the same power at work—judgment that removes oppression, mercy that offers a new way, a restorative justice where mercy triumphs? It is love-almightiness in action.

***I believe in the Holy Ghost; the holy catholic Church;
the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection
of the body; and the life everlasting. AMEN.***

I believe, I love and trust that we live in the era of the Spirit. Today, as the breath of God breathes and hovers over the world, as the wind of God calls forth order out of chaos, our work is to participate in the breathing everywhere we go, with everyone we meet, in all situations.

What might it look like to live our lives as breath prayer . . . breathed for the well being of God's world? What form might it take in our relationships with people like the three strangers, with people like Jeanine?

I love and trust God's call to be one holy catholic church—no geographic or denominational borders, no limits of time and space, a different dimension. Are we capable of this kind of church? To choose it is to participate in redemption, the good-newsing of the world.

If we really love and trust the great hope within this statement, we can meet people where they are, we can trust in the breath of God to quicken them and to quicken us, and to quicken our interactions. We can listen to one another's stories openly, without fear. We will discover God coming to us in unexpected ways, opening our hearts to a wider love. Parker Palmer, in *A Hidden Wholeness*, says this:

Instead of telling our vulnerable stories, we seek safety in abstractions, speaking to each other about our opinions, ideas and beliefs rather than about our lives. Academic culture blesses this practice by insisting that the more abstract our speech, the more likely we are to touch the universal truths that unite us. But what happens is exactly the reverse: as our discourse becomes more abstract, the less connected we feel. There is less sense of community among intellectuals than in the most "primitive" society of storytellers.⁷

May God lead us out of our wilderness of abstractions in our creeds and all of our theology. May God forgive us for the ways we have used theological statements as lines in the sand and bludgeons to get our way, whether from the left, the right, or the center. May God help us become good news, the incarnation of love almightiness, for God's sake and for the sake of God's world.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, amen.

⁷Parker Palmer, *A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey toward an Undivided Life* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 2004), 123.

GRACE ABOUNDS: THE MISSIOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS OF JOHN WESLEY'S INCLUSIVE THEOLOGY OF OTHER RELIGIONS

by

Joe Gorman

The existence of other religions has long raised a host of questions for Christians: If there is one God, why are there so many different religions? Do Christians worship the same God as other religions? Are other religions completely false or is it possible that other faith traditions are providential means of God's gracious revelation to humankind? How are the faith, hope, and love found in other religions and those of no religion at all to be explained from a Christian point of view? Is it possible that people of other faiths can be saved apart from a conscious appropriation of the grace of God revealed in Jesus Christ? If it is possible to be saved outside the boundaries of explicit, Christian faith, but never apart from Christ, what does such an affirmation do to missionary vitality and Jesus' commission to "go and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19a, TNIV)?

Like many Wesleyans, I understand John Wesley's theology of other religions to be an inclusive one that maintains the finality and sufficiency of Christ alone for salvation, but yet allows for the possibility—although not the certainty—of salvation among other religions.¹ Inclusivism

¹See, for example, Dean Flemming, "Foundations for Responding to Religious Pluralism," *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 31:1 (Spring, 1996): 51-75; Charles R. Gailey and Howard Culbertson, *Discovering Missions* (Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2007); Diane Leclerc, *Discovering Christian Holiness: The Heart of Wesleyan-Holiness Theology* (Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2010), 149-150; Michael Lodahl, "To Whom Belong the Covenants? Wesley, Whitehead, and Wildly Diverse Religious Traditions," chapter 10 in *Deep Religious Pluralism*, ed. David Ray Griffin (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005); Michael Lodahl, *Claiming Abraham: Reading the Bible and Qur'an Side by Side* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Brazos Press, 2010); Randy L. Maddox, "Wesley as Theological Mentor: The Question of Truth or Salvation through Other Religions," *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 27 (1992): 7-29; Eric Manchester, "Why is Evangelism

affirms the universal presence of God working in and through all creation while at the same time robustly affirming of Jesus the Christ: "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name given under heaven by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12, TNIV).² Inclusive theologies of religion are thus very careful to hold together God's universal saving will that desires no one to be lost (1 Timothy 2:4), but yet allow that even though salvation is possible outside the church and even beyond the boundaries of Christianity, it never takes place apart from Christ.

As charitable as an inclusive theology of religions sounds, however, what happens to the necessity and urgency of mission, locally and globally, if people have access to salvation apart from an explicit encounter and existential embrace of Christian faith? Many Christians believe that the primary motivation for evangelism and missions is that, unless the unevangelized have the opportunity to hear about Christ and then consciously respond to Christ's good news, they will be damned for eternity. John Wesley had a different idea about the motivations behind evangelism and mission, however. In order to explore these themes further, I will examine the theological resources in John Wesley and the Roman Catholic theologian, Karl Rahner, for understanding the presence of Christ in creation, culture, and people in other religions and no religion. Following this I will propose several missiological implications of a Wesleyan inclusive theology of other religions for the practice of missions in the twenty-first century.

Wesley and Prevenient Grace

John Wesley's theology is well known for its generosity of spirit toward Christians of differing opinions. What is less known, perhaps, is that, because of his understanding of prevenient grace, Wesley recognized that God's presence gratuitously springs up throughout human cultures and

Important if One Can be Saved Without the Gospel?, *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 37:1 (2002): 158-170; Philip Meadows, "Candidates for Heaven: Wesleyan Resources for a Theology of Religions," *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 35:1 (Spring, 2000): 99-129; Donald Thorsen, "Jesus, Ecumenism, and Interfaith Relations: A Wesleyan Perspective," *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 47:7 (Spring, 2012): 59-71; Al Truesdale and Keri Mitchell, *Cords of Love: A Wesleyan Response to Religious Pluralism* (Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2006).

²For New Testament scriptures commonly cited as evidence for an inclusive understanding of other religions, see Romans 1:18-20; Romans 2:13-17; Acts 10:1-8; Acts 14:7; Acts 17:24-34.

even in religions other than Christianity. One of the most distinctive features of Wesley's understanding of prevenient grace is that it conveys the efficaciousness of Christ's atoning work to all human beings. As Wesley says of this, "Something of this is found in every human heart, passing sentence concerning good and evil, not only in all Christians, but in all Mahometans, all Pagans, yea, the vilest of savages."³

The doctrine of prevenient grace leads Wesleyans to support an intimate relationship between nature and grace and creation and redemption. Asserting that the Holy Spirit is pervasively present in all creation and redemptively active in all cultures and religions, Wesleyans affirm, along with the biblical witness, that God has not left himself "without witness" (Acts 14:7). Prevenient grace is the category by which Wesleyans are able to embrace truth, beauty, and holiness wherever they are found. It is thus the ubiquitous and gracious presence of God through the agency of the Holy Spirit which allows Wesley to say:

Some great truths, as the being and attributes of God, and the difference between moral good and evil, are known, in some measure, to the heathen world. The traces of them are to be found in all nations: So that, in some sense, it may be said to every child of man, "He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; even to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God" . . . there is no man that is in a state of mere nature; there is no man, unless he has quenched the Spirit, that is wholly void of the grace of God. . . . [This is] more properly termed "preventing grace." Every man has a greater or lesser measure of this. . . . Everyone has sooner or later good desires, although the generality of men stifle them before they can strike deep root or produce any considerable fruit. Everyone has some measure of that light, some faint glimmering ray, which sooner or later, more or less, enlightens every man that cometh into the world.⁴

Wesley is careful not to make quick judgments about the eternal destiny of those outside "the Christian dispensation." Very charitably he says, "I have no authority from the word of God 'to judge those that are with-

³John Wesley, "Heavenly Treasure in Earthen Vessels," Sermon 129 (1790), in *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley*, ed. Albert C. Outler (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1987), 4:163. Hereafter abbreviated as *BCE*.

⁴John Wesley, "On Working Out Our Own Salvation," Sermon 85 (1785), in *BCE*, 3:199-200, 207.

out;’ nor do I conceive that any man living has a right to sentence all the heathen and Mahometan world to damnation.”⁵ He goes on to say in his sermon “On Charity”:

How it will please God, the judge of all, to deal with *them* [those in other religious traditions], we may leave to God Himself. But this we know, that He is not the God of the Christians only, but the God of the Heathens also; that He is “rich in mercy to all that call upon him,” according to the light they have; and that “in every nation, he that feareth God and worketh righteousness is accepted of Him.”⁶

Wesley was not alone in exploring the ramifications of prevenient grace for understanding the religious faith of others. John Fletcher, whom Wesley named as his successor to the leadership of Methodism, speaks of the ontological/soteriological ramifications of Wesley’s doctrine of prevenient grace as well:

Such is the faith by which those Jews, Mohammedans, and Pagans, whose hearts are principled with humility, candour, and the fear of God, have been, and still continue to be saved in every part of the world. For the Father of mercies, who knoweth whereof we are made, will no more absolutely condemn such worshippers, on account of the extraordinary respect they have discovered for Moses, Mohammed, and Confucius, than he will finally reject some pious Christians, for the sake of that excessive veneration which they manifest for particular saints and reformers.⁷

Karl Rahner and “the Anonymous Christian”

A theologian who provides onto-theological language that supplements Wesley’s practical-theological language is the Roman Catholic Karl Rahner. Similar to Wesley, Rahner seeks to combine in one position what is essential to orthodox Christian faith and affirm the truth, beauty, and holiness found in other religious traditions. Rahner asserts both the need to remain faithful to Christ and to account for those in other religions

⁵John Wesley, “On Living Without God,” Sermon 130 (1790), in *BCE*, 4:174.

⁶John Wesley, “On Charity,” Sermon 91 (1784), in *BCE*, 3:295-296.

⁷John Fletcher, *The Works of the Reverend John Fletcher*, vol. III (Salem: OH: Schmull Publishers, 1974), 176-177.

and of no faith who live lives of faith, hope, and love. As will be seen, Wesley and Rahner are kindred spirits theologically.

Rahner raises the question: How is Christ present in non-Christian religions? From the dawning of human existence, all human beings have been “exposed to the influence of divine, supernatural grace.”⁸ Every person who has ever lived has been “pursued by grace.”⁹ By virtue of God’s universal, salvific will which finds its concrete, perfect realization in Jesus the Christ, no person is void of the grace of God in Christ, for such a person is “always in a Christ-determined situation, whether he has accepted this grace or not.”¹⁰ If grace is not without effect in human culture and religion, then it must be true that traces of the grace of Christ are to be found everywhere. However difficult such traces may be to identify, they are there. Perhaps, Rahner suggests, “we may only have looked too superficially and with too little love at the non-Christian religions”¹¹ and thus have not seen the “grace-filled elements” in them.¹²

Rahner asserts that Christ is present to all humankind through his Spirit. This is the Spirit who proceeds from the Father and Son and must therefore be called the Spirit of Christ. Understood ontologically, a Wesleyan understanding of prevenient grace similarly affirms that the Holy Spirit graciously indwells all human beings. Wherever one person of the Trinity is, there are all three. For this reason we say that the divine “Persons” mutually indwell each other in a perichoretic dance of love. As Augustine writes in *On the Trinity*, “they are always in each other” and never “alone.”¹³ Every act of divine “Person” is always caused by all three. For this reason when we talk about the Spirit’s presence, we also mean that Christ himself is present in the depths of human experience, offering the benefits of his cross and resurrection to every human being.

Any person who tacitly accepts God’s offer of grace, which can come through one’s conscience or indigenous religion, is said by Rahner to be an

⁸Karl Rahner, “Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions,” in *Theological Investigations*, vol. V (New York: Seabury Press, 1966), 123.

⁹*Ibid.*, 130.

¹⁰Karl Rahner, “Atheism and Implicit Christianity,” in *Theological Investigations*, vol. IX (New York: Seabury Press, 1966), 146.

¹¹Karl Rahner, “Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions,” 130.

¹²*Ibid.*, 121.

¹³Augustine, *The Trinity*, trans. Edmund Hill (Brooklyn: New City Press, 1991), 1.8 (70), quoted by Miroslav Volf, *Allah: A Christian Response* (New York: HarperOne, 2011), 137.

“implicit” or “anonymous” Christian. God’s offer of grace can be rejected, however. In order to be considered an “implicit” or “anonymous” Christian, a person need not have consciously received Christ, but must have appropriated the grace of God in Christ in such a way that she lives a life oriented toward faith, hope, and love. Until a person comes into contact with the explicit preaching of the gospel and thus has the opportunity to respond consciously to the specific demands of Christ, she is not in a position to call herself a Christian.¹⁴ Whenever a person embraces God’s gracious interior overtures (which may take place through their own religion or cultural context), they can be said to be, from the perspective of Christian faith, an “anonymous Christian,” even if they are a self-professed Jew, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, or even an atheist. Rahner readily concedes that Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, or Hindus will not refer to themselves as anonymous Christians. He claims that this evaluation is not intended to disparage the faith of others, but is instead to offer a charitable appraisal of the faith claims of other religious traditions from a Christian perspective.¹⁵

Rahner goes further than Wesley in exploring the missiological ramifications of the possibility of salvation in other religions. He insists that the *telos* of faith is always to become explicit: “The seed has no right to seek not to grow into a plant. But the fact that it is not yet developed into a plant is no reason for refusing to give the name which we give to the plant destined to grow from it to the seed as well.”¹⁶ Christian missionaries thus help people to see the God who has always been present, but may have gone unrecognized. Without their direct efforts, it is possible that whatever “faint glimmering ray”¹⁷ they experience will never see the full light of day. Missionaries also point to the visible church where it is more likely that the seed will grow into a mature plant so that salvation occurs. The church thus helps an “anonymous” Christian” to recognize her true identity so that “if a man is consciously aware of who he is and what he is making of himself of his own freedom, the chance that he will succeed in the self-achievement of his and arrive at a radical self-fulfillment is greater than if he merely possesses and fulfills his own humanity at a

¹⁴Karl Rahner, “Atheism and Implicit Christianity,” 145.

¹⁵Gavin D’Costa, *Modern Theology*, 1:2 (1985), 133-134.

¹⁶Karl Rahner, “The Problem of the ‘Anonymous Christian,’” in *Theological Investigations*, vol. XIV (New York: Seabury Press, 1966), 291.

¹⁷John Wesley, “On Working Out Our Own Salvation,” Sermon 85 (1785), in *BCE*, 3:207.

merely inert and unconscious level.”¹⁸ Without intentional missionary efforts to fan the inner embers of faith into flame through explicit sharing of the gospel, the implicit faith of “anonymous Christians” will not have access to Christian community, the scriptures, or means of grace that can lead to a life of holiness in the fullness and beauty found in Christ. For this reason, missions and specific evangelistic efforts are to be continued.

Similarities Between Wesley and Rahner

Before we move to our last section, it is important to summarize Wesley’s and Rahner’s inclusive theology of other religions. Both Wesley and Rahner:

- Affirm the presence of the Triune God interpenetrating all creation and culture, thus being the font of all truth, beauty, and holiness.
- Share a hopeful view of the possibility of salvation in other religions.
- Insist that there is no salvation except through Jesus Christ and, wherever salvation occurs and lives of faith, hope, and love emerge, it is always because of Christ.
- Maintain the necessity of evangelization and explicit proclamation of the gospel locally and globally.

Missiological Implications of a Wesleyan Inclusive Theology of Other Religions

During the missionary impulse of the nineteenth century, one of the great driving forces of Protestant missions was the belief that only those who have the gospel proclaimed to them and then respond explicitly in faith to

¹⁸Karl Rahner, in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 12, 1974, quoted by D’Costa, 138.

¹⁹See Clark H. Pinnock, for example, in *A Wideness in God’s Mercy: The Finality of Jesus Christ in a World of Religions* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1992), 74, 75, who says, “What has to be said forthrightly is that a biblically based Christology does not entail a narrowness of outlook toward other people. The church’s confession about Jesus is compatible with an open spirit, with an optimism of salvation, and with a wider hope. . . . There is no salvation except through Jesus Christ, but it is not necessary for everybody to possess a conscious knowledge of Christ in order to benefit from redemption through him. The patriarch Job, for example, was saved by Christ (ontologically) without actually knowing the name of Jesus (epistemically).”

Christ can be saved. If a “wider hope”¹⁹ toward those who have never heard of God’s universal, salvific will in Christ is embraced, what will happen to our motivation for evangelism inside and outside the church? What will such a view do to the urgency to be Christ’s “witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8, TNIV)? In response to our discussion so far, some may say, “If it’s possible to be saved apart from an explicit confession of faith in Christ, then what happens to the uniqueness of Christ? Or, why bother with evangelism and world missions at all?” A theology of mission informed by Wesleyan sensibilities will ask in response, however: “Does an inclusive theology of other religions necessarily lead to indifference toward to the salvation and well-being of those who experience daily the devastating consequences of personal and systemic sin or the injustices of life just because they are assumed to be ‘anonymous Christians’ but they themselves don’t know it yet?”

The question of motivation for missions is an essential one to answer for the practice of Christian faith. The possibility that God may treat those outside “the Christian dispensation” with mercy did not slow Wesley or Fletcher down in their evangelistic efforts. Both Wesley and Fletcher were far more interested in spreading scriptural holiness throughout the land than they were in speculating over whether or not those of other religions traditions will finally be saved by Christ. For this reason, I suggest that Wesley’s concrete missional actions in the face of the religious diversity he knew in eighteenth-century England go a long way toward filling in the blanks for us in those areas for which we may desire further theological explanation on his part as to the motive for and practice of mission, locally and globally.

Wesleyans have a unique theological approach to Christian mission. As Douglas Mills says,

Because we understand John Wesley’s insistence on prevenient grace, then we know that our task of witness (evangelism) is not set in the context of a world lost and deprived of God. Our task is, instead, set in the context of a world in which God is very much active and where people have already experienced the love of God in good measure through the activity of the Holy Spirit. Because we understand prevenient grace that “goes before,” we know that the activity of the Holy Spirit is not limited to the confines of the church. The Spirit of God is at work

in the world, too, even at work in persons of other religious traditions.²⁰

It is in this spirit that I offer the following missiological practices exemplified in Wesley's ministry as both an exploration and invitation for those who affirm along with Wesley an inclusive theology of other religions:

1. *Imitatio Christi*. The basis of all our missiological efforts for Wesley is the imitation of Christ. We love others because God first loved us (Romans 5:8). We love our enemies, both perceived and real, because Jesus loved his enemies. We forgive because we have been forgiven. "The idea of imitating Jesus . . . who 'went about doing good' (Acts 10:38) . . . is a central and persistent theme throughout [Wesley's] ministry," says Richard Heitzenrater.²¹ Christ was thus not only Wesley's model for ministry but also the source of its empowerment. The motivation for Wesley's ministry was to walk as Jesus walked (1 John 2:6).²² "Why did Wesley work with the poor?" Heitzenrater asks, "because Jesus did so, but also because Jesus told him to do so and would help him to do so."²³ Wesley's passion for the poor lasted throughout his long lifetime—a challenge and encouragement to us to finish well in life and ministry. When Wesley was eighty-two-years-old, he spent a week slogging through the melting snow and muddy streets of London "begging" for the poor. As a result of about thirty hours spent soliciting funds that week, he raised 200 pounds or the equivalent of around \$30,000 in today's currency.²⁴

Unlike for Wesley, the poor for us are not only the poor who live next door or in big cities in the United States, Europe, or the United King-

²⁰Douglas Mills, "A Very Short Theological Basis for Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation," paper, Commission on Interfaith Relations, New York, 21 February 2009, quoted by Donald Thorsen, "Jesus, Ecumenism, and Interfaith Relations: A Wesleyan Perspective," *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 47:7 (Spring, 2012), 68.

²¹Richard Heitzenrater, "The *Imitatio Christi* and the Great Commandment: Virtue and Obligation in Wesley's Ministry with the Poor," chapter 3, in *The Portion of the Poor*, ed. M. Douglas Meeks (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1995), 58.

²²As Heitzenrater points out, this was "the most repeated biblical phrase (over fifty references) in his published sermons." See *Ibid.*

²³*Ibid.*, 63.

²⁴Richard Heitzenrater, "The Poor and the People Called Methodists," in chapter one, *The Poor and the People Called Methodists*, ed. Richard Heitzenrater (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 2002), 31, 223.

dom. They are also the global poor. These poor are the 3.5 billion (half the world's population) in developing countries who live on less than \$2 per day.²⁵ As a result of advances in technology, we are aware of the plight of the global poor as never before. We can no more turn our backs on these global neighbors of ours than Wesley could ignore the poor, hungry, and sick on the streets of London. Two-thirds of the world is non-Christian, a high percentage of them living below the World Food Bank's extreme poverty line of \$1.25 a day.²⁶ These realities clearly inform where and how we in the Wesleyan tradition will invest our missional efforts.

With the influx of refugees of many different faith traditions into our country (many who have been in refugee camps for fifteen or more years before coming to the U.S.), many Christian churches are showing the love of Christ in tangible ways by building relationships with the poor of other religions by helping them set up their households with bedding, dishes, furniture, and food.²⁷ Most do this not to convert refugees, but simply to follow the pattern of Jesus who "went about doing good" (Acts 10:38). It is precisely when the church surrenders itself in kenotic, self-emptying love, expecting nothing in return, giving its life away simply because it is the Christlike thing to do, that the non-Christian world will see Christ in action and possibly understand his love for them in an explicit way. As a result of encountering living examples of Christian love, it may be that those who are recipients of such concrete acts of Christ's love will recognize within themselves the stirrings of the love of God and grow to the point where they make an explicit confession of faith in Christ.

Even though Wesley offers a very dim view of the "condition [of] the world at the present,"²⁸ in his sermon "The General Spread of the Gospel"

²⁵<<http://data.worldbank.org/topic/poverty>>, accessed 12 April 2012. According to 2008 figures from the World Food Bank, 70.9% of the population in Southeast Asia lives on \$2 a day or less. 69.2% of the population of Sub-Saharan Africa lives on \$2 a day or less.

²⁶Christians make up about 33 percent of the world's population, followed by Muslims (22.5%), Hindus (13.6%), Buddhists (6.7%), agnostics and atheists (11.6%), and other religions (approximately 13%).

²⁷As just one example of those who help refugees settle in the United States, see the efforts of World Relief, <<http://worldrelief.org/page.aspx?pid=1532>>, accessed 12 April 2012. According to 2008 figures from the World Food Bank, 36% of the population in Southeast Asia lives on \$1.25 a day or less. 47.5% of the population in Sub-Saharan Africa lives on \$1.25 a day or less.

²⁸John Wesley, "The General Spread of the Gospel," Sermon 63 (1783), in *BCE*, 2:485.

his hopes for the redemption of the world remain as buoyant as ever. To those of his day who may have wondered how “the heathen nations” that do not communicate with “Christians of any kind” can be saved, Wesley maintains that God will not be limited in sending preachers:

Yea, but is not God able to send them? Cannot he raise them up, as it were, out of the stones? And can he ever want means of sending them? No: were there no other means, he “can take them by his Spirit” (as he did Ezekiel), or by “his angel,” as he did Philip, and set them down wheresoever it pleaseth him. Yeah, he can find out a thousand ways, to foolish man unknown.²⁹

The stumbling-block in this occurring, however, is the failure of Christians to live winsome, Christlike lives in the non-Christian world. If Christians will lead lives like those in the early church, “Mahometans will look upon them with other eyes, and begin to give attention to their words. . . . the holy lives of Christians will be an argument they will not know how to resist.”³⁰ When our lives match the profession of our faith, it may well be that the graciousness of such lives will speak louder than mere words in pointing those of other faiths and no faith to Christ. The *imitatio Christi* remains to this day our missional motive and the hope of the non-Christian world.

2. “Catholic Spirit” Hospitality. One of the most winsome things about John Wesley’s theology is its openness to others. In his “Catholic Spirit” sermon, he wanted his hearers to rally around, not their similar beliefs, but around their common love: “Though we cannot think alike, may we not love alike?”³¹ Although Wesley is clearly talking about relationships between Christians, if Wesley were alive today he well might extend a similar hospitality to other religious traditions. In a religiously diverse age like ours, is it in keeping with Wesley’s theological spirit to extend Wesley’s spirit of charity to those of other faiths?³²

If Wesley were alive today, could he say to a Muslim, as he did to a Roman Catholic in 1749: “Let us endeavor to help each other on in what-

²⁹Ibid., 497.

³⁰Ibid., 495, 496.

³¹John Wesley, “Catholic Spirit,” Sermon 39 (1750), in *BCE*, 2:82.

³²Don Thorsen, “Jesus, Ecumenism, and Interfaith Relations: A Wesleyan Perspective,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 47:7 (Spring, 2012), 60, 68, suggests that it may be.

ever we are agreed leads to the kingdom"?³³ Or, to a Hindu: "Though we cannot think alike, may we not love alike?"³⁴ Or, to a Zen Buddhist: "Hold you fast that which you believe is most acceptable to God, and I will do the same"?³⁵ The application of these words of Wesley to our contemporary situation may be unfair to Wesley; but in a day in which Protestants expressed anything but a "Catholic spirit" toward Roman Catholics, Wesley's plea to a Roman Catholic "to help each other on in whatever we are agreed leads to the kingdom" is an important indicator of the way in which Wesley may have considered people of other faiths if he were alive today. Wesley's remarkably catholic spirit toward those of other "dispensations" comes through loud and clear as well in his following statement from one of his last printed sermons, "On Living Without God":

Let it be observed, I purposely add, "to those that are under the Christian dispensation," because I have no authority from the word of God "to judge those that are without." Nor do I conceive that any man living has a right to sentence all the heathen and Mahometan world to damnation. It is far better to leave them to Him that made them, and who is "the Father of all the spirits of flesh"; who is the God of the Heathens as well as the Christians, and who hateth nothing that he hath made.³⁶

Wesley was hopeful, but cautious about the work of God in those outside "the Christian dispensation." At the very least, we can say that extending Wesley's catholic spirit to our religiously plural world involves loving those of different faiths as our neighbors (Luke 10:25ff). As Christ's followers we love those who dislike us or may even hate us. Christlike love doesn't mean agreement, but active goodwill toward the flourishing of the other.

³³John Wesley, "Letter to a Roman Catholic," 18 July 1749, in *The Works of John Wesley*, ed. Thomas Jackson, third edition (London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, 1872; reprint ed., Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1979), X:86. This is exactly what Leymah Gbowee and other Christian women in Liberia did when they joined forces with Muslim women to non-violently drive Charles Taylor from power in 2005. See Leymah Gbowee, *Mighty Be Our Powers: How Sisterhood, Prayer, and Sex Changed a Nation at War* (New York: Beast Books, 2011).

³⁴John Wesley, "Catholic Spirit," Sermon 39 (1750), in *BCE*, 2:82.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 89-90.

³⁶John Wesley, "On Living Without God," Sermon 130 (1790), in *BCE*, 4:174.

In the same year that Wesley published his “Catholic Spirit” sermon, he published a sermon, “A Caution Against Bigotry,” where his text is Jesus’ story of a man who, though not a follower of Jesus, casts out demons in Jesus’ name (Mark 9:38-39). Jesus’ disciples want the man to be stopped, but Jesus rebukes the disciples for trying to stop the man. Wesley’s homiletical appropriation of this text shockingly exhorts that rather than ignoring, discouraging, or fighting against those of other religions who are “cast[ing] out devils,” we are instead to “acknowledge,” “rejoice,” “praise,” “encourage,” “speak well of,” “defend,” “enlarge,” “show . . . kindness,” and pray for “a Jew, a deist, or a Turk [Muslim]”:

In every instance of this kind, whatever the instrument be, acknowledge the finger of God. And not only acknowledge but rejoice in his work, and praise his name with thanksgiving. Encourage whomsoever God is pleased to employ, to give himself wholly up thereto. Speak well of him wheresoever you are; defend his character and his mission. Enlarge as far as you can his sphere of action. Show him all kindness in word and deed. And cease not to cry to God in his behalf, that he may save both himself and them that hear him.³⁷

Both Wesley’s sermon on “Catholic Spirit” and “A Caution Against Bigotry” remain provocative guides for those of us who seek to explore the missiological implications of an inclusive theology of religions in the twenty-first century.

3. Golden Rule Witness. Most Muslims demand that Christians should not evangelize among them. We as Christians respond by saying, “We can no more cease evangelizing than we can stop breathing.” Evangelism is interwoven into the very fabric of Christian faith. As the Father sent Jesus, so he has sent us to be his eyes, ears, hands, feet, and voice in the world. If it is impossible for us not to witness about our faith in Christ, then we must ask along with Miroslav Volf, “How can we witness lovingly, compassionately, kindly, and with hospitality?”³⁸ In a word, as Miroslav Volf says in his book *Allah*, Christians “have an obligation to follow the Golden Rule” whenever we witness.³⁹

³⁷John Wesley, “A Caution Against Bigotry,” Sermon 38 (1750), in *BCE*, 2:77.

³⁸Miroslav Volf, *A Public Faith: How Followers of Christ Should Serve the Common Good* (Grand Rapids Michigan: Brazos Press, 2011), 106.

³⁹*Allah*, 15.

Here's a real-life example of what practicing Golden Rule love can look like in relation to a person of another faith. I have a good friend who works at the Denver Rescue Mission. Even though it is part of his job, Tom loves developing relationships with refugee families. He helps them become better acclimated to United States culture, connects them with individuals and local churches who help set up their first apartment with food, furniture, and bedding, and assists them in finding jobs. One of the relationships that has meant the most to Tom in the last year or so is his relationship with an Iraqi family. His relationship with this family is not just a job, it is a passion. When the family asks Tom why he cares about them so much, he tells them, "This is the way I'd want to be treated if I were in your shoes. God loves you and I love you too." This is Golden Rule living in action.

Practicing the Golden Rule is nothing less than neighbor love in action. Golden Rule living was at the heart of Wesley's understanding of mission: "Put yourself in the place of every poor person—[we might say, "Put yourself in the shoes of people of all faiths"] and deal with *him* as you would God should deal with *you*."⁴⁰ Mission in the Wesleyan spirit is thus coming alongside, entering into life with, being compassionate toward, and treating all people, regardless of their faith tradition, the way we would want to be treated if we were in their place.

4. Holistic Love of Neighbor. In the ever-practical theological spirit of Wesley, rather than trying to prove that Christianity is right and all other faith traditions are wrong, we are called to invest our energy in living out the demands of the gospel wherever sin and injustice are found. Sometimes these efforts will lead us to evangelize even within the church, but most often it will lead us to live incarnationally outside the boundaries of Christianity among those of little faith, different faith, and no faith. Wesley's approach to evangelism was holistic through and through. The gospel for Wesley was good news for the totality of life. Loving our neighbor includes evangelism, but is not limited to it. Caring for our neighbor also involves tending to the spiritual, physical, emotional, relational, and economic needs of every person.

A very clear implication of an inclusive Wesleyan theology of religions, then, is that it will be holistic. Evangelism in a Wesleyan spirit

⁴⁰John Wesley, *Journal* (4 June 1747), *Works*, 20:177. Quoted by Heitzenrater, "The Poor and the People Called Methodists," 37.

always cares for the entire person. If only the spiritual matters, then food, water, health, shelter, jobs, education, and clothes are incidental to the gospel. Nothing could be further from the gospel Jesus embodied or Wesley preached. The past eleven years I have spent about a month a year in Africa, teaching at Africa Nazarene University in Nairobi and raising funds for various compassionate ministry projects. As I join my African friends in ministry, they have challenged me to be incarnational and thoroughly Wesleyan. When they talk about evangelism, for example, they never mention conversion to Christ apart from talking about education, health, food, shelter, clean water, or an ongoing source of income that meets the aforementioned needs and provides meaning for life.

Wesley, for example, collected food for the hungry, visited prisoners, helped the poor help themselves, established schools for children, provided clean water, clothes for cold bodies, medicine for the sick, hospitality to the imprisoned, assisted the weak and sick by building medical clinics, and gave microloans to start small businesses.⁴¹ A pastor and District Superintendent friend of mine in the Church of the Nazarene in Ghana, Rev. Frank Mills, for example, preaches about Jesus as living water in conjunction with a well dug by a local Nazarene church. The well's water is free to all in the community: Christians, Muslims, and animists. As Frank says, "As God's grace in Christ is free to all, so is access to clean water. We have found that clean water often leads people to the Living Water of Christ."

The salvation that comes through Christ is for the flourishing of all human beings in every area of life. Tragically, too many non-Christians do not see Christians as being of any earthly good. One of the chief tasks of Christians locally and globally, however, is to love not only "with words or tongue but with actions and in truth" (1 John 3:16). We demonstrate the love of God when clothe the naked, feed the hungry, give a cup of clean water to the thirsty, and visit those in prison. Whether a person is an atheist or a Muslim, they need to see that Christian faith makes a material difference in their world and is not, as Marx accused religion, "the opiate of the people."⁴² Contrary to Marx's critique of religion, evan-

⁴¹John Wesley, "A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists," (1749) in *BCE*, 9:272-280. See also Richard Heitzenrater, "The Portion of the Poor," 49.

⁴²Karl Marx, "Towards a Critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*," in *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, ed. David McLellan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 200), 72. Quoted by Volf, *A Public Faith*, 15.

gelism in a Wesleyan spirit is life-affirming—both this life and the life to come. As long as there is life on earth, there is significant work God has given us to do in feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, providing clean water, loving the stranger, and visiting the sick (Matthew 25:31-46). One of the purposes of the early Methodists, as Wesley pointed out, quoting George Herbert, was to “Join hands with God to make a poor man live.”⁴³

Conclusion

As we engage those in other religious traditions in dialogue, mission, and mutual cooperation—“in whatever . . . leads to the kingdom”⁴⁴—we maintain along with Miroslav Volf that this is “not an attenuating of Christian convictions but affirming them robustly and living them out joyously.”⁴⁵ Like Wesley, we seek to remain faithful to our core commitment to Jesus Christ while loving our neighbor of another faith or no faith. In spite of a positive evaluation of the grace of God found in other religions, Wesleyans continue to insist on the necessity of mission among those of other religions and no religion. Without an explicit presentation of the gospel, it is unlikely that whatever implicit faith exists will reach fruition, with implications for both this life and the life to come. Even if some people respond to God's prevenient call to salvation apart from an explicit reception of the gospel, these may be few and without access to the means of grace to grow in the love of God and neighbor. It is only at the final judgment that those who have appropriated saving grace will be revealed. Until then we, like Wesley, do not judge those outside the Christian dispensation before the appointed time (1 Cor. 4:5), but, instead, give ourselves away in kenotic, self-giving love to the broken and wounded of the world in Jesus' name, regardless of their faith or lack of it while trusting in the wideness of God's mercy.

⁴³John Wesley, “A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists,” (1749) in *BCE*, 9:280.

⁴⁴John Wesley, “Letter to a Roman Catholic,” 18 July 1749, in *Works* (Jackson), X:86.

⁴⁵Volf, *A Public Faith*, xvii.

THE WESLEYAN TRILATERAL: PREVENIENT GRACE, CATHOLIC SPIRIT, AND RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE

by

Kelly Diehl Yates

Is there some aspect of our theology that allows Wesleyans to coexist with people who practice other Abrahamic religions, namely Jews and Muslims? Must Wesleyans perceive those who practice these other Abrahamic religions simply as people to be converted, or is it possible to perceive them as the people of God? Can Wesleyans cultivate an openness to God's activity in the lives of people who practice other Abrahamic religions? If so, what particular aspect of John Wesley's theology lend themselves to this openness?

I will argue that the concept of prevenient grace contributes to Wesley's approach to both the "catholic spirit" and his openness to God's activity in the lives of people who practice the other Abrahamic religions, paving the way for an enlarged understanding of the catholic spirit that can embrace the activity of interreligious dialogue. A specifically Wesleyan and Christian approach to people living peacefully together, rooted in the concept of prevenient grace and flowing from the practice of a catholic spirit, moves us from the position of mutual understanding to graceful dialog and peaceful coexistence.

Ecumenism and interreligious dialogue are often compartmentalized as two different practices within the church. Yet Wesley's concepts of catholic spirit and religious tolerance in general both seem to stem from his concept of prevenient grace. Rather than viewing *religions* as other institutions that must be dealt with by Christianity, a Wesleyan idea of religious tolerance views *persons* graced by God who practice other religions. Persons, covered by prevenient grace, are valued, not for their religious ideas, but for their humanity. Religions are ideas, and all people have the God-given right to think, as Wesley proclaims in his sermon "The Catholic Spirit."¹

¹Wesley, John, *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. II, *Sermons*, Bicentennial Edition. Ed. Albert Outler, "The Catholic Spirit," 89.

An Anthropological Understanding of Prevenient Grace

The role one gives to humanity will determine the nature of the theology he or she asserts.”² Since John Wesley’s anthropology cannot be separated from his theology of grace, then humanity as object of God’s grace is the axis of Wesley’s theology of grace.³ A particular view of this grace in the Wesleyan corpus is “preventing grace,” later called “prevenient grace” by his theological descendants.⁴ The concept of prevenient grace did not originate with Wesley. The concept may be traced back to Augustine.⁵

Wesley’s concept of prevenient grace may be categorized three ways: anthropological, cosmological, and finally, pneumatological.⁶ Through analysis of many of Wesley’s writings, I will explore how an anthropological understanding of prevenient grace contributed to Wesley’s nondogmatic theological method, which was summarized in his sermon, “The Catholic Spirit.” He understood prevenient grace to provide us with power to respond to God’s offer of salvation, but his concept also provides us with his view of what it means to be a human being.⁷ For example, Wesley does hold to the doctrine of total depravity, but he qualifies the depravity with a description of total depravity *except* for prevenient grace.

Unlike John Calvin, whose theology Wesley says has to exclude some people based on his concept of predestination, Wesley’s theology excludes no one. His “optimism of grace” forced a wedge between Augustine’s view of grace and the eighteenth-century’s optimism of nature.⁸ A pessimistic Augustinian theology argued that God elected only a choice few to save. The optimism of nature of the Enlightenment declared that humanity could save itself without God’s grace or anything else. Wesley declared universal grace; all people have the *potential* for a saving relationship with God.⁹

²Irwin W. Reist, “John Wesley’s View of Man: A Study in Free Grace vs. Free Will,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 25 (1972): 25.

³Reist, 26.

⁴J. Gregory Crofford, *Streams of Mercy: Prevenient Grace in the Theology of John and Charles Wesley* (Lexington: Emeth Press, 2010), 14.

⁵Crofford, 14.

⁶Crofford, 23.

⁷Philip R. Meadows, “Candidates for Heaven: Wesleyan Resources for a Theology of Religions,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 35 (2000):101.

⁸Jerry McCant, “An Optimism of Grace,” in *It’s All about Grace*, ed. Samuel M. Powell (San Diego: Point Loma University Press, 2004), 38.

⁹*Ibid.*, 38

Prevenient grace is what draws every person to God. Wesley describes this process in his *Journal*, July 16, 1756:

At first curiosity brings many hearers: *At the same time God draws many by his preventing grace to hear his word, and comforts them in hearing.* One then tells another. By this means, on the one hand, curiosity spreads and increases, and, on the other, drawings of God's Spirit touch more hearts; and many of them more powerfully than before. He now offers grace to all that hear; most of whom are in some measure affected, and more or less moved, with approbation of what they hear, desire to please God, and good-will to his messenger. . . .¹⁰

Every person has been given prevenient grace by God. This provides a "measure of light." Wesley goes so far as to attribute conscience to prevenient grace.¹¹ In 1788, Wesley announced in a sermon,

But it is not true that either the *public* or the *moral sense* (both of which are included in the term "conscience") is now natural to man. Whatever may have been the case at first while man was in a state of innocence, both the one and the other is now a branch of the supernatural gift of God which we now style preventing grace.¹²

Now that we have established an understanding of prevenient grace, we move to an understanding of the "catholic spirit."

Prevenient Grace and the Catholic Spirit

Albert Outler says that the sermon "Catholic Spirit" is Wesley's formulation of a non-dogmatic theological method.¹³ Can this method be attributed to prevenient grace? Is it non-dogmatic because Wesley views all people as graced by God?

In the "Catholic Spirit" sermon, Wesley claims that we can unite in love, but how can we love if we have not been given prevenient grace?

¹⁰John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, Thomas Jackson ed. (14 volumes: Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978), II, Number X, *Journal*, Feb. 16, 1755 through June 16, 1758. Accessed CD. Hereafter *Works* [Jackson].

¹¹John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, Bicentennial Edition (35 volumes projected: Nashville: Abingdon, editor in chief Frank Baker, 1984-present). vol II. "On Conscience." Hereafter *Works* [BE]. Accessed CD.

¹²*Works* [BE]. II. "On Conscience." Preached in 1788.

¹³*Works* [BE] II. Outler's notes "Catholic Spirit." Accessed CD.

How can anyone love us in return? If we have a catholic spirit, then we have catholic, universal love. Because God first loved us, then we can love others. If we love at all, it is only because God first loved us. If God values people, then we value people because they are graced by God with prevenient grace. If we value others because they are humans graced by God, then we will have a catholic spirit.

Wesley says in this sermon that, if we have a catholic spirit, we will “have unspeakable tenderness for their persons,”¹⁴ and we will long for their welfare. We do this because we view people as graced by God. He also states in “Catholic Spirit” that none has the right “to lord it over the conscience of his brethren. But every man must judge for himself as every man must give an account of himself to God.”¹⁵ Wesley believes that others *do have* a conscience, and that conscience, and he attributes to prevenient grace.¹⁶

A catholic spirit is a humble spirit: “Although every man necessarily believes that every particular opinion which he holds is true, yet no man can be assured that all his opinions, taken together, are true.” Wesley goes on to say that to be ignorant of many things is a necessary condition of humanity. It takes this humility to approach others as graced by God, to view their opinions as valued. He implores us to ask of others, “Is thy heart right with my heart?”¹⁷ How does a heart become “right?” The heart becomes “right” only by the grace of God. According to Wesley, everyone has the possibility of becoming right with God. He says in another sermon, “The Scripture Way of Salvation,”

No man living is entirely destitute of what is vulgarly called natural conscience. But this is not natural: *It is more properly termed, preventing grace.* Every man has a greater or less measure of this, which waiteth not for the call of man. Everyone has, sooner or later, good desires; although the generality of men stifle them before they can strike deep root, or produce any considerable fruit. Everyone has some measure of that light, some faint glimmering ray, which, sooner or later, more or less, enlightens every man that cometh into the world. And every

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵*Works* [BE]. II. “Catholic Spirit.” Outler says he is referring to Romans 14:12. Accessed CD.

¹⁶*Works* [BE] II. “On Conscience,” preached 1788. Accessed CD.

¹⁷*Works* [BE] II. “Catholic spirit.” Accessed CD.

one, unless he be one of the small number whose conscience is seared as with a hot iron, feels more or less uneasy when he acts contrary to the light of his own conscience. So that no man sins because he has not grace, but because he does not use the grace which he hath.¹⁸

If we assume the other person has a “right heart,” then we assume that they have prevenient grace. Once we are grounded in grace which leads to catholic love, universal love, it is easier to view others as graced by God. The person with a catholic spirit can, as Wesley states, “embrace with strong and cordial affection neighbours and strangers, friends and enemies.”¹⁹ Note that Wesley does not qualify the “catholic spirit” at the end of this sermon as only applying to other Christians.

Now that we have discussed prevenient grace and catholic spirit, we can see how an enlarged understanding of the catholic spirit can cultivate an openness to God’s activity in the lives of Jews and Muslims.

The “Catholic” Includes Jews and Muslims

First, let us explore Wesley’s writings concerning Jews and Muslims, or Mahometans as he calls them. Wesley values the religion of the Jews *over* heathens and Mahometans in his sermon “On Faith,” preached near the end of his life in 1788.

But in general we may surely place the faith of a Jew above that of a heathen or Mahometan. By Jewish faith I mean the faith of those who lived between the giving of the law and the coming of Christ. These—that is, those that were serious and sincere among them—believed all that is written in the Old Testament. In particular they believed that in the fullness of time the Messiah would appear “to finish the transgression, to make an end of sin, and bring in everlasting righteousness.”²⁰

In his Journal entry for Feb. 23, 1770, Wesley mentions visiting a synagogue: “I was desired to hear Mr. Leoni sing at the Jewish synagogue. I never before saw a Jewish congregation behave so decently. Indeed, the place itself is so solemn that it might strike an awe upon those who have

¹⁸Works [BE] II. “The Scripture way of salvation.” Accessed CD. Emphasis mine.

¹⁹Works [BE] II. “Catholic Spirit.” Accessed CD

²⁰Works [BE] III. “On Faith.” Accessed CD.

any thought of God.”²¹ This statement leads us to believe that perhaps Wesley had observed other Jewish congregations.

Perhaps the most famous quote of Wesley in reference to Islam is found in the document *The Doctrine of Original Sin*.

Ever since the religion of Islam appeared in the world, the espousers of it . . . have been as wolves and tigers to all other nations, rending and tearing all that fell into their merciless paws, and grinding them with their iron teeth; that numberless cities are raised from the foundation, and only their name remaining; that many countries, which were once as the garden of God, are now a desolate wilderness; and that so many once numerous and powerful nations are vanished from the earth! Such was, and is at this day, the rage, the fury, the revenge, of these destroyers of human kind.²²

One wonders how a positive view of Wesley and Islam could ever be argued with such a statement attributed to him. But Wesley himself expressed a different view near the end of his life. From the 1788 sermon “On Faith” we read:

It cannot be doubted, but this plea will avail for millions of modern Heathens. Inasmuch as to them little is given, of them little will be required. As to the ancient Heathens, millions of them likewise were savages. No more therefore will be expected of them, than the living up to the light they had. But many of them, especially in the civilized nations, we have great reason to hope, although they lived among Heathens, yet were quite of another spirit; being taught of God, by his inward voice, all the essentials of true religion. Yea, and so was that Mahometan, and Arabian, who, a century or two ago, wrote the *Life of Hai Ebn Yokdan*. The story seems to be feigned; but it contains all the principles of pure religion and undefiled.²³

In another end-of-life sermon, preached in 1790 and called “On Living without God,” Wesley claims that no one has the right to sentence all the heathen and Mahometans to hell. He leaves the judgment to God.

²¹Works [Jackson]. III. *Journal* from May 6, 1760 to Sept. 12, 1773. Number XV: *Journal* from May 14, 1768 to Sept 1, 1770. Accessed CD.

²²Works [BE] I, “Doctrine of Original Sin.” Accessed CD.

²³Works [BE] IV, “On Faith.” Accessed CD.

Nor do I conceive that any man living has a right to sentence all the heathen and Mahometan world to damnation. It is far better to leave them to Him that made them, and who is “the Father of the spirits of all flesh;” who is the God of the Heathens as well as the Christians, and who hateth nothing that he hath made.²⁴

Since God made the “heathen and Mahometan,” then God provides them with prevenient grace. If he provides them with prevenient grace, then we have an obligation to see them as God’s people. If we see them as God’s people, then we can dialogue gracefully, we can coexist. This means that we can work together toward the common good.

Also in the 1788 sermon “On Faith,” Wesley’s settles his “disjunctions between the conscience awareness of God’s favor and its total absence.”²⁵ It seems that, with this awareness of God’s favor rather than its absence, Wesley tactfully retracts earlier harshness toward what he calls “lower degrees of faith.” The harshness was specifically found in the sermons, “Almost Christianity” and “Scriptural Christianity.” By contrast, “On Faith” is a beautiful yet robust²⁶ picture of Wesley’s vision of universal saving grace.²⁷

In this sermon, Wesley specifically refers to dispensations of the grace of God. He starts with a description of the “heathen dispensation” where there is a “small degree of light.”²⁸ He then moves to a Jewish dispensation of grace. The Jews were given far more light with the oracles of God. There was a further dispensation of grace given to John the Baptist.²⁹ Then he describes what he calls the degrees of faith. He attributes the first degree of faith to even a materialist who believes that there is nothing but matter in the universe. The second degree of faith is one of a deist. The next is the one of the heathens and the Mahometans.

The next sort of faith is the faith of heathens, with which I join that of Mahometans. I cannot but prefer this before the faith of

²⁴*Works* [BE] IV, “On Living without God.” Accessed CD.

²⁵*Works* [BE] IV, “On Faith.” Outler’s comments. Accessed CD.

²⁶This use of “robust” is a tribute to William Abraham who often uses the term to describe Wesley’s theology.

²⁷*Works* [BE] IV, “On Faith,” Outler’s comments. Accessed CD.

²⁸*Ibid.*

²⁹*Works* [BE] IV, “On Faith.” Accessed CD.

the deists; because, though it embraces nearly the same objects, yet they are rather to be pitied than blamed for the narrowness of their faith. And their not believing the whole truth is not owing to want of sincerity, but merely to want of light.³⁰

Wesley claims that these groups in the different dispensations will not be blamed for their narrowness of faith because they just did not know or understand the Gospel. If they have prevenient grace, then they have some degree of light. If they have some degree of light, then they have some degree of faith. And if we Wesleyans embrace the catholic spirit, we will view Jews and Muslims as graced by God, perhaps even as the people of God.

Conclusion

In conclusion, there is an aspect of theology that allows Wesleyans to coexist with people who practice the three Abrahamic religions. Since Wesleyans embrace Wesley's concept of prevenient grace, anthropologically, we view all persons as graced by God. If we view all people as graced by God, then we value all people. This grace-filled view of humanity contributes to Wesley's nondogmatic theological method as found in the sermon "The Catholic Spirit."

Unlike most other evangelicals, Wesleyans do not need to perceive those who practice Abrahamic religions simply as people to be converted. Wesleyans can perceive Jews and Muslims as people of God, grace by God. Wesleyans view every person with potential for a saving relationship with God because they believe in universal grace. When Wesleyans embrace the catholic spirit, judgment of the souls of Jews and Muslims is left to God. Instead of judgment, we will embrace opportunities for grace-filled dialogue.

In this catholic spirit, I implore all Wesleyans to cultivate an openness to God's activity in the lives of people who practice Judaism and Islam. If we truly believe in this prevenient, grace-filled, catholic spirit-ed view of humanity, then we will embrace a Wesleyan *via media* of religious tolerance, the river that runs between universalism and dogmatic sectarianism. This is the Wesleyan tri-lateral: prevenient grace, catholic spirit, and religious tolerance.

³⁰Ibid.

ONLY EXCLUSIVISM WILL DO: GAVIN D'COSTA'S CHANGE OF MIND

by

Thomas A. Noble

The threefold typology of exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism became standard in the discussion of a Christian theology of religions almost thirty years ago. Alan Race is credited with popularizing it in his influential book, *Christians and Religious Pluralism*¹ although it apparently can be traced further back to the nineteenth-century Scottish missionary to India, John Farquhar. Gavin D'Costa, born in Kenya to an Indian family and Professor of Catholic Theology at the University of Bristol where he has taught since 1993, was among many who adopted the typology, using it in his chapter in the first edition of David Ford's *The Modern Theologians* published in 1989.² D'Costa acknowledged that there were considerable differences between theologians belonging to the same camp, but still thought at that time that it was valuable to distinguish three broad approaches "for pedagogic purposes." After a life-time as a pedagogue, one can see the attraction.

But D'Costa changed his mind. In 1996 he published a paper which he said could be described as "an act of public self-humiliation" in which he recognized the threefold typology as redundant.³ Again in *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity* (2000),⁴ he argued that the threefold typology cannot be regarded as coherent. I intend here to examine the typology and its logical coherence, to take account of D'Costa's demolition of the pluralist position (at least from within the context of Christian faith and

¹Alan Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism* (London: SCM, 1983).

²David Ford (ed), *The Modern Theologians* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989).

³Gavin D'Costa, "The Impossibility of a Pluralist View of Religions," *Religious Studies*, 32 (1996), 223-232.

⁴Gavin D'Costa, *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 2000).

theology), and to see what we can learn from D'Costa's Trinitarian approach to a Christian theology of religions.⁵

The Logical Coherence of the Threefold Typology

In his chapter "Theology of Religions" in David Ford's 1989 introductory textbook, D'Costa identifies the English Presbyterian, John Hick, as the main representative of the pluralist view. He traces the evolution of Hick's thought from a Christocentric position to the theocentric one expounded in *God Has Many Names* published in 1980. George Lindbeck is selected to represent the exclusivist position. Noting Lindbeck's "cultural-linguistic" model for Christian doctrine (although D'Costa calls it his model for "religions"), he adds to that Lindbeck's wish to retain the *solus Christus* and *fides ex auditu* of his Lutheran tradition. In the light of these Reformation principles, Lindbeck maintains that to be saved, one must learn the language of faith. However, things are not as they seem. Lindbeck goes on to argue that just as there is no salvation outside the church, so there is no damnation either (or at least, not necessarily so). Non-Christians will have a *post mortem* confrontation with Christ and therefore there is hope that all may in the end be saved.

D'Costa then cites Karl Rahner as the exemplar of the inclusivist position. He too affirms with Lindbeck the *solus Christus* principle, and also affirms with Hick the universal salvific will of God, that God wills all to be saved. As a Catholic, Rahner maintains that salvation is mediated only through the Church, but somehow all people "must be capable of being members of the Church."⁶ To explain this, Rahner develops the Catholic understanding of salvific grace, present in creation and through conscience, and argues that this is mediated historically through the religions of the world so that, when their adherents respond to this grace *through* their religions, they may be regarded as "anonymous Christians."

If one were to put these three in order with respect to the value they put on world religions, Hick ranks them most highly as ways of salvation equal to Christianity. Rahner would come next, seeing world religions as the historical means through which God's saving grace is mediated,

⁵In his most recent work, *Christianity and World Religions* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2009), D'Costa critiques the concept of "religions" as a construct of modernity and part of its attempt to privatize religion, and he repeats his criticisms of the threefold typology.

⁶Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, vol. 6, 391.

although in fact this makes the “anonymous Christian” a member of the Church and thus saved through Christ. Lindbeck (according to this assessment by D’Costa) gives the least value to world religions. Whatever cultural or moral value they may have, they are not in any way the means or vehicle of salvation, even anonymously. Salvation is *sola fide*, by faith alone, and by Christ alone (*a solo Christo*), even if that be through a *post mortem* preaching of the gospel.

The example of Lindbeck immediately raises the question of whether his position is a true exclusivism. It has been a widespread position among many of the Protestant missionaries who planted churches throughout the world-side expansion of the church over the last two centuries that all who have not heard the gospel of Christ and explicitly believed in him are eternally lost. They reflected the theological position expressed, for example, by Princeton’s Charles Hodge:

It is therefore, as before stated, the common faith of the Christian world that, so far as adults are concerned, there is no salvation without the knowledge of Christ and faith in him. This has ever been regarded as the ground of the obligation which rests upon the Church to preach the gospel to every creature.⁷

In the light of that *radically* exclusivist position, Lindbeck’s view seems remarkably inclusive. The same comment may be made about the major theologian often given as an example of an “exclusivist,” Karl Barth. Confusingly, Barth is also frequently accused of being a universalist, believing that all will eventually be saved.

The relevant question appears to be that of the definition of the term “exclusivist.” Does it refer to the teaching that all who are saved will be saved through Christ alone, or does it refer to the teaching that only those who *explicitly* put their faith in Christ in this life will be saved? In other words, to what does the word exclusive refer? Is it *Christ* as exclusively the Saviour (in which case those who are not historically Christian may yet possibly be saved through him), or is it *faith* as the exclusive means or condition, so that *only* those who explicitly “confess with their lips . . . and believe in their heart” will be saved. Does the word “exclusive” attach to the *solus Christus* or to the *sola fide*? If the inclusivist Rahner believes that all those who are saved by universal salvific grace available through their

⁷Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol. I (London and Edinburgh: Nelson, 1872).

non-Christian religions are nonetheless anonymous Christians, saved through being members of the church, that is, of Christ's body, then they too are saved through Christ. So if the word "exclusive" is attached to the *solus Christus*, then the consequence appears to be an inclusive rather than an exclusive position.

Indeed, in the end there does not appear to be any significant or material difference between the inclusivism of Rahner and the so-called exclusivism of Barth and Lindbeck. Granted that Rahner sees value in other world religions in a way denied by Barth and Lindbeck; even so, the so-called exclusivists, Barth and Lindbeck, agree with the inclusivist Rahner that all who are saved will be saved through Christ and that those who have never heard of Christ in this life may nevertheless be saved. It therefore seems clearer to classify all three (Rahner, Barth and Lindbeck) as versions of *inclusivism* over against the traditional exclusivism expressed by Hodge (which may come in both traditional Protestant and traditional Catholic forms), holding that only those who expressly become Christians by conscious faith in this life will be saved.

Returning to D'Costa, we come to his analysis of the incoherence of the threefold typology. By 1996, D'Costa had come to the conclusion that "inclusivism collapses into exclusivism in three ways."⁸ The first is that inclusivists believe that "their tradition [i.e. the Christian tradition] contains the truth regarding ontological, epistemological, and ethical claims." Inclusivists agree with exclusivists that, while truth exists outside the Christian faith, it is not on the same level as Christian truth and so must be "mitigated" (by which D'Costa presumably means "corrected"). We must bear in mind that D'Costa presumably has in mind a position something like Barth's or Lindbeck's when he refers to "exclusivism," but even if we have in mind the more *radical* exclusivism of traditional Christianity as expressed by Hodge, many such radical exclusivists (though perhaps not all) would still allow that there is some truth in other religions. They would insist that it is partial truth "twisted into a lie" when it comes to knowledge of God, thus having to be severely corrected. So even with our identification of the *radical* exclusivism of traditional Christianity, we can still agree with D'Costa that there is no material difference here between inclusivism and exclusivism. Both groups believe that the Christian tradition uniquely has the truth and is even the criterion of truth.

⁸Gavin D'Costa, *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 2000), 22.

D'Costa's second way in which inclusivism collapses into exclusivism is in agreeing that ontology, epistemology and ethics are inseparable in such a way that truth cannot be separated from the mediator, Christ and his church. Protestants will want to insist that Christ alone is the mediator, not the church, but nonetheless the point stands that, for all Christians, Christ *is* the Truth in such a way that knowing the truth is not merely a mental assent accepting a doctrine, but that truly believing the doctrine is inseparable from personal faith in Christ, knowing him as Saviour and confessing him as Lord.

D'Costa is surely right that Lindbeck (whom he classifies as an exclusivist) takes such a view, for Lindbeck insists on a post *mortem* conversion to Christ. But is this true of the inclusivist Rahner? He may see ontology and ethics as inseparable, for the good Muslim or Buddhist is seeking God and truth with all his heart and his ethical life demonstrates that. But is epistemology to be included here for Rahner? If this good Muslim or Buddhist does not actually *know* the Lord Jesus, he may actually be united to Christ through the universal action of grace (ontology), and he may show that in his moral life (ethics), but how can one say that epistemology is included if he does not *know* Christ? Perhaps one could say that in the hereafter this good Muslim or Buddhist will recognize the One known all along without prior awareness of having known him. Rahner then begins to sound sufficiently like Lindbeck to allow us to agree with D'Costa that at this point there is no material difference between them. Therefore, D'Costa's conclusion stands: the inclusivist is really an exclusivist. Of course, from the perspective of the *radical* exclusivism expressed by Hodge and shared across evangelicalism and the modern missionary movement it produced, it may be more true to say that these exclusivists (Barth and Lindbeck) are really inclusivists!

D'Costa's third way in which inclusivism collapses into exclusivism is that "both inclusivists and **exclusivists** recognize the tradition-specific nature of their inquiry." That implies that "they are committed to defence of their position" and make claims which concern questions of truth. I do not find this point particularly clear, but it appears that D'Costa is saying that, in contrast to the pluralists, both inclusivists and exclusivists are committed to the truth claims of Christianity. No doubt that is true, but that in itself does not establish that exclusivism and inclusivism are one and the same. Certainly it means that at this point they do not differ.

Coming back to my own analysis, the really significant question is whether "exclusive" applies to the *solus Christus* or to the *sola fide*. I sug-

gest that it would be a clearer use of the typology if it is applied to the latter. Thus, exclusivists are those who hold that only those who have explicitly put their faith in Christ will be saved, while inclusivists believe that there are those who do not explicitly put their faith in Christ who will be saved. They may differ on who those people are but, if we take this definition of the terms, it appears that virtually the whole body of Christian theologians down through the centuries (with some exceptions) has held a common view. They are exclusivist in the sense that salvation is *a solo Christo*, but inclusivist in believing that not all who are saved will be those who have explicitly put faith in Christ and been saved *sola fide*. Some (perhaps many) will be saved (whether infants, those who have not heard the gospel, or those who live up to the light they had), even though they have not put explicit faith in Christ following the preaching of the gospel.

Ruling Out Pluralism

Having concluded that all inclusivists are really exclusivists, D'Costa proceeds to argue that all pluralists are really exclusivists too. He deals with the Catholic Paul Knitter's "Eco-Liberation" approach, as well as with Dan Cohn-Sherbok's relativizing of Jewish pluralism, and in two further sections of the book with pluralism in Hinduism (including Radhakrishnan) and Buddhism (particularly with what he calls the "skillful" pluralism of the Dalai Lama). But here we shall simply examine briefly his critique of John Hick, based on his reading of Hick's Gifford Lectures of 1986-87.⁹ By then Hick's trajectory had continued: his first major move was from Christocentrism to "theocentrism" (as in *God Has Many Names*, 1980), and his second was from his version of theocentrism to what he called "Realitycentredness." This move was to accommodate the non-theistic religions, and D'Costa sees it as the adoption of a Kantian-type distinction between the noumenal and the phenomenal. Specific religious traditions have authentic but different responses to the noumenal, such as talking about this Reality as "our heavenly Father," but such language is to be classified as "myth." Our human language therefore has no connection

⁹Published as *An Interpretation of Religions: Human Responses to the Transcendent* (Yale University Press, 1990 and 2004). John Hick died in February, 2012, in Birmingham at the age of 90. The author recalls J. B. Torrance speaking of Hick's evangelical conversion while he was a student at Edinburgh and commenting that his trajectory from evangelical faith to pluralism could be seen as rooted in making "Love" rather than Christ the center of his thought.

with the divine reality and has a merely instrumental use. In their various ways the myths of the religions help us to turn away from Self toward the Real and to love people compassionately. There is thus a common ethical goal for all religions.

For D'Costa, Hick's pluralism amounts to an "ethical agnosticism" which is a form of liberal modernity's "god." It not only fails to take the plurality of the world religions seriously but dissolves them into myths. D'Costa employs Roland Barthes' analysis in *Mythologies* (1957) of the "bourgeois myth" that attempts to turn history into "essences." Hick does this with the religions so that they can conform to his pluralistic schema. This is to be seen as part of the project of modernity to arrive at universal truth. The adherents of world religions are not allowed to make fundamental ontological claims because the liberal modernist is "unable to imagine the Other" and so must transform the Other somehow into a reflection of himself. If the adherents of world religions do not accept this universalizing scheme by accepting that their doctrines are myths, they must be said to be holding false doctrines and making false truth claims.

The theism of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam and the non-theism of eastern religions, by being reduced to myths, are therefore all rejected in favor of agnosticism. The underlying Kantian assumption is that the Real *an sich* cannot be encountered for we have no access to it. Consequently, every religion can be included in the catalogue of modernity's narrative, their particularities and unique histories drained of their power. Their ethical imperatives can be reduced to the lowest common denominator, which is the ideal they all are said to share, love and compassion, "not an alien ideal imposed by a supernatural authority but one arising out of our human nature."¹⁰

Drawing on Alasdair MacIntyre and Barthes, D'Costa critiques this manoeuvre first as an "essentialism" not so much of ontology as of ethics. It effectively erases "the particularities of history and the uniqueness of religious traditions."¹¹ Secondly, Hick's pluralism pretends to an impartiality which actually masks "a highly specified form of liberal modernity." It is nothing but the Enlightenment claim to embody impartial, universal truth, the old trick which has been so successfully adopted by secular humanism when it claims to take a completely neutral stance from which

¹⁰Hick (1990), 325.

¹¹D'Costa (2000), 29.

religion may be judged and found wanting. For D'Costa, this is not truly "pluralist" as it claims, but is in fact a form of exclusivism. It is not, however, a Christian exclusivism proclaiming the *solus Christus*, nor indeed proclaiming the *solus Deus*. It is "Enlightenment exclusivism," stemming from Hick's Kantian epistemology and resulting in an ontological agnosticism. For Hick, the Enlightenment, not Jesus Christ, is the Light of the world.

Hick attempted to reply to D'Costa's critique by accepting that, while a pluralist adopts criteria by which to rule out deficient religious or quasi-religious movements such as Nazism or the Jones cult, that cannot be classified as "exclusivism."¹² He also wants to differentiate between a self-committing affirmation of faith and a philosophical hypothesis. But both of these rejoinders miss the point.

D'Costa's Exclusivist/Inclusivist Trinitarian Approach

In the second half of *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity*, D'Costa attempts to begin to sketch a Trinitarian theology of religions by drawing on the documents of the Second Vatican Council and subsequent documents. In *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* (1974), John Paul II comments on the phrase in *Nostra Aetate* (1965) with reference to world religions that the church rejects "nothing that is true and holy in these religions." John Paul places this in the context of the *praeparatio evangelica*. For example, the "implicit faith" of those who believe that God exists (Hebrews 11:6) may be seen in animistic religions while Muslims evidence fidelity to prayer. D'Costa notes that in *Redemptoris Missio* (*On the Permanent Validity of the Church's Missionary Mandate*, 1991), John Paul sees the natural questing of men and women as also related to the action of the Holy Spirit in their lives, and argues (in a way which Wesleyans will recognize) that there is no clear and unambiguous nature apart from grace. Yet this is not the fullness of sanctifying and redeeming grace found in Christ's eschatological church. It also should be made clear that the Spirit must never be seen as "an alternative to Christ": "Whatever the Spirit brings about in human hearts and in the history of peoples, in cultures and religions serves as a preparation for the Gospel and can only be understood in reference to Christ."¹³ A truly Trinitarian understanding can

¹²John Hick, "Religious Pluralism: A Reply to Gavin D'Costa," *Religious Studies*, 33 (1997), 161-166.

¹³*Redemptoris Missio*, 29, quoted in D'Costa (2000), 108.

therefore never divorce the Spirit from the Son or the action of the Spirit in the world from the incarnation, death and resurrection of the Son.

Among the Vatican II documents, D'Costa notes that *Gaudium et Spes* (otherwise *Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World*), 44, acknowledges that "elements of goodness and truth within western modernity may be a preparation for the gospel" and these may "challenge and even change elements within the Church." Similarly in *Redemptoris Missio*, there is an "unambiguous acknowledgement that the Spirit's activity in other religions does not take place only in the secret of the heart, but has important structural and cultural dimensions."¹⁴ Through the Spirit, God's Trinitarian presence within other religions and cultures as preparations for the gospel is a possibility discerned by signs of the kingdom within those cultures. This may lead to a deeper understanding and application of God's truth entrusted to the church so that through this, the Spirit may make the church more "Christ-shaped."

None of this implies any acceptance of the idea that non-Christian religions are in themselves salvific structures *per se*,¹⁵ which would be a move toward pluralism. It does not require any compromise on the exclusivism of the *solus Christus* (which is the form of exclusivism which D'Costa maintains). But he argues that such a Christian exclusivism promotes three values claimed by the pluralists more effectively and coherently than their position does. It promotes a genuine *openness*, for Christians can enter into dialogue expecting to learn from the Other and not (like pluralism) demoting their religions as a whole to the level of mythology. And in line with the civic rights acknowledged in another conciliar document, *Dignitatis Humanae Personae*, it also promotes genuine *tolerance* and *equality*.

After an exegetical chapter focusing on the Paraclete passages in John, D'Costa draws some conclusions.¹⁶ We must be extremely reticent about abstract talk of the Spirit in other religions, but *specific* Christian engagement with other cultures may lead to fresh practices within the church, to be received as a gift from God. He does not however give specific examples. It is not that there are fresh revelations, understood as other "gods," but that all truth in whatever form will serve to make Christ known more fully to Christians. This "observing" of the likeness of Jesus

¹⁴D'Costa (2000), 113.

¹⁵D'Costa (2000), 109.

¹⁶See D'Costa (2000), 128-132.

in others is part of what it means to say that the Holy Spirit is present in the world in the "Other." Other religions may generate Christ-like behaviour. Further, inasmuch as the Spirit is present in the world, the world can be challenged by the elements of truth it might already hold to be true to its best insights. But to say that the Spirit is present in the lives of non-Christians is both a judgement on and a sign of promise to the church.

In the light of this, D'Costa argues that distinctions between mission and dialogue and inculturation may be unhelpful. Dialogue and mission are intrinsically related. Mission is impossible without dialogue and *vice versa*. There can be no real dialogue without mission, for Christians have nothing to share with others except what has been given so bountifully to them. I think I would want to re-phrase that to say that the distinctions are helpful but that these distinct exercises cannot be separated from each other. One may recognize here the value of the standard language used to refer to the Chalcedonian settlement about the "two natures" of Christ, that they are said to be "distinct but not separate."

Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, in reviewing a spectrum of theologians who try to relate the question of a Christian theology of religions to the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, finds himself most in agreement with his fellow-evangelical Clark Pinnock and with the Catholic D'Costa.¹⁷ His criticisms of D'Costa are small indeed. Within the family of evangelical traditions, Wesleyans too should note how close this Catholic theologian is to us. Like Pinnock and Kärkkäinen, D'Costa wants to steer a course between universalism and the "restrictivism" of the Calvinist tradition or of traditional Augustinian and Tridentine Catholicism. To do so, we have (as Wesley emphasized) our faith in the Father "whose mercy is over all his works," a God for whom it is unthinkable to create creatures in order to damn them. Secondly, we have our firm commitment to the doctrine of the church catholic through the centuries that Christ died for all. To avoid confusion with *universalism*, to get away from individualism, and to emphasize the Christological basis of the atonement, it may be better to speak of this as the doctrine of the *corporate atonement*.

Thirdly, we have our emphasis on prevenient grace, but there too it would be better to drop that scholastic Augustinian terminology and speak instead of the universal presence and work of the Holy Spirit,

¹⁷Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Trinity and Religious Pluralism* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 79, 105.

always remembering that the Spirit in none other than the Spirit of Christ. And holding all these three together as one, we have a firm Trinitarian base for a Christian theology of religions. That gives us the basis on which we may work out a position which holds firmly to the *exclusivism* of the *solus Christus* and holds a carefully modulated *inclusivism* with respect to the *sola fide*.

WAS JOHN WESLEY ARGUING FOR PREVENIENT GRACE AS REGENERATIVE?

by

Stan Rodes

John Wesley's understanding of prevenience has long been a subject of attention by Wesleyan scholars, and for good reason. To borrow an idiom from the world of sports, the divine initiative in salvation is unquestionably *the* game-changer, and uniquely so for Wesleyan-Arminians. While there seems to be broad agreement that the *agenda* of God's prevenient working is relentlessly redemptive, the question that continues to engage us is that of *how* and in what sorts of ways it changes the game; that is, what are the salvific *accomplishments* of prevenient grace? What exactly is secured, or obtained, in terms of our salvation by this grace that we are agreed "comes before" and upon which any sort of divine-human co-operancy is always dependent?

Wrestling with this question has led to renewed interest in two rather striking declarations made by John Wesley in his 1788 sermon, *On Faith*. In that sermon, he posed the question, "What faith is properly saving?" and answered as follows:

It is such a divine conviction of God and of the things of God as even in its infant state enables everyone that possesses it to "fear God and work righteousness." And whosoever in every nation believes thus far the Apostle declares is "accepted of him." He actually is at that very moment in a state of acceptance. But he is at present only a *servant* of God, not properly a *son*. Meantime let it be well observed that "the wrath of God" no longer "abideth on him."¹

The imagery of an "infant state" calls to mind Wesley's sermon *On Working Out Our Own Salvation* (1785). In a well-known passage he relates "pre-

¹John Wesley, Sermon 106, "On Faith," §10, in *Sermons III*, ed. Albert C. Outler, vol. 3 of *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1976—), 497.

venting grace” to the beginning of our salvation, describing it as “the first wish to please God, the first dawn of light concerning his will, and the first slight transient conviction of having sinned against him.” He goes on to assert that “all these imply some tendency toward life, some degree of salvation, the beginning of a deliverance from a blind, unfeeling heart, quite insensible of God and of the things of God.”² Randy Maddox proposes that this might be properly described as a “rudimentary regeneration.”³

There are some significant implications attending this broad usage of the term “regeneration” when it is linked with the imagery of an “infant state” and Wesley’s declarations of divine acceptance and wrath no longer abiding. Is this “*tendency toward life*” to be understood as life itself in the sense of reconciled relationship with God, albeit infantile and undeveloped?

The aim of this present inquiry is to contribute toward the discussion by raising the question intimated in the title. When Wesley spoke of the divine acceptance in the passage above, was he arguing for prevenient grace as regenerative? That is, is the prevenient *engagement* of the human heart inherently *transformative* in something of a conversional sense? Is this what Wesley was affirming when he declared that wrath no longer abides?⁴

What Impact Has Prevenient Grace?

The last sentence of the passage from *On Faith* cited above certainly causes the reader to do a double-take. What does Wesley mean? Who is this “servant of God”? What has transpired in that person’s life? What does it mean that this person is accepted of God and no longer is under the wrath of God? And when does this become a reality in a person’s life?⁵

Without doubt, Wesley’s words cannot be ignored. They have been seized upon and, it seems, generally agreed upon as being definitive of Wes-

²Wesley, Sermon 85, “On Working Out Our Own Salvation,” §II.1, *Works*, 3:203-4.

³Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley’s Practical Theology* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1994), 170.

⁴Wesley was convinced that grace is always transformative in the sense that it inevitably brings about a new situation. The question here is whether or not the “first wish to please God” evidences a reconciled relationship.

⁵For a thorough study of the “servant of God,” see Stanley J. Rodes, “From Faith to Faith’: An Examination of the Servant-Son Metaphor in John Wesley’s Theological Thought,” Ph.D. thesis. The University of Manchester, 2011.

ley's soteriology. The paragraph is replete with significant words and phrases. It speaks of "a divine conviction," not merely "a conviction" but one that is God-given or God-initiated. It infers the idea of progression when it speaks of the "infant state" and of believing "thus far." It certainly affirms a divine-human dynamic on the way of salvation. The combination of the ideas of divine acceptance and wrath no longer abiding inevitably seems to raise the question asked by Maddox: "What can this mean but that [those having the faith of a servant] are presently justified?"⁶

At first—and second!—glance, Wesley's declarations on acceptance and wrath seem to suggest that prevenience not only *advances* one on the way of salvation but is *transformative* in a conversional sense. Surely, if wrath is lifted, this must mean that the person has "crossed over from death to life."⁷ While acknowledging that Wesley also spoke of prevenient grace in the narrow sense of "God's saving work in fallen humanity *prior to justification*,"⁸ Maddox posits the phrase "pardoning prevenience" to capture the essence of Wesley's convictions regarding prevenience. Describing prevenience in this way might be understood to be pointing simply to the *agenda* of prevenience. However, Maddox seems to suggest pardon as the immediate outcome of any responsiveness of the person. Wesley, says Maddox, came to understand faith to be "justifying from its earliest degree," from the mere inclination to "fear God and work righteousness." He notes, however, that this mere inclination is not accompanied by assurance and is, therefore, in Wesley's view, a "nascent faith" that is "not yet the fullness of Christian faith."⁹

John Tyson arrives at a somewhat different conclusion, but agrees that assurance is a leading indicator of one's progress on the way of salvation. "Justification," he writes, "is a renewed relationship with God in which a person *realizes* that he or she is pardoned, forgiven, loved, and accepted." Acceptance, on the other hand, "indicates a unilateral action on God's part that *is not comprehended or enjoyed* by the person."¹⁰ This is

⁶Randy L. Maddox, "Continuing the Conversation," *Methodist History* 30:4 (July 1992), 237.

⁷John 5:24.

⁸Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 84.

⁹Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 127.

¹⁰ohn H. Tyson, "John Wesley's Conversion at Aldersgate" in *Conversion in the Wesleyan Tradition*, ed. Kenneth J. Collins and John H. Tyson (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001), 36.

a rather open-ended assertion. Is such acceptance “unilateral” in a sense akin to Calvinistic conception of election? Is Tyson suggesting that prevenient grace issues in a universally bestowed acceptance (in a distinctly salvific sense)?¹¹ Probably not. It is more likely that the intent of the term “unilateral” is to affirm the certainty of a divine, favorable response to the one fearing God and working righteousness. It is “unilateral” in the sense that it is a reality independent of any *experiential* confirmation. The situation is that wrath no longer abides; however, the person simply does not *know* in his or her *experience* that it no longer abides. That is, the person *feels* the wrath of God but this is actually a false reading—such as when a medical test returns a “false positive.” The person blessed with (but not enjoying) the divine acceptance therefore “remains in an infant state of salvation,” Tyson concludes, and remains, for the time being, “on the ‘porch’ of redemption.”¹²

As something of an alternative to these views, Scott Kisker has suggested that Wesley’s affirmation is directed at those who have been justified but *not* yet regenerated; that is, while the wrath of God has been lifted (suggesting pardon and “a degree of justifying faith”), what is yet to come is freedom from the dominion of sin—what Kisker styles as the signal element of regeneration.¹³ In the end, for Kisker the distinguishing factor is, again, simply the lack of assurance: the one having the faith of a servant does not “perceive” the fact that she is justified, and thus remains fearful and under the conviction of sin on account of lacking “full justifying faith.”¹⁴

From these few examples, it is clear that Wesley’s declarations concerning divine acceptance and wrath may not be as theologically straightforward as might first appear. Are we missing something here? I answer, “Yes!” and suggest that what we are missing is context. First, a missing context is the long-running conversation concerning divine acceptance. Second, we are missing the broader context surrounding the declaration of wrath no longer abiding, as stated by Wesley in his sermon, *On Faith*.

¹¹The qualifying phrase in parentheses is added to distinguish between divine acceptance in the sense that God is “no respecter of persons” and divine acceptance in the “distinctly salvific” sense of reconciled relationship with God.

¹²Tyson, “John Wesley’s Conversion at Aldersgate,” 36.

¹³Scott Kisker, “Justified but Unregenerate? The Relationship of Assurance to Justification and Regeneration in the Thought of John Wesley,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 28 (1993), 54.

¹⁴Kisker, “Justified but Unregenerate?,” 5.

The Conversation on Divine Acceptance

In his comments on Acts 10:34-35 in *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament*, Wesley spoke of Cornelius as representative of those who were “in some measure accepted.”¹⁵ With these comments he was engaging a conversation long underway, and one that has resurfaced on several occasions since then. The Puritan divine, William Perkins, had written extensively on the subject of divine acceptance in *The Cases of Conscience*. Perkins, though himself a supralapsarian, articulated a preparationist point of view when it came to outlining how it is that the elect come to saving faith. He identified ten divine actions by which a person is brought into God’s favor. The first four are those of “first grace” and, he says, “are onely workes of preparation going before [justifying] grace; the other actions which follow are effects of [justifying] grace.”¹⁶

Perkins elsewhere made the distinction between reconciliation “in nature” and reconciliation “in God’s acceptance.” The immediate context of this distinction is Perkins’ declaration that “the desire of reconciliation with God in Christ is reconciliation it selfe.” He goes on to qualify this assertion by noting that “a desire to be reconciled is not reconciliation in nature”—that is, in actual fact—“(for the desire is one thing, and reconciliation, another)” but is reconciliation “in God’s acceptance: for if we being touched throughly for our sinnes, doe desire to haue them pardoned, and to bee alone with God, God accepts vs as reconciled.” This was not itself “a liuely faith” but was, says Perkins citing the words of Theodore Beza, “a pledge of the Fathers will” and is in this sense “as truly in the acceptance with God as the prayer made in liuely faith.”¹⁷

¹⁵John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament* (London, 1788), 386.

¹⁶William Perkins, *The first part of The cases of conscience Wherein specially, three maine questions concerning man, simply considered in himselfe, are propounded and resolved, according to the word of God*. 2nd ed. (Cambridge: printed by John Legat, 1604), 46-7.

¹⁷William Perkins, “A Graine of Musterd-Seede: Or, the Least Measure of Grace That Is or Can Be Effectual to Saluation,” *The Workes of That Famous and Worthy Minister of Christ in the Vniuersitie of Cambridge, Mr. William Perkins. The First Volume: Newly Corrected According to His Owne Copies. With Distinct Chapters, and Contents of Euery Booke, and Two Tables of the Whole: One, of the Matter and Questions, the Other of Choice Places of Scripture* (London: printed by Iohn Legatt, 1626), 1:639-41.

The British delegation to the Synod of Dort also held a preparationist point of view. While the Orthodox Continental Reformed theologians attending the synod insisted that the elect are unwilling to turn to God until their effectual calling, the preparationists believed that God gave the will to convert and thus allowed for a measure of cooperation on the part of the elect. Later in the seventeenth century we find Herman Witsius being called upon to arbitrate discord among British Calvinists over the question of preparation. Witsius diplomatically ruled in favor of doctrinal antinomianism, that is, the radical exclusion of good works, and resolved the dispute by insisting that those espousing a preparationist view were simply misreading the situation. He maintained that what the British preparationists described were “not preparations for regeneration, but the fruits and effects of the first regeneration” since they necessarily “suppose some life of the soul, which spiritual attends to spiritual things.”¹⁸ Thus, according to Witsius, the British delegates are, in actual fact, describing the *advance* in the life of the elect from “passive justification”¹⁹ to coming to “fiducially lay hold on Christ, and apply himself to the practice of true godliness.”²⁰

When Wesley composed his *Explanatory Notes* on Acts 10, he relied in part on John Guyse’s *The Practical Expositor*. To illustrate how lively the conversation was on the matter of acceptance, it is worth noting Guyse’s commentary on the passage:

[Peter] cannot reasonably be supposed to have meant, that all persons who served God according to their present light, whatsoever their religion were, should be accepted of him to eternal life: And [Peter’s being sent] . . . (*chap* xi. 14.) intimates, that [Cornelius and his household] were not already in a state of salvation, according to the tenor of the gospel. I therefore take it, that acceptance, here spoken of, relates chiefly, if not only, to the proselytes of the gate being so far accepted of God, as to be admitted to an enjoyment of the privilege of the gospel for their

¹⁸Herman Witsius, *The Economy of the Covenants between God and Man, Comprehending a Complete Body of Divinity*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: printed by Thomas Turnbull, 1803), 1:367.

¹⁹By “passive justification” Witsius is speaking of the view that justification takes place solely as an act of divine grace exercised *upon* persons—that is, apart from any co-operancy whatsoever.

²⁰Witsius, *The Economy of the Covenants*, 1:368.

own salvation; and that their fearing God, and working righteousness, as far as it went, was agreeable to the perfections and will of God, though it did not give them a claim to eternal life. . . .²¹

In his comment on the passage, Wesley affirms three things: 1. That Christ is the basis for this acceptance (“Through *Christ*, though he knows him not”); 2. That none are excluded from this acceptance (“The assertion is express, and admits of no exception”); and 3. They that fear God and work righteousness are in the favor of God, even without the written word and ordinances. However, in making these affirmations, Wesley does not take exception to Guyse’s view. Wesley, too, could conceive of being in the favor of God in a sense distinct from that of reconciled relationship. Indeed, this broader view of the favor of God—of being “agreeable to the perfections and will of God”—is certainly compatible with Wesley’s view that properly stewarded grace is answered with yet more grace. The difficulty *we* have is in reining in our tendency to insist on a more narrow understanding of the term “favor” (i.e., as being descriptive only of reconciled relationship with God).

John Fletcher’s assertion on the acceptance enjoyed by Cornelius and his household is also noteworthy. Although in *Essay on Truth* Fletcher had stated that this acceptance was “according to an inferior dispensation,”²² he realized that his opponents (and perhaps constituents, too) would argue that to affirm such acceptance as on a par with reconciled relationship with God is to endanger the spiritual welfare of true seekers by marginalizing their need of Christ. Anticipating this criticism, he poses as his own antagonist: “If we see our way by the candle of Moses, as thou intimatest, what need is there that ‘the Sun of righteousness’ should arise upon us with ‘healing in his wings’?”²³ In reply, Fletcher pointed to

²¹John Guyse, *The Practical Expositor: Or, an Exposition of the New Testament, in the Form of a Paraphrase; With Occasional Notes* (Edinburgh: printed by W. Darling, 1775), 120-21. Emphasis mine.

²²Fletcher, *Essay on Truth* in *The first part of an equal check to Pharisaism and Antinomianism* (Shrewsbury: printed by J. Eddowes, 1774), 240. This is important to note because, although Fletcher developed a covenant (federal) theology in a direction that was not wholly shared by Wesley, the idea that those salvation-historical eras (dispensations) prior to that of the Christian era were inferior was a commonly held understanding of God’s redemptive work in human history. See Rodes, “From Faith to Faith,” 62-90.

²³Fletcher, *Essay on Truth* (1774), 239.

the biblical record of Cornelius' response to Peter's declaration of divine acceptance:

But although St. Peter began his discourse by acknowledging that his pious hearers "were accepted with God," none of the congregation said, "Well, if we *are accepted*, we are already in a state of salvation, and therefore, we need not 'hear words whereby we shall be saved.'"²⁴

Finally, to this overview of the long conversation on divine acceptance we must also note how Wesley himself modified the term "acceptance." He spoke of "*in some measure accepted*" or "*in a degree . . . 'accepted with him.'*"²⁵

If what Wesley was intending by the phrase "accepted of Him" has suffered some disconnection from its context, this can be attributed in part to his own assertion that the wrath of God no longer abides on those having the faith of a servant. So, we must take up this assertion.

The Question of Wrath Abiding

In light of the significant implications of Wesley's declaration of God's wrath no longer abiding upon one with the faith of a servant, revisiting the broader context is paramount. To begin, it is important to note that Wesley published the sermon *On Faith* in the *Arminian Magazine* in late 1788 and followed it with the publication in March of 1789 of a letter touching on the servant-son metaphor. Then, a few months later, Wesley published his sermon *On the Discoveries of Faith*. Both sermons had been written within two months of each other in the spring of 1788; and the letter had originally come to Wesley back in 1779. While there are points of connection among all three, the contextual issue is brought to light clearly enough by looking at the two sermons.

First, the background of Wesley's sermon *On Faith* may well be John Fletcher's *Essay on Truth* (1774).²⁶ The resonance between the essay and

²⁴Ibid., 240.

²⁵See Wesley's commentary on Acts 10:35. Wesley, *ENNT*, 386. See also Wesley, "On the Discoveries of Faith," *Works* (BE) §13, 4:35. Emphasis mine.

²⁶Outler's footnote on Wesley's acknowledgement of Fletcher's "treatise on the various dispensations of the grace of God" suggests that Wesley is referencing Fletcher's *The Doctrines of Grace and Justice*. See fn. 2 of Wesley, "On Faith," in *Works*, 3:492. While this may be correct, the parallels between Fletcher's *Essay on Truth* and Wesley's sermon are noteworthy.

Wesley's 1788 sermon is so pronounced that we are hard-pressed to say if Wesley was echoing Fletcher or Fletcher was re-presenting Wesley more than a decade earlier.²⁷ Either way, it appears that Wesley's declaration of wrath no longer abiding was not a new theological turn taken by Wesley in the last several years of his life.

In his *Essay*, Fletcher rebukes those who would "drive into the burning lake Christ's *sheep*, which are *big with young*" the likes of "pious Melchisedec, devout Lydia, and charitable Cornelius" whom, he says, are waiting for "brighter displays of gospel-grace."²⁸ Part of his defense of these "sincere worshipers" was to distinguish those who "sincerely seek the kingdom" from those who are "absolute unbelievers."²⁹ Fletcher cross-examined his objectors: "Ought we to keep from those who sincerely seek the kingdom of God the comfort that the Gospel allows them? Are not 'they that seek the Lord' commanded 'to rejoice.' And how can they do it, if 'the wrath of God abideth on them,' as it certainly does on all absolute unbelievers?"³⁰

But whereas the context of Fletcher's *Essay on Truth* and of Wesley's sermon *On Faith* was in *defense* of those sincerely seeking after God, the very same verse (John 3:36) could be used by Wesley in the *opposite* way to describe this *same* person—the one having the faith of a servant! The difference was neither the person nor the person's state of affairs spiritually, but was the aim of the message. This is evident in the first of Wesley's 1748 series of sermons on the Sermon on the Mount. When he spoke of the wrath of God, he was speaking *not* of the absolute unbeliever but of those "who know themselves, who are convinced of sin; those to whom God hath given that first repentance which is previous to faith in Christ." He describes them as painfully sensitized to their sin. "Above all," he says, "the guilt of 'not believing on the name of the only-begotten Son of God' " lies heavily upon that person who, realizing the depths of their sinful estate, asks, "how . . . shall I escape, who neglect so great salvation!"? The answer is sobering. There is no way to put a hopeful face on the situation! "He that believeth not is condemned already," and "the wrath of God abideth on him."³¹

²⁷We do know that Wesley was apparently well-acquainted with Fletcher's *Essay on Truth*. See Wesley's August 29, 1777, letter to Alexander Knox in John Telford, *The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.*, 6:272-3.

²⁸Fletcher, *Essay on Truth* (1774), 237.

²⁹*Ibid.*, 169.

³⁰Fletcher, *Essay on Truth* (1774), 237.

³¹Wesley, Sermon 21, "Upon Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount," §I.5 in *Works*, 1:478.

Forty years later—and two months after writing his sermon, *On Faith*—Wesley wrote a sermon titled *On the Discoveries of Faith* in which we hear an echo of the 1748 sermon. Rather than offer the *consolation* that the wrath of God no longer abides, Wesley emphasizes that the terror of God's wrath weighs heavily upon those who have the faith of a servant since they are convinced of their evil nature, evil tempers, evil words, and evil actions. Utterly guilty before God, they fear his wrath, the punishment they deserve, and consignment to eternal death. They find themselves "altogether sinful, altogether guilty, and altogether helpless."³² And rather than saying, "It really isn't so; the wrath of God actually *no longer* abides," Wesley drives the point home as relentlessly as he did in 1748.

I suggest that Wesley's view might be most fairly and accurately summarized as follows: where God's gracious purposes are co-operantly advanced, the wrath of God does not abide *in the same sense* that it abides upon those who are unresponsive to the divine initiatives to awaken them from the slumber of their sinful estate. Conversely, it is also the case that the wrath of God *abides* upon those who *are* responding to such divine initiatives in a way that it does *not* abide upon the *unresponsive*.³³ That is, whereas the unresponsive are generally oblivious to the abiding wrath of God, those who are responding are now fully alert to their helpless estate as evidenced in the very fact that they feel deeply the wrath of God upon them as ones who have offended a holy God.

Wesley does not see these distinctions as in conflict with each other. In fact, they are two sides of a single coin. On the one hand, Wesley had no interest in relieving the intense experience of the wrath of God. One of the accomplishments of prevenient grace was the re-inscription of the moral law upon the heart. This re-inscription did not mitigate the reality of humanity's "lostness" but acted as the divine gracious initiative in bringing humanity to terms with its lostness. An experience of God's wrath that not only *threatened* despair but that *delivered* on the threat was

³²Wesley, Sermon 117, "On the Discoveries of Faith," §12 in *Works*, 4:34-5.

³³This double entendre of abiding wrath is actually portrayed in Wesley's commentary on the story of the jailor in Acts 16:30, who certainly was under the wrath of God prior to the earthquake but who had no sensitivity to this abiding wrath until he became responsive: "Sirs . . . What must I do to be saved? from the guilt I feel, and the vengeance I fear. Undoubtedly God then set his sins in array before him, and convinced him in the clearest and strongest manner that the wrath of God abode upon him." Wesley, *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament* (1788), 409.

a critical juncture on the way of salvation that Wesley was consistently unwilling to obviate.

On the other hand, Wesley was radically defensive of any and all who had set foot on the way of salvation. However, he was not naïve about beginnings—even ones *earnestly* undertaken! This is evident in Wesley's response to William Law. In *Spirit of Prayer*, Law had contended that in those who have begun to gain "the painful sense of what [they] are," the first prayer rising up is "all humility."³⁴ Wesley responded that "[i]n its first kindling nothing is found, but Pain, Wrath, and Darkness." And while "during the first Convictions" there is "very often" found "sweet Gleams of *Light*, Touches of *Joy*, of *Hope*, and of *Love*, mixt with Sorrow and Fear . . . much less is it true, that the *first Prayer* of an awakening Sinner is *all Humility*." Rather, "a Sinner newly awakened has always more or less Confidence in himself, in what he *is*, or *has*, or *does*, and *will do*; which is not *Humility*, but downright *Pride*."³⁵

However realistic Wesley was with respect to the beginnings of those having a "mere inclination to fear God and work righteousness," he was, nevertheless, unapologetically adamant about the value of beginnings, however small. The "infant state" was divinely favored. Even a "mere inclination" was enough to call forth Wesley's best defence against any who would despise the day of small beginnings.

Conclusion

The question at the outset was this: when Wesley spoke of the divine acceptance in the passage above, was he arguing for prevenient grace as regenerative? That is, is the divine *engagement* of the human heart inherently *transformative* in a conversional sense? Without doubt, Wesley would affirm the idea of the salvific *accomplishments* of God's gracious prevenience. Certainly, the situation was changed when "God . . . being reconciled to man through the Son of his love, . . . in some measure reinscribed the law on the heart of his dark, sinful creature."³⁶ Accordingly, he described prevenience in terms of "the light that *enlightens* every man

³⁴William Law, *The Second Part of the Spirit of Prayer: or, The Soul Rising out of the Vanity of Time into the Riches of Eternity* (London, 1750), 172.

³⁵Wesley, *A Letter to the Reverend Mr. Law: Occasioned by Some of His Late Writings* (London, 1756), 74-5.

³⁶Wesley, Sermon 34, "The Original, Nature, Properties, and Use of the Law," §I.4-5 in *Works*, 2:7.

coming into the world.” But when he spoke of “the first wish to please God” as implying a “tendency toward life” and “some degree of salvation,”³⁷ was he declaring that prevenience is “the light that *enlivens* every man coming into the world”?

Understanding the broader context of Wesley’s declarations of divine acceptance and of wrath no longer abiding is essential to developing conclusions regarding his soteriology and, particularly for the purpose at hand, to drawing inferences with respect to his understanding of the salvific accomplishments of prevenient grace. It is true that Wesley had long spoken in terms of “the Successive Conquests of Grace, and the gradual Process of the Work of God in the Soul.”³⁸ However, when his declarations in *On Faith* are placed against the textual evidence and the larger context, proposals that Wesley significantly altered (in the direction of broadening) his soteriological views during his mature years are less convincing.

Appreciating the larger context and the nuances which permitted Wesley to speak both of wrath *no longer* abiding and of wrath *intensely* abiding—both in relation to the same person!—suggests that his aim in making the declarations in *On Faith* was not to argue that prevenience is regenerative in the sense of crossing over from death to life.³⁹ To infer *on the basis of these two declarations* that Wesley was, in fact, making the case that prevenience is itself regenerative in the sense of reconciling one with God will require explaining the declarations in the opposite direction as found in the companion sermon, *On the Discoveries of Faith*.

One outcome of isolating the declarations of divine acceptance and of wrath no longer abiding has been to overstate of Wesley’s understanding of the place of assurance and to overlook his chief concern in the two late sermons, *On Faith* and *On the Discoveries of Faith*. While there were certainly implications with respect to his understanding of assurance, a con-

³⁷Wesley, “On Working Out Our Own Salvation,” §II.1 in *Works*, 3:204.

³⁸John Wesley, “The Preface,” *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (London: printed by W. Strahan, 1740), iv.

³⁹It is noteworthy, though early in the formative stages of his soteriological convictions, that Wesley had no qualm with Josiah Tucker’s assertion defining the salvific limits of prevenient grace: “the preventing grace of God, which is common to all, is sufficient to *bring* us to Christ, though it is not sufficient to carry us any *further* till we are justified.” John Wesley, “The Principles of a Methodist” (1742), §29 in *The Methodist Societies: History, Nature, and Design*, in *Works*, 9:64.

cern common to both sermons was to address the realities of being awakened and of continuing to be responsive to God in that awakened state. In making these declarations, Wesley was again stepping off the dimensions of soteriological convictions he had held from at least the mid-1740s. Accordingly, his declarations of divine acceptance and of wrath no longer abiding must be pressed no further than what the historical and textual context can support. By exercising such caution, we gain the advantage of securing the depth and the textures of Wesley's soteriology.

INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE WITHIN THE PARADIGM OF ARMINIUS' FIRST PRINCIPLE OF THEOLOGICAL DISCOURSE

by

Nathan Napier

Scholars of the Wesleyan-Arminian tradition place heavy emphasis on the work of John Wesley, but often neglect how Jacobus Arminius' theology can contribute to today's inter-religious dialogue. Indeed, it is possible to be raised in this tradition, be educated through its institutions, and yet learn precious little of Jacobus Arminius and the critical role he has played in shaping this unique Christian heritage. Consequently, very little work has been done with the intention of interfacing Arminius with the world's religions or inter-religious dialogue in general. I will explore that gap.

I begin by refuting the common notion that the only contribution Arminius made to theology is "free will." Even seasoned scholars have mistaken Arminius' first theological principle as that of "free will." In reality, the primary motivation for Arminius was the need to have a theology that was consistent with an *a priori* recognition of the ontological goodness of God, particularly as God is revealed through Jesus the Christ. For Arminius, the first principle of theology was the goodness of God. Any theology that did not preserve the integrity of this assertion had to be dismissed.

First, then, I will establish Arminius' quest for the centrality of God's goodness as a primary starting point for engaging in inter-religious dialogue. Second, I will delineate the difference between the shade of Calvinism of which Arminius was a part and the more heavily Reformed tradition that seemed to make God culpable for the deprivation of a humanity predetermined to be lost. I will argue that in Arminius one finds greater hospitality in coming to the table of inter-religious conversation than is afforded in a more rigidly Reformed setting because of his insistence that the goodness of God be the guiding theological principle for engaging theology with "others." Third, I will discuss the way in which Arminius

viewed humanity outside of the church. Lastly, I will venture some suggestions for using Arminius as a viable conversation partner in inter-religious dialogue.

Arminius and God's Goodness

According to Robert Peterson and Michael Williams, "the incompatibilist commitment to the freedom of the will as the highest value and first principle of doctrinal construction moves Arminianism to argue that human choices and actions have no meaning if God directs them by his ordaining power."¹ Even so, at no point in the beginning of Arminius' "Orations" does he begin his theological work by making an emphatic commitment to a Reformation synergistic humanism in which "free will" is the chief and primary principle that guides all Arminian conclusions. In fact, much like the beginning of John Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, in which Calvin begins his work by articulating the "knowledge of God" and the "knowledge of man,"² Arminius goes to great lengths to explain that God is totally other, infinite and transcendent. The beginning of Arminius' theological precepts reads like a "who's who" of Reformation theology. Full of Reformation hallmarks such as God's sovereignty, glory, holiness, truth, Christocentrism, human depravity, God's will, predestination, faith, salvation, justification, etc., at no point in his theological prolegomena does Arminius surrender "this object in the infinity of its nature"³ to human will or choice. If anything, Arminius' work sets forth a sharp distinction between humanity and God.⁴

The common view that Arminius was merely interested in "free will" contra his opponents has led many to trivialize the contributions of

¹Robert A. Peterson and Michael D. Williams, *Why I Am Not An Arminian* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2004), 157.

²Vergilius Ferm, *Classics in Protestantism* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1959), 68-71. The Knowledge of God is key for Calvin because therein one learns how God acts and relates to the world, and by consequence, one is made aware of their humanness and the limitations of human knowledge to apprehend the Divine. Arminius similarly starts with creaturely knowledge, yet such knowledge is grounded in the goodness of the Divine Being. To compare and contrast, see John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge, (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2008), 1-25.

³James Arminius, *The Works of James Arminius*, London ed., trans. James Nichols and William Nichols, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986), 1:328.

⁴*Ibid.*, 2:192.

Arminius or just misunderstand his thought altogether.⁵ Contemporary Arminians have either become indifferent toward Arminius or have been predisposed toward his biased Calvinistic interpreters. The contributions of Arminius have been limited even among his most staunch defenders. They assess his work positively, yet his real first and reoccurring principle of the goodness of God remains hidden among the more attractive and polarizing debate on predestination.⁶ Arminius has thus become a footnote to the tradition that bears his name and seems to be only a minor figure on the theological stage that has been eclipsed by the advent of John Wesley, suggesting that Wesley saw most clearly what Arminius only saw “dimly.”⁷ It would seem that Christianity needed the protesting Arminius to free itself from the rigidity of western theological traditions so that Wesley could come along and reveal the role of responsible grace. Yet, when one understands Arminius as merely the theologian of free will, one is left with very few reasons to plumb the depths of his theology. Arminius ceases to become a resource that can inform more than the tired complexities of contemporary debates between Wesleyans and pseudo-Calvinists.

Instead, Arminius should be remembered for his commitment to the scholastic tradition of theology and for an overt commitment to the Goodness of God, the Best Being. It is only because Arminius starts with this proper object of theology, a God that is simply good, not freely good,⁸ that Arminius is able to arrive at his conclusions. In fact, it is not an a priori theological commitment to the beatific vision of goodness that proves as his starting point, as if this is a romantic idea to which Arminius must commit himself. It is, rather, the revelation of God in Jesus Christ through the scriptures that leads Arminius to his first principle of theology: the goodness of God.

⁵See Roger E. Olson, *Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 40-43.

⁶One classical work where such is the case is Mildred Bangs Wynkoop's, *Foundation of Wesleyan-Arminian Theology* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1976) and H. O. Wiley's, *Introduction to Christian Theology*, vol. 1 (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1946), 98-99 and 258-59. Wiley gives a small paragraph to God's goodness, yet even here fails to note the emphasis Arminius places on goodness and instead relies on biblical proof texts to establish divine goodness. See 101.

⁷Wynkoop, 68.

⁸Arminius, *Works*, 2: 707.

There are several examples wherein it can be clearly seen that the goodness of God is the first principle of his theology and the theme that diachronically unfolds within his theology. Foremost, God is good in his being and his being is spirit.⁹ This is clearly seen at the outset of Arminius' work as he defines the object of theology and its (God's) ontological characteristics. He notes,

But God is himself the OBJECT OF THEOLOGY. . . . He is the Best Being; he being the first and chief good, and goodness itself; he alone is good, as good as goodness itself . . . his liberality is only equaled by the boundless treasures which he possesses, both of which are infinite and restricted only by the capacity of the recipient, which he appoints as a limit and measure to the goodness of his nature and to the communication of himself.¹⁰

It should be noted that this statement is made by Arminius after a decade of turmoil regarding his theology and interpretation of Scripture.¹¹ Ten years into strife, the first principle he proposes is not humanity's efficacious response to God, that is, human free will. It is, rather, that God is good. God's essence is goodness; God cannot choose to be good because God is good.¹² This is in juxtaposition to the Lutheran and Calvinistic predispositions toward nominalist voluntarism with which Arminius would have contended. For Arminius to begin with such a firm affirmation of the goodness of God is to imply that his conclusions will also be consistent with what it means to say that God is good. This, of course, marks a major distinction between Arminius and his hyper-Calvinistic detractors. Arminius is confident that one can say God is good and know what that means because one has seen God revealed through Scripture and Jesus Christ.¹³ Good and evil are not ambiguous terms that are lost within divine combustibility, wherein they are synonymous

⁹Arminius, *Works*, 2:338. John Wesley will later affirm the same in *The Works of John Wesley*, 3rd Ed. 14 vols. (Grand Rapids, Baker: 1978), 4: 42.

¹⁰Arminius, *Works of James Arminius*, 1:324-326.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 321. See also Carl Bangs, *Arminius: A Study in the Dutch Reformation* (Nashville, Abingdon: 1971), 138-152. Bangs notes that questions regarding Arminius' positions emerged around 1591.

¹²*Ibid.*, 33. In his "Defense against Thirty-One Articles," Arminius emphatically denies God's ability to be anything but Good.

¹³Olson, 98. Arminius also grounds the primacy of God's goodness within a Thomistic paradigm.

because all action originates in the first cause which is God.¹⁴ Goodness is known through the works of Christ and is apprehended by us through creation.¹⁵ Thus, Arminius' commitment is to a theology grounded in the character of God, not in a humanistic love affair with free will.

In addition to God as the proper object of theology and Arminius' emphasis on inherent goodness, Arminius also demonstrates his commitment to God's goodness when he explains how one is to understand God and God's relationship to God's self. As Richard Muller notes, "Although Arminius wrote no separate orations or treatises on the doctrine of God, we have more than enough material in his *Disputations Private and Public* from which to elicit a highly detailed and philosophically sophisticated view of the divine essence and attributes. Whereas other topics frequently receive only sketchy thesis statements, the doctrine of God appears developed at length and in considerable depth."¹⁶

His "Disputations" on God offers critical insight into the role of goodness as an divine innate predicate and demonstrates his dependence on Thomistic tradition for patterning his arguments after the proofs of the existence and nature of God. Scholastic dependence was possible because when Arminius was formulating his responses and disputations there was no universal model through which doctrine was grounded. The Reformation was still in the process of codifying theological structures in response to Catholicism. The Reformers, such as Calvin and Luther, were more discursive, exegetical and polemical in presentation. Arminius, however, patterns his writings in logical dialectics and incorporates Scripture within the tradition of high scholasticism.

What's most striking about Arminius is his indebtedness to the medieval theological commitment of the *summum bonum*,¹⁷ a marked distinction between himself and his Reformation contemporaries who

¹⁴Arminius, *Works*, 2:707, "The distinction into the will of God into that which is secret or of his good pleasure, and that which is revealed or signified, cannot bear a rigid examination."

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 2:338-339.

¹⁶Richard A. Muller, *God, Creation and Providence in the Thought of Jacobus Arminius: Sources and Directions of Scholastic Protestantism in the Era of Early Orthodoxy* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 84.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, "Arminius' doctrine of God is fashioned with a consistent emphasis on the relationship of God to things *ad extra* under the categories of understanding and will—with a specific focus on God as *summum bonum* and final cause of all things."

would speak about the goodness of God but not ground their theology therein. This commitment is consistent with the Protestant emphasis on Scripture and God. It differs, however, in that Arminius places his entire theological edifice on the doctrine of God and constructs his theology from the predicates set forth therein. Very few Reformers worked out a detailed doctrine of God in the scholastically logical and dialectal fashion of Arminius, with an emphasis on God's essential goodness.¹⁸

In his Disputation "On the Object of the Christian Religion: And, First, About God, Its Primary Object, What God is" Arminius begins his philosophical explorations by affirming again that God's nature is goodness and excellence, so that only a God whose nature is such is worthy of our attention. After "proving" the existence of God via analogy and dialectics, Arminius once again affirms that God is a Good Being, so that God is understood to be Goodness itself, not a being that does Good.¹⁹ Arminius affirms this nature, not because God's essence is in its substance available to us. He clearly says this is not the case.²⁰ Arminius adamantly affirms God's goodness because God is the creator. As creator, God not only made all of creation, but humanity which is fashioned in the image of God. Via analogy, the implication is that the image of God and creation is good and can therefore only come from a Good Being.²¹ Arminius' commitment to a reformed style of the Thomistic beatific vision separates him from his Calvinistic contemporaries since they traditionally placed more emphasis on God's impassible sovereignty rather than God's impassible Goodness. Arminius affirms these orthodox and reformed predicates without losing sight of the goodness of God as an *a priori* starting point via analogy of creation, humanity and Jesus the Christ.²²

Arminius, Reformed Theology, and Predestination

If the *summum bonum* is to be understood as the object of theology and the scholastic starting point of Arminius' doctrine of God, it is doctrinally

¹⁸Ibid., 87. Muller notes chiefly Melancthon, Zacharias Ursinus, and Lambert Daneau as those interested in the proofs as methodological starting points for theology, but notes that the majority of Reformed scholars either did not employ them or were ambivalent toward their use.

¹⁹Arminius, *Works*, 3:336-38.

²⁰Ibid., 2:338.

²¹Ibid.

²²For Arminius' understanding of Jesus and his systematic treatment of the Trinity, see *Works*, 2:379-411, 2:690-695, 2:707-709, and 2:719.

worked out within the debate on predestination. Typically, an analysis of Arminius and predestination vacillates across various dimensions of free will or human agency, yet such focus removes Arminius from his scholastic heritage and prolegomenal starting point. Thus, I will demonstrate the relationship between method/conclusion and also how Arminius' form of Reformed theology differs from his contemporary adversaries, especially on the axis of divine goodness.

Within the scope of Arminius' Reformed context, he clearly considered himself faithful to the ancient and orthodox divines of his time.²³ The norm of proper Christian confession was found in the Belgic Confessions and Hiedelberg Catechism,²⁴ both of which were approved or seen by Calvin and Beza without objection.²⁵ Calvin, Beza and other Reformed divines were certainly regarded as faithful interpreters of doctrine, but these Confessions were the parameters within which Reformed pastors and professors were expected to maneuver. Arminius is accused in his teaching of deviating from these Confessions. At multiple points, however, Arminius affirms his stance within these Reformed teachings. He was not attempting to depart from his Reformed identity but attempting to modify and adjust Reformed theology.²⁶

John Wesley, Carl Bangs, and others have noted the close similarities that exist between Arminius and Calvin, yet the similarities and differences have never directly been the real issue at hand. Arminius never had to contend with Calvin's personal theology in the *Institutes* even though he did at times reference the *Institutes* in his arguments. His times of strife and theological turmoil were concerning his relationship to the said Confessions accepted as norms for the Dutch Reformed Churches of the Netherlands. The issues Arminius raised (which are pertinent to God's goodness and inter-religious dialogue) are those issues that exist beyond the acknowledged Confessions and how the particularities of the said Confessions actually operate at a theological and practical level.

²³Ibid., 1:609,613, 739.

²⁴For a detailed history, see Nicolaas H. Gootjes, *The Belgic Confession: Its History and Sources* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 13-58 and 93-115. Bangs notes that these Confessions were not as authoritative as presumed, thus occasioning Arminius' objection. Arminius, however, does not allow himself to be distanced from these Confessions despite his more liberal interpretive tendencies.

²⁵Gootjes, 67-70 and 89-91.

²⁶Richard Muller, "Historical and Theological Studies: Arminius and the Reformed Tradition," *Westminster Theological Journal* 70 (2008), 21.

On predestination, Arminius clearly seems to suggest that this doctrine, understood as a rigid form of determinism, is not consistent with the Goodness that is God and faithful Reformed theology. He writes:

For this doctrine states that God willed to damn; and, that he might be able to do this, he willed to create, *although creation is the first egress of God's goodness toward his creature*. How vastly different are such statements as these from that expansive goodness of God by which he confers benefits not only on the unworthy, but also on the evil, the unjust and those deserving of punishment.²⁷

This statement is replicated in theme and connotation across Arminius' work. For Arminius, predestination via coercion is problematic because it is not consistent with the Goodness and justice of God, the former of which informs the action of the latter.²⁸ Arminius notes that God acts according to his essentially good nature. The implication is that it would be better for God not to create than to create and suspend goodness toward parts of creation via damnable decrees, thereby disclosing God as anything but Good.

Arminius' lengthy disputation on predestination, in which he demonstrates how this doctrine is inconsistent within the broad scope of theology, is in stark juxtaposition to the Reformed theology he was countering in the Belgic Confession. For him, God knows who, by their free will, will respond to grace, but God does not coercively bring this about. God's knowledge is of a contingent nature, not a determining nature that would violate the autonomy of the creature's will and intellect. In Thomistic fashion, Arminius argued that God's immediate provision as primary cause does not exclude the action of secondary causes, which are the execution of the providence of God as originating within God's self.²⁹

²⁷Arminius, *Works*, 1:695. Emphasis added.

²⁸Ibid., 1:623-624. Throughout his polemical writings Arminius links justice and goodness as two codependent theological principles. God's justice cannot violate God's goodness. He notes that predestination is unjust because it does not regard the obedience of the one being damned arbitrarily. His second point is that predestination is not consistent with God's justice because it rewards humanity with something that does not belong to it.

²⁹Arminius, *Works*, 3:48-49. Arminius calls secondary causes "principles" that are contingent on the primary cause which is God. Also Muller, *God, Creation and Providence in the Thought of Jacobus Arminius*, 147-149.

The issue at hand, and the one of primary interest for interreligious dialogue, is the role of intellect and the effects of intellect on contingency in creation. Unlike the hyper Reformed tradition, Arminius leaves open a space of synergistic participation within the order of salvation. This allows him to hold an orthodox understanding of God while also affirming a synergism that may still be adopted and employed within our contemporary situation for dialogue among ourselves and with persons of other faith traditions. Barry Callen is very clear about the synergism of an orthodox understanding of God.³⁰

Arminius and the Heathen or the Un-elect

Confined to the limits of inter-faith theological language, a literal reading of Arminius would lead one to the conclusion that Arminius would be a modern day exclusivist. It is, of course, a forced nomenclature and anachronistic to use such labels. There is infrequent discussion about people of other faiths in his *Works*, in large part because Arminius' conflict is not with unbelievers or those outside the church, but with his fellow Christians. For Arminius, what is at stake is the nature of theology and a proper construction of the world via theology and its primary object, not recourse to understand his faith in relationship to those of other faiths. This does not mean Arminius cannot be read as such; it simply means this is not his primary concern. There is a hint, however, that within his historical context some of Arminius' teachings were understood to be more accommodating to people outside the ark of the church. A brief synopsis of a few of these accusations and his responses will provide insight into Arminius' approach to other faiths and his exclusivist tendencies.

There were three main accusations against Arminius in which he had to defend himself against misconceptions of his teaching, especially as it relates to those outside the saving decree/knowledge of God. They are articles 16-18 in his "Defense Against Thirty-One Theological Articles." These are accusations against Arminius concerning the doctrine of God and his teachings on faith, grace, predestination, etc., which would indicate Arminius was heterodox in his positions concerning unbelievers. In his responses, we see not only the semantic brilliance of Arminius' implementation of scholastic logic, but his firm affirmation that salvation comes through God in Christ.

³⁰Barry L. Callen, "Soteriological Synergism and its Surrounding Seductions," *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 46.2 (2011): 25-40.

In Article 16, Arminius is accused of teaching that God imparts his efficaciously saving grace to unregenerate persons on occasion of their good works. He roundly rejects this accusation. After delineating the differences of the meaning “unregenerate,” he contends that the only thing pleasing to God is either the action toward initial regeneration or the action of a regenerate person. The acts of unregenerate persons, for Arminius, are the “*occasion* by which God is moved to communicate to them saving grace.” He insists that any action that is good to God is “preceding or subsequent” and “operating and co-operating” in a person who is unregenerate and is in the process of responding to God’s grace. The resurfacing of his doctrine of God and the role of goodness is to be noted here. It is illogical to speak of good works apart from God’s goodness toward the unregenerate person.

In Article 17, Arminius is accused of teaching that God will not deny his grace to any who does what is in him. Arminius first criticizes those who construct the accusation as being unable to make one holistic accusation rather than separate equivocations. Arminius’ response is consistent with his response to article 16, as he once again affirms the dubious logic of his accusers that seem to think Arminius will ever suggest a grace-free moment in the *ordo salutis*. Arminius then turns the argument against his adversaries and accuses them of this Pelagian statement, seeing how they would even entertain to accuse Arminius of such as absurdity.

Arminius is accused in Article 18 of teaching that God converts, without preaching of the gospel, many persons to a saving knowledge of Jesus. In addition, it was suggested that such conversions happen inwardly through the Holy Spirit or through the ministry of angels. To this accusation Arminius bristles, noting that those who accuse him of such calumny cannot provide one example of this “great number of persons” God saves unilaterally. The only example Arminius can find that is even close to this sentiment is that of Zwingli who intimated that for historical personages such as Socrates and Aristides, they would have only had opportunity of Christian salvation through angels or the Holy Spirit since they lived prior to the Scriptures.

The theme that continually resonates through these articles is that regeneration and salvation is thoroughly an act of God. There is nothing within the natural state of reality that empowers any unregenerate person to move toward God without God’s predestining grace that longs to save. Opponents were attempting to caste Arminius as an inclusivist and humanist, both charges that are roundly refuted. Arminius’ responses

showcase his commitment to the efficacious act of God in Jesus the Christ. Regeneration, for Arminius, is not a pluralistic envelopment of all persons into God's gracious act of redemption. It was only inclusive, plural or universal in that God has not limited salvation to a selection of those indiscriminately chosen in a supralapsarian fashion.

God's Goodness as a Paradigm for Inter-Religious Dialogue

Given Arminius' historical context, the question of inter-religious dialogue does seem anachronistic. The absence of any literature on the topic is testament to this reality. Arminius was not concerned with our post-modern tendencies to engage the "other" and develop a Christian theology that is able to speak across cultural and religious boundaries. He is bound to the controversies of his time and his writings are largely polemical responses to those accusing him of deviating from approved Confessions, or they are scholastic arguments on particular theological points of interest such as the doctrine of God or creation. Consequently, one searches in vain to find any positive assessment of other faiths in Arminius' work. Does this mean that Arminius has proved useless to scholars of the Wesleyan-Arminian tradition as we find ourselves in vastly different contexts? Is Arminius' silence on a direct disputation with other faiths imply that Arminius has nothing to offer us as we approach another faith in humility and charity? It does not.

To begin, the theology of Arminius is predicated on the scholastic emphasis of the *summum bonum*, Arminius offers a much deeper and richer place of departure for dialogue than would normally be assumed. Arminius, given his context, did not assess the plurality of goodness in other religions per se, but certainly his conviction that goodness wherever it is found within creation is the result of a good God can be a fruitful place to begin dialogue with other faiths. If Arminius is correct and goodness comes from God, the Chief Good, than any good found anywhere is there because God has created it.³¹ Arminius notes that creation is a testimony to the goodness of God. Wherever there is good, it is the result of the created order being fashioned after the image and likeness of the ground from which it comes, especially as regards human beings.³² If we approach the persons of other faiths with this conviction, that they are created in the image of God and are representative of God's goodness, then we will approach them with respect and dignity in search for the

³¹Arminius, Works, 2:355-57.

³²Ibid., 2:363.

good that God has created within them. In essence, it leads one to a doctrine of the incarnation wherein God, and God's revelation are not limited to our religion or its cultural manifestation.³³

Christianity, therefore, is not sole possessor of God's goodness or the revelation of goodness as such. For a contemporary Arminian, then, it could be argued that, in the "other," God has placed God's self and it is our task to join with them and discover the good that is only found when we engage in life and dialogue. This stance means we come to other faiths in openness and inquiry, seeking not to convert them outrightly (though this could be the result of any serious dialogue) but to see what God is doing in the world and how we might participate with God in the goodness God has created.³⁴ Arminius' context may not have allowed him to embrace this approach, but we may draw the hermeneutical bridge from his context to ours and apply his principles as we engage the other and do ministry in the contemporary scene.

From a literal perspective of his teachings, Arminius would find no salvation outside of Christ; and yet, he likely would suggest that this interaction could cause those who were predestined to believe (which is all of humanity) to recognize their election in Christ. The interaction can be mutually salvific as one gets a fuller picture of God's redemptive purposes across the religious spectrum.³⁵ The dialogue with other religions has for too long been about whether there are multiple roads to the same destination. The question has rarely been asked whether these other religions may in fact be cultural responses to the goodness of the one Triune Spirit working across cultural, religious, and ethnic boundaries.

The relationship of the will and intellect, with the intellect having the capability to move the will toward understanding, is a residue of the

³³The diversification of revelation across multicultural contexts is given good exposition in Paul Knitter's *Jesus and the Other Names* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2002), 23-45, 158. Knitter notes, "To hold up Christian tradition as the sole source or norm for theology is to disrespect what God has revealed elsewhere."

³⁴Leslie Newbegin, *Trinitarian Doctrine for Today's Mission* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 1998), 25-27.

³⁵Randy Maddox, "Wesley and the Question of Truth or Salvation Through Other Religions," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 27:1 (1992), 16-18. Maddox notes that the late Wesley was able to affirm a more positive assessment of other faiths via the character of God. He argues for a Wesleyan position in which God will judge other faiths according to their response to the revelation they do receive. This assumes that God is revealing goodness initially in creation that may not be Christocentric, yet may still be holy.

goodness of God that can offer contemporary Arminian scholars a tool in religious dialogue. Arminius' conviction is that the will is free to respond to the moving of the Holy Spirit. It does not move itself and does not convict itself. It is not moved without an intellectual assent to a form of truth initiated by grace. Truth can be acted upon, even by a sinful will. Arminius notes that the will is flexible between good or evil.³⁶ The grace of God can rescue the will that is perpetually depraved, but only through God's offering of grace and not via heretical Pelagian convictions.

God is good and creation is created in the image of this good God. Humanity has certain elements that were not lost in the fall and are reflective of God, namely, the will which is free and knowledge of God and of things divine. For Arminius the will is not bound to perdition; it is inclined to do the good.³⁷ Predestined damnation is not consistent with the goodness and justice of God; the will is free to be moved intellectually and take its place as that which is predestined to believe on Jesus the Christ. The will may respond to grace because the intellect is given primacy in Arminius' soteriology as the element that conditions ones affections and responses.³⁸ Thus, the themes of prevenient grace and goodness, and their codependency, are both diachronic and synchronic elements in Arminius' theology that allow for a unique portrayal of the character of God and humanity's ability to respond to the presence of God in the world.

From an Arminian perspective, dialogue really is a good, perhaps even the chief end of our inter-faith overtures. In dialogue the intellect is able to apprehend truth and move through grace that makes such truth evident. An Arminian emphasis on the inherent goodness of the intellect as a leftover from the good ground of God means that one can know and ascend to the divine and have the freedom to respond. Not only can the intellect apprehend the good but, because creation is made in the likeness and image of God, so can the person of another faith. The Arminian can affirm this primordial divine Goodness as an immutable goodness that predestines all those that apprehend the truth to act upon it and believe. Thereby, inter-religious dialogue is a task filled with prevenient hopefulness in the immutable goodness of God, unclouded by divine coercion and the sadistic curses often decreed on the "other" of another faith.

³⁶Arminius, *Works*, 3:470.

³⁷Arminius, *Works*, 2:63.

³⁸Richard Muller, "The Priority of the Intellect in the Soteriology of Jacobus Arminius," *Westminster Theological Journal* 55 (1993), 71.

HOW “TRUTH” LIMITS INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE: WHAT WESLEYANS MIGHT LEARN FROM BUDDHISM

by

Wm. Andrew Schwartz

Schubert Ogden argues that one can enter into inter-religious dialogue “only if one can somehow claim truth for one’s own religious beliefs without thereby denying, explicitly, or implicitly, that others’ religious beliefs also may possibly be true.”¹ He then poses the question, “But how is it possible to claim that one’s own beliefs as a Christian are true while allowing at least the possible truth of others’ beliefs as well?”²

It is said that “the truth shall set you free.” I contend, however, that when it comes to interfaith dialogue, some conceptions of truth do more to confine us than free us. That is, if Ogden is correct, and a precondition for dialogue is being able to reconcile divergent truth claims, it seems that a correspondence theory of truth is an underlying deterrent for those who wish to pursue inter-religious dialogue.

By “correspondence theory,” I mean a view which considers a proposition “true” if that proposition properly represents or corresponds to reality. It is common to consider our own beliefs true and all contradictory claims false. As such, a correspondence theory of truth is prone to turning differing claims into divisive claims, and divisive claims into hierarchical claims, whereby one’s own propositions are superior to the propositions of others. By Ogden’s standards, then, this approach does not generate dialogue.

If Wesleyan’s wish to participate in inter-religious dialogue, we should consider an alternative theory of truth. In search of an approach that may be more conducive to dialogue without doing violence to religious belief, a pragmatic theory of truth may prove useful. I will look at

¹Schubert M. Ogden, “Christian Identity and Genuine Openness to the Religious Beliefs of Others,” in *International Buddhist-Christian Theological Encounter*, vol. 25 (2005), 21.

²Ogden, 21.

the tradition of Buddhism as an example of dealing with religious truth in pragmatic terms. After crossing over into Buddhism, I will then cross back into the Wesleyan context to see what lessons Wesleyans might learn from Buddhism with respect to conceptions of truth. I hope that this exercise in comparative theology will provide new ideas about how a pragmatic theory of truth may open the door of more robust opportunities for Wesleyans to engage in inter-religious dialogue.

Wesleyans and Religious Pluralism

Historically, the dominant Christian response to religious diversity has been the practice of evangelistic missions—engaging the other with the intent to convert the other. Holiness churches are no exception here. Floyd Cunningham argues that “those in the Wesleyan holiness tradition have done little to facilitate inter-religious dialogue.”³ He continues by saying that one of the reasons “for this lack of interest in inter-religious dialogue [among Wesleyans] is an assumption that no one is ‘saved’ apart from both Christian conversion and present assurance of it. If that is the presupposition held, there is little need to discuss interfaith cooperation and, rather, a great urgency to evangelize by bold and brash proclamations of the gospel.”⁴

I believe that underlying this dominant Wesleyan response to religious diversity is a presupposed religious exclusivism. At its core, this exclusivism is not so much theological as it is philosophical. In other words, it is not doctrine *per se* that breeds exclusivism, but assumptions about truth and difference. Christian exclusivism, as Harold Netland describes it, is a position that states:

- (a) Jesus Christ is the unique Incarnation of God, fully God and fully man; (b) only through the person and work of Jesus Christ is there the possibility of salvation; (c) the Bible is God’s unique revelation written, and thus is true and authoritative; and (d) where the claims of Scripture are incompatible with those of other faiths, the latter are to be rejected as false.⁵

³Floyd T. Cunningham, “Inter-religious Dialogue: A Wesleyan Holiness Perspective,” in *Grounds for Understanding: Ecumenical Resources for Responses to Religious Pluralism*, edited by Mark Heim (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), 188.

⁴Cunningham, 188.

⁵Harold A. Netland, *Dissonant Voices: Religious Pluralism and the Question of Truth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. Eerdmans Pub., 1991), 34.

To be clear, I do not wish to challenge these doctrines. I do not wish to question the centrality of Jesus, or the uniqueness of the Christian message. What I am suggesting is a new way of understanding, not these doctrines, but our approach to truth in general.

What makes exclusivism exclusive is its rejecting as false all beliefs found incompatible with its own. Naturally, people do not devote themselves to doctrines and ideologies that they believe to be false. Rather, it is expected that all religious devotees adhere to religions that they deem valid. Yet, two contradictory claims cannot both be true. It cannot be both p and $\sim p$. Therefore, exclusivism seems the natural conclusion—we exclude those beliefs that appear incompatible with our own.

If “true” beliefs are understood in terms of correspondence, then a true belief is that belief that properly corresponds to the state of things. In this sense, the true is synonymous with the real. In light of religious diversity, such an approach to truth sets the stage for religious exclusivism. For, if reality is not fragmented, and truth corresponds to reality, then truth too is not fragmented. Given a true belief, any contradictory belief must be false. From the framework of a correspondence theory of truth, it makes sense to be an exclusivist!

It is important to recognize, however, that not all differences are contradictions. Difference may be complimentary rather than contradictory. Therefore, as John Cobb urges, we should first enter into dialogue to determine if those claims which seem to be flat contradictions are in fact what they seem. For example, if an atheist says that God does not exist and a theist claims that God does exist, the two claims appear conflicting, or more strictly, contradictory. And this is certainly implied by the terms “theism” and “atheism.” Yet, it is possible that the concept of God being rejected by the atheist would be equally rejected by the theist. If, by God, the atheist is rejecting an old man with a white beard, or a cruel puppet-master, or one that unilaterally determines all things, then what the atheist is rejecting may not be what the theist is affirming. In such an instance, difference (which on the outset seems like necessary contradictions) is anything but! Methodologically, then, we should begin with dialogue, not divisive assumptions and claims to religious superiority.

Buddhism and Truth

At the core, Buddhism is a tradition concerned with truth. The “Four Noble Truths” found at the center of Buddhism are evidence of this. What is significant, however, is that such truths are not ends in themselves, but means. The Four Noble Truths are not something we are to “believe” as if

such belief is efficacious. Rather, these truths are only valuable in so far as they lead one to liberation. In this way, Buddhist (generally speaking) are soteriological pragmatists—which should be distinguished from American pragmatism. In Buddhist soteriological pragmatism, it is not utility itself that is deemed valuable, but utility to a specific end, namely, salvation/liberation.

In Buddhism, liberation is achieved only when one transcends all impermanence, going beyond all categories, including “truth.” We are to use reason in order to overcome reason; we are to use truth to overcome truth. Therefore, truth claims, from a Buddhist perspective, are tools. One should consider truth as a vehicle for getting to where one needs to go. As Arvind Sharma writes, “one should not lose sight of the fact that all proposals are finally disposable, to be disposed of like the raft after the other shore is reached.”⁶

The raft is a common analogy in Buddhism, the idea being that rafts are a metaphorical means by which we can travel from one state of being to another, from our current state of ignorance to a state of enlightenment. Therefore, the idea that truth is like a raft, which is useful for getting to a certain destination but of little use when we arrive on the shore, provides a very practical understanding of truth. Clinging to the “truth” is like strapping a raft to one’s back after reaching the final shore. The one who attempts this never fully reaches the destination.

A common story that expresses this Buddhist pragmatic concern is the story of the poisoned arrow. In this discourse, found in the middle-length discourses of the Pali Canon, the Buddha is instructing a student not to be overly concerned with metaphysical matters, such as whether or not the cosmos is eternal, if the soul and body are the same, if there is life after death, etc. To illustrate to the student how misguided these sorts of concerns are, the Buddha tells a story about a man who was wounded with a poisoned arrow. As the story goes, the wounded man refused to remove the arrow until he knew a long list of “truths”: Who shot me? What is the person’s occupation? Where is the person from? Is the person tall or short? What kind of bow was used? As the Buddha notes, “the man would die and those things would still remain unknown to him.”⁷

⁶Arvind Sharma, *The Philosophy of Religion: A Buddhist Perspective* (Oxford University Press, 1995), 144.

⁷*Cula-Malunkiyovada Sutta*, translated by Thanissaro Bhikkhu, <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.063.than.html> (accessed February 29, 2012).

The moral of the story is to concern yourself with immediate matters which, from a Buddhist perspective, is suffering and the removal of it. I believe such pragmatism can help one move beyond original exclusivism to a more open and hospitable view regarding the religious other, all the while not undermining the “truth” of one’s own tradition.

Crossing Back—A New Wesleyan Perspective

With a shift from “truth” as correspondence to “truth” as utility, one needs to establish criteria by which something is considered useful. When it comes to Buddhist pragmatism, this criteria must be rooted in Buddhist values and convictions, such as helping one attain Enlightenment. Similarly, a Wesleyan pragmatism must have its criteria rooted in Wesleyan convictions. The question then becomes, what sorts of internal resources might guide a Wesleyan pragmatic theory of truth?

Perhaps the doctrine of inward and outward holiness is one such criterion. One of the central concerns—possibly a defining characteristic of the holiness traditions—is the pursuit of holiness. According to Melvin Dieter, “Wesley declared that the supreme and overruling purpose of God’s plan of salvation is to renew men’s and women’s hearts in His own image. . . . All the grand currents of biblical salvation history moved toward this one end . . . fulfillment and perfection in this life.”⁸ Dieter later states that the purpose of sanctification “is moral and ethical and not merely a Christian’s claim to some special standing before God. . . .”⁹

If Wesleyans wish to adopt a more pragmatic approach to truth, perhaps it can be rooted in Wesley’s doctrine of inward and outward holiness, which is characterized by perfect love and care for the poor and oppressed. In this way, Wesleyans can be open to the “truth” of other traditions, in so far as others exemplify holiness.

One criticism of this perspective may be that it presupposes “holiness” as the only goal, over-against salvation. This is not my intent. In fact, it is quite possible that there are many goals. But with a multiplicity of ends comes a plurality of means—all of which are in some sense true and in another sense false. In other words, while this pragmatic approach

⁸Melvin E. Dieter, “The Wesleyan Perspective,” in *Five Views on Sanctification*, ed. Stanley N. Gundry (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1987), 15.

⁹Dieter, “The Wesleyan Perspective,” 32.

may allow for more than one “true” way, it does not preclude the possibility that there are also many “false” ways.

In this sense, one can speak of degrees of truth, judged on the basis of expediency, rather than simply distinguishing between truth and falsity. That is, there may be multiple paths that eventually lead to Enlightenment—multiple true paths. Insofar as radically different positions fulfill this utility, they are true, but not necessarily equally true. For example, if one path is a quicker or more direct means of attaining Enlightenment, then that path is deemed “more true.” This approach is the result of treating truth, not as an end itself, but as a means to liberation. For Wesleyans then, metaphysical claims become means to the end value of right living, which is an expression of inner righteousness.

While, at the end of the day, this might not seem all that different than a correspondence approach, in that both can be exclusive, there is a primary difference; the pragmatic approach gives the ability to simultaneously affirm more than one way as true. In this sense, I think the pragmatic approach is the kind of progress that Ogden requires for inter-religious dialogue. It is a way of affirming multiple ways as true, without falling into utter relativism, whereby all ways are true.

Conclusion

As long as one affirms that reality is not fragmented, a correspondence theory is more likely to result in seeing differing views as contradictory rather than complimentary. Such an approach to religious truth naturally leads to exclusivity and attitudes of religious superiority. Since it is common to assume that one holds true beliefs, the natural conclusion is to consider all contradictory views as false. And, if Ogden is correct, such a perspective immediately limits the possibilities of inter-religious dialogue.

If correspondence leads to exclusivity by setting up a dichotomy between truth and falsity, rejecting as false all claims that contradict one’s own, how does pragmatism help? How does pragmatism allow us to claim that our beliefs are true while allowing the possibility that the beliefs of others are true as well? In one sense, a shift from correspondence to utility allows us to move beyond the traditional true/false dichotomy to allow for the possibility of degrees of truth. This is one way to understand the internal Buddhist debates about expediency.

It is often argued that the “primary realms of dispute between Buddhist schools have less to do with truths and more to do with efficacy or

expediency.”¹⁰ The most expedient way is the most true way. On the surface, this move is not absent in those who affirm a correspondence theory. In fact, religious inclusivism is often articulated as a position that sees the beliefs of others as partially true. The difference, however, is that in a correspondence understanding partial truth entails partial falsity. For example, if a belief were deemed 60 percent true, it would remain 40 percent false. In this sense, a belief that was 70 percent true and 30 percent false would be “more true” than the former, and both are true only in a partial sense. But this correspondence type of “degrees of truth” is not the same as a pragmatic approach.

From a pragmatic perspective, as demonstrated by the expediency debates of Buddhism, if two ways are true, but one is more expedient than the other, the less expedient way is not false or untrue. Its truth is not partial. The difference between the two beliefs is not a difference in truth but expediency. In that sense, both can be true yet different. It is not necessarily a matter of true or false. It may be better or worse, maybe; but it is not true or false. In this way, a pragmatic approach to truth can fulfill Ogden’s criteria for inter-religious dialogue—whereby different perspectives are reconciled in their difference.

When applied as a Wesleyan approach to religious truth, in so far as religious “others” are living holy lives, exemplifying love, and caring for the oppressed, then these “others” are walking in the truth. In this new pragmatic sense, truth is a lived truth, not epistemic truth. It is an embodied truth. I believe such a Wesleyan position, informed by an encounter with Buddhism, can yield a new theology of religions in Wesleyan circles, a theology that bridges the gap between exclusivism and relativism. Such a position, I contend, is a better way forward, given the state of growing religious diversity and the encounters to come.

¹⁰Judith Simmer-Brown, “Pluralism and Dialogue: A Contemplation on the Dialogue Relationship,” in *Buddhist Theology: Critical Reflections by Contemporary Buddhist Scholars*. Ed. Roger Jackson and John Makransky (London: Curzon Press, 2000), 312-313.

**“PURE RELIGION AND UNDEFILED”:
A WESLEYAN ANALYSIS OF
IBN TUFAYL’S *HAI EBN YOKDAN***

by

Mark Murphree

Interfaith dialogues, especially between Christians and Muslims, have surged in the post-9/11 world. Those who follow such dialogues may have noticed “a disproportionate involvement of Methodists in the inter-faith enterprise.”¹ Both conservative and progressive followers of John Wesley have used his words in defining and defending their approach to Islamic dialogue, but so far one particularly riveting comment of Wesley’s seems to have been only superficially addressed.²

In his sermon “On Faith,” John Wesley said that there were some who “lived among Heathens, yet were quite of another spirit; being taught of God, by his inward voice, all the essentials of true religion. Yea, and so was that Mahometan, and Arabian, who, a century or two ago, wrote the life of Hai Ebn Yokdan. The story seems to be feigned, but it contains all the principles of pure religion and undefiled.”³ Wesley is referring to Ibn Tufayl’s 12th-century philosophical novel *Hayy Ibn Yaqzan*, which was published as *The Improvement of Human Reason* when it was translated into English from the original Arabic in 1708 by Simon Ockley. Ibn Tufayl, who was born in Andalusian Spain, was a physician and philosopher in the Almohad dynasty of Al-Maghrib. He wrote the book in the 1160s when he served in the court of Sultan Abu Ya‘qub Yusuf in Mar-

¹Frank Whaling, “Wesley’s Premonitions of Inter-faith Discourse,” in *Pure, Universal Love: Reflections on the Wesleys and Inter-faith Dialogue*, ed. Tim Macquibban (Westminster Wesley Series No. 3, Summer 1995), 17.

²See, for instance, Thomas. E. Brigden, “The Wesleys & Islam,” *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society*, vol. 8 (1912): 91-94.

³John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 7 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1958), 197.

rakesh.⁴ The original title translates as “Alive, Son of Awake” or “Alive, Son of the Vigilant,” and is the name of the main character.

Briefly, the story is that of a certain Hayy Ibn Yaqzan, who as an infant winds up on a deserted island, is suckled by a roe deer or gazelle, and grows up alone. As he gets older, the story traces his philosophical reasoning as he uses the cosmological argument to arrive at a knowledge of God, and spends his time in contemplation of God's perfection, ultimately attaining a mystical, almost beatific vision of God.

The European Reception

This story made a splash in European philosophical thinking when Edward Pococke published his Latin translation in 1671 under the title *Philosophus Autodidactus*. Edward Pococke was the son of Dr. Pococke, the Laudian Professor of Arabic at Oxford. His translation quickly became popular throughout Europe, and influenced many leading thinkers. Spinoza had a copy of the Dutch translation,⁵ and G. A. Russell argues strongly that it provoked a dramatic shift in the thinking of John Locke (a friend of the Pocockes) which led directly to his famous *Essay on Human Understanding*.⁶ Pococke's translation quickly became a best-seller and was reprinted, summarized, and plagiarized numerous times.⁷

The book caused waves in religious circles as well as philosophical circles. The story itself is not overtly Islamic; in fact, Muhammed Nawal Hassan points out that it “professes no aggressive notions to any religious sect whatsoever. Indeed, but for the Koranic allusions in the book and the reader's previous knowledge that the author is a Muslim, one would have remained in the dark as to what religious sect the author belongs.”⁸ Perhaps because of this, Quakers almost immediately saw in the book a validation of their spirituality. By 1674, three years later, George Keith, a

⁴Avner Ben-Zaken, *Reading Hayy Ibn-Yaqzan: A Cross-Cultural Study of Autodidacticism* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), 16. Others have dated the book as late as 1182. See the discussion in Lawrence I. Conrad, ed., *The World of Ibn Tufayl: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Hayy ibn Yaqzan* (New York: Brill, 1996), 6-7.

⁵Ibid., 10.

⁶G. A. Russell, “The Impact of the *Philosophus Autodidactus*: Pocockes, John Locke, and the Society of Friends” in *The ‘Arabick’ Interest of the Natural Philosophers in Seventeenth-Century England*, ed. G. A. Russell (New York: Brill, 1994), 224, 226.

⁷Ibid., 227-228.

⁸Muhammed Nawal Hassan, *Hayy Bin Yaqzan and Robinson Crusoe: A Study of an Early Arabic Impact on English Literature* (Baghdad: Al-Rashid House for Publication, 1980), 14.

Quaker, had produced an English translation of Pococke's Latin, writing that in it he found many "savoury and refreshing" things.⁹ This translation was used by Robert Barclay in his defense of Quakerism, *Apology for the Christian Divinity*, in 1679.¹⁰ Simon Ockley took umbrage with this, and his 1708 translation was partially a reaction to what he felt was the Quakers' misuse of Pococke's Latin version.¹¹

Hayy Ibn Yaqzan also influenced the field of literature. Antonio Pastor,¹² Samar Attar,¹³ Muhammed Nawal Hassan, and many others¹⁴ all argue that Daniel Defoe's 1719 novel *Robinson Crusoe* was a direct descendant of it. Alexander Pope refers to the book in various places, in both positive and negative contexts, and the character of Hayy appears in other, minor works of the time. With the story receiving such widespread attention, decade after decade, it is little wonder that John Wesley read it. Wesley, however, was not a Quaker, and so his approval of it, especially using such high praise as "pure religion and undefiled," needs some investigation.

In fact, Wesley's comment is striking in light of his other, polemically negative comments on Islam. He referred to Islam as a "miserable delusion"¹⁵ and to Muslims as "wolves and tigers."¹⁶ It is doubly striking because of the original source of his compliment. The phrase "pure religion and undefiled" is from the book of James, "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world."¹⁷ Hayy Ibn Yaqzan's isolation prevents him from being stained by the world (though through no virtue of his own) as well as preventing him from helping widows and the fatherless (through no fault of his own). Since Wesley rejected

⁹George Keith, "Advertisement to the Reader," *Hai Ebn Yokdan*, quoted in Russell, "Impact," 248.

¹⁰Hassan, *Yaqzan and Crusoe*, 6.

¹¹Russell, "Impact," 249.

¹²Ben-Zaken, *Reading*, 10.

¹³Samar Attar, *The Vital Roots of European Enlightenment: Ibn Tufayl's Influence on Modern Western Thought* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2007), 21-30.

¹⁴See further names in Fedwa Malti-Douglas, "Hayy Ibn Yaqzan as a Male Utopia" in *The World of Ibn Tufayl: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Hayy ibn Yaqzan*, ed. Lawrence I. Conrad (New York: Brill, 1996), 53 n. 4.

¹⁵Hassan, *Yaqzan and Crusoe*, 12-13 and Attar, *Vital Roots*, 32 n. 9.

¹⁶Wesley, *Works*, vol. 6, 278.

¹⁷Wesley, *Works*, vol. 9, 216.

the idea of “holy solitaires” and emphasized that Scripture knows “no holiness but social holiness,”¹⁸ his comment is therefore puzzling. While his other comment about heathens being taught by God’s “inward voice” has often been repeated, Wesley’s perception of the philosophical values of this Islamic work has been completely overlooked. This perception would seem to be foundational to any Wesleyan-Islamic dialogue.

How, then, are the principles of true religion, as understood by Wesley, found in *Hayy Ibn Yaqzan*? In short, both the efficacy of prevenient grace in reaching one isolated from all human contact, and the goal and summit of holiness as purity of love for God and neighbor, are the primary principles found in the work. This understanding, especially when set against a background of Islamic views of the work, can improve inter-faith dialogue between Wesleyans and Muslims.

Prevenient Grace

One of the cornerstones of Wesley’s theology is that of preventing or prevenient grace. Because of the sinfulness of natural humanity, Wesley speaks of man’s “utter inability to do any good of himself” and of “the absolute necessity of the grace and Spirit of God to raise even a good thought or desire in our hearts.”¹⁹ Initially, this grace of God takes the form of prevenient grace. Wesley understood prevenient grace as grace that enables one “to choose further to cooperate with saving grace.”²⁰ Wesley says that this response includes “the first wish to please God, the first dawn of light concerning his will, and the first slight transient conviction of having sinned against him.”²¹ This suggests the interplay of two faculties: conscience and God-consciousness. In fact, Wesley associated conscience so closely with prevenient grace that he practically equated the two. In his sermon “On Conscience,” he says, “though in one sense [conscience] may be termed natural, because it is found in all men; yet, properly speaking, it is not natural, but a supernatural gift of God . . . which

¹⁸James 1:27 (King James Version).

¹⁹Wesley, *Works*, vol. 14, 321.

²⁰John Wesley, *The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.*, ed. John Telford (London: The Epworth Press, 1931), vol. 5, 231, quoted in W. P. Stephens, “Understanding Islam—in the light of Bullinger and Wesley” *Evangelical Quarterly* 81, no. 1 (2009): 31-32.

²¹Thomas Oden, *John Wesley’s Scriptural Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 243.

we usually style, preventing grace.”²² Again, he writes, “No man living is entirely destitute of what is vulgarly called *natural conscience*. But this is not natural: It is more properly termed, *preventing grace*.”²³ This also shows that Wesley held that prevenient grace was common; that is, that God has given this grace to all men, quite apart from the special revelation of the Bible. In addition to these quotes, he also said, “Every man has a greater or less measure of [prevenient grace], which waiteth not for the call of man.”²⁴

Furthermore, Wesley held that righteous works, which necessarily depend on this prevenient grace of God, were enough to enable the heathen to be accepted by God, although not in terms of full salvation. On one hand, he expresses this in the negative. In his sermon “On Living Without God,” he writes, “I have no authority from the word of God ‘to judge those that are without [outside Christianity];’ nor do I conceive that any man living has a right to sentence all the heathen and Mahometan world to damnation.”²⁵ On the other hand, he also expresses it positively, saying that nothing “will be expected of them [heathens and Mahometans] than living up to the light they had.”²⁶ In his sermon “On Charity,” he quotes Acts 10:35, “in every nation, he that feareth God and worketh righteousness is accepted of him,” and applies it to people of other religions, saying, “he is not the God of the Christians only, but the God of the Heathens also.”²⁷ In his *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament*, Wesley comments on this verse: “He that, first, reverences God, as great, wise, good, the cause, end, and governor of all things; and secondly, from this awful regard to him, not only avoids all known evil, but endeavours, according to the best light he has, to do all things well; *is accepted of him*—through Christ, though he knows him not.”²⁸

Wesley argued that this acceptance was not the same as full salvation. Although he says that salvation “begins with what is usually termed . . . preventing grace” and that preventing grace implies “some tendency

²²Wesley, *Works*, vol. 6, 509.

²³Wesley, *Works*, vol. 7, 187-89.

²⁴Wesley, *Works*, vol. 6, 512.

²⁵*Ibid.*, 512.

²⁶Wesley, *Works*, vol. 7, 353.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 197.

²⁸*Ibid.*, 48.

toward life, some degree of salvation,”²⁹ he nevertheless refuses to call it full salvation. This is seen most clearly in his further comments on Acts 10:35, where he points out that, if this acceptance was the same as full salvation, “God would never have sent an angel from heaven to direct Cornelius to St. Peter.”³⁰

As Ibn Tufayl's story progresses, Hayy Ibn Yaqzan demonstrates both God-consciousness and the actions of conscience, and thus, of prevenient grace. Between the ages of 28 and 35, Hayy Ibn Yaqzan begins to consider the nature of the universe.³¹ He is stuck for several years on the question of whether the universe was eternal, or had begun to exist at a certain point. Eventually, though, he realizes that either option leads him to a similar conclusion. The existence of a non-eternal universe requires an eternal, incorporeal Creator.³² The existence of an eternal universe requires an eternal, incorporeal Mover.³³ In both of these cases, the Creator (or Mover) would have complete power over and knowledge of the physical world. At this point, Hayy Ibn Yaqzan has acquired a recognizable idea of God. He does not stop here, though. He begins to consider the nature of this Being in increasingly greater detail.

Convinced of this Being's eternity, omnipotence, and omniscience, Hayy Ibn Yaqzan then perceives other qualities, as reflected in the created order, especially the animal kingdom. After considering the proportions and abilities of animals,

. . . he knew, that the Creator of the World was supereminently Bountiful, and exceedingly Gracious. And then when he perceiv'd among the Creatures, any that had Beauty, Perfection, Strength, or Excellency of any kind whatever, he consider'd with himself, and knew that it all flow'd from that Voluntary Agent, (whose Name be praised) and from his Essence and Operation.

²⁹John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament* (Salem, OH: Schmull Publishers, 1976), 304.

³⁰Wesley, *Works*, vol. 6, 509.

³¹Wesley, *Notes*, 304.

³²Ibn Tufayl, *The Improvement of Human Reason*, Simon Ockley, trans. (1708; Project Gutenberg, 2005), paragraph 50, <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/16831/16831-h/20018-h.htm>. I quote from the Ockley translation throughout this paper because this was the translation most popular at the time Wesley wrote, although it is certainly possible that Wesley read Keith's earlier English translation, or Pococke's Latin version, among others.

³³*Ibid.*, paragraph 55.

And he knew, that what the Agent had in his own Nature, was greater than that, [which he saw in the Creatures,] more perfect and compleat, more beautiful and glorious, and more lasting.³⁴

Ultimately, Hayy Ibn Yaqzan concludes that this Creator is free from all imperfections, and that “HE is the Being, HE is the Absoluteness, HE the Beauty, HE the Glory, HE the Power, HE the Knowledge, *HE is HE, and besides Him all things are subject to perishing.*”³⁵

This God-consciousness coincides with an awakening of conscience in Hayy Ibn Yaqzan’s life. He realizes that it is his duty to imitate the Creator “by all possible means, and put on his Qualities, and imitate his Actions, and labour in doing his Will, and resign himself wholly to him, and submit to his Dispensations heartily and unfeignedly, so as to rejoice in him, tho’ he should lay Afflictions upon his Body, and hurt, or totally destroy it.”³⁶ The realization of this duty leads to his commitment to act in such a way that mirrors Wesley’s own understanding of purity of love as the fullness and completion of holiness.

Purity of Love

Wesley conceived of the goal and summit of holiness as purity of love for God and neighbor. In his sermon “On Perfection,” Wesley said that sanctification was possessing “the love of God . . . and neighbor,” “the mind which was in Christ,” the “unity” of the fruit of the Spirit, “the moral image of God,” “inward and outward righteousness . . . arising from holiness of heart,” sanctification “in spirit, soul, and body,” as well as being consecrated as “a living sacrifice,” and offering up all of one’s “thoughts, words, and actions” as a “sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving.”³⁷ The *Minutes* of the Wesley-led Second Annual Conference of the Methodist Societies reinforces this. According to them, Christian perfection implies “loving God with all the heart, so that every evil temper is destroyed and every thought and word and work springs from and is conducted to that end by the pure love of God and our neighbor.”³⁸ Whaling summarizes these and other passages by saying that the Wesleys’ spirituality of Chris-

³⁴Ibid., par. 56.

³⁵Ibid., par. 59.

³⁶Ibid., par. 60.

³⁷Ibid., par. 72.

³⁸Wesley, *Works*, vol. 6, 413-415.

tian perfection was "perfect love itself, simplicity of heart, purity of intention, the possibility of obtaining a character free from known sin, the fruits of the Spirit, [and] the possibility of an inner experience of perfect love."³⁹

Wesley even addresses what this would look like in the life of one who had no knowledge of Christ. In his "Letter to a Person Lately Joined with the People Called Quakers" Wesley quotes in agreement Robert Barclay's statement that "The benefit of the death of Christ is not only extended to such as have the distinct knowledge of his death and sufferings, but even unto those who are inevitably excluded from this knowledge. Even these may be partakers of the benefit of his death, though ignorant of the history, if they suffer his grace to take place in their hearts, so as of wicked men to become holy."⁴⁰

The life of Hayy Ibn Yaqzan consistently demonstrates these principles. First, he has a pure love for God. When he first realizes that there is a Creator, necessarily free from all imperfections, he immediately begins contemplating the nature of this Creator. These contemplations were quickly "rooted in his heart," such that "he was inflam'd with the desire of him, and his Heart was altogether withdrawn from thinking upon" anything inferior.⁴¹ He soon perceives what would happen to such a man in the afterlife:

Or lastly, were such an one, who convers'd with this necessarily self-existent Being, and apply'd himself to it, with the utmost of his Ability, and has all his Thoughts continually intent upon his Glory, Beauty, and Splendor, and never turns from him, nor forsakes him, till Death seizes him in the Act of Contemplation and Intuition: Such a Man as this shall, when separated from Body, remain in everlasting Pleasure, and Delight, and Joy and Gladness, by reason of the uninterrupted Vision of that self-existent Being.⁴²

Hayy Ibn Yaqzan clearly considers eternal happiness to be the contemplation of the perfections of God; he also realizes that the attainment of such

³⁹Albert Outler, ed., *John Wesley* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 177.

⁴⁰Whaling, "Premonitions," 25.

⁴¹Wesley, *Works*, vol. 10, 178.

⁴²Tufayl, *Human Reason*, par. 61.

a blessed state requires absolute devotion and consistent dedication throughout life. As mentioned above, he realizes that it is his duty to imitate the Creator “by all possible means, and put on his Qualities, and imitate his Actions, and labour in the doing his Will, and resign himself wholly to him, and submit to his Dispensations heartily and unfeignedly, so as to rejoice in him, tho’ he should lay Afflictions upon his Body, and hurt, or totally destroy it.”⁴³ Entailed in this are certainly Wesley’s ideas of being consecrated as “a living sacrifice” and the offering up of all “thoughts, words, and actions.”

Hayy Ibn Yaqzan does not get a chance to demonstrate his love for his fellow man until late in the story. However, he begins to practice love for his neighbor much earlier. Among other things, his perceived duties “consisted in removing all things that were hurtful, either from Animals or Plants if they could be remov’d: So that . . . if he saw any Creature pursu’d by any wild Beast, or entangled in a Snare, or prick’d with Thorns, or that had gotten any thing hurtful fallen into its Eyes or Ears, or was hungry or thirsty, he took all possible care to relieve it.”⁴⁴ From this point on, none of his spiritual development interferes with “his care of Animals and Plants, Compassion upon them, and Industry in removing whatever inconvenienc’d them.”⁴⁵ This is quite a change from the early life of Hayy Ebn Yokdhan, who, in his process of learning and discovery, systematically vivisects many animals!⁴⁶

When, near the end of the story, the devout Muslim Asal arrives on the island, seeking a retreat for meditation and prayer, Hayy Ibn Yaqzan finally gets a chance to love his fellow man. Although their first real encounter involves Hayy chasing him down and seizing him, Ibn Tufayl makes clear that Hayy not only did not harm him, but went to great lengths to calm his fear.⁴⁷ In the course of time, Asal teaches Hayy his own language, and, upon hearing how the great masses of men were deceived in seeking after wealth, Hayy decides to leave the island to show them a better way.⁴⁸ Although this missionary venture does not produce

⁴³Ibid., par. 65.

⁴⁴Ibid., par. 72.

⁴⁵Ibid., par. 79.

⁴⁶Ibid., par. 83.

⁴⁷Ibid., par. 26-27.

⁴⁸Ibid., par. 104-105.

much fruit, it is evidence of Hayy's zealous desire to seek after and better the condition of his fellow man.

Wesley, then, perceived several elements that reflected aspects of his own theology in the work. Using this understanding to improve interfaith dialogue, however, faces several possible challenges. Some might argue that Wesley misunderstood Ibn Tufayl's story.⁴⁹ Others might argue that the translation Wesley presumably relied upon, that of Simon Ockley, is a flawed and ultimately deficient translation of the Arabic original.⁵⁰ Perhaps the greatest challenge, though, is in understanding how *Hayy Ibn Yaqzan* was and is perceived in the Islamic world.

Islamic Perspectives

In its original context, *Hayy Ibn Yaqzan* was tied to the politico-religious tensions of the Almoravid and Almohad dynasties of Northwest Africa. In 1109, the ruling Almoravid dynasty ordered the burning of all copies of Al-Ghazzali's *The Revival of the Religious Sciences*. This philosophical work was perceived as an attack on the traditional power structures of institutionalized Islam, which revolved around legal rulings. Instead, it seemed to be clearly in favor of Sufism, a form of mystical Islam. The chief judge at the time, Ibn Hamdin, wrote a refutation of this work.

By 1147, the Almohad dynasty had overthrown the Almoravid dynasty, largely with the aid of the followers of Sufism, who still looked to Al-Ghazzali's work. The nature of Sufism, though, prevented it from being as easily appropriated by the Almohad dynasty as the previous Almoravid dynasty had appropriated the structure of the Islam of its day. As the years passed, the Almohad dynasty began to fear political turmoil centered around various Sufi orders, and it was during this time that Ibn Tufayl wrote the book.⁵¹ Ben-Zaken's analysis is that "Ibn-Tufayl appropriates Sufi jargon while at the same time rejecting Sufi claims for direct knowledge of God."⁵² Ibn Tufayl's novel, then, is an attempt to simultane-

⁴⁹Ibid., par. 111-113.

⁵⁰Wesley's comment that the story "seems to be feigned" might imply a tentative grasp of the story as a whole, since most consider it clearly and obviously fictional.

⁵¹Conrad calls Ockley's translation "less faithful to the original Arabic," but this is not to say it is deficient. (*World of Ibn Tufayl*, 277). Moreover, it is not perfectly clear which translation Wesley read.

⁵²Ben-Zaken, *Reading*, 29. His first chapter covers this history in more detail than I have given it here.

ously embrace Sufism and subordinate it to the philosophical structures that would answer the accusations of Ibn Hamdin.

Sufism today is a marginalized branch of Islam in many Islamic countries, and furthermore, Ibn Tufayl's original work was condemned by Muslim theologians.⁵³ Thus, the interpretation and orthodoxy of Ibn Tufayl's novel is necessarily a subject of debate, depending on which Islamic authority one consults. It would be a grave mistake to assume that the book represents the views of all (or even most) who claim the title Muslim. However, *Hayy Ibn Yaqzan* has generally been well-received and highly regarded in mainstream modern Islam. For instance, it was one of the first works printed in the Arab world in 1880s Cairo,⁵⁴ and in 1992, a Turkish film studio produced a children's animated version.

In the post-9/11 world, interfaith dialogues, especially between Christians and Muslims, have grown in number and importance. Wesleyans desiring to speak from the perspective of their faith-tradition in these dialogues would do well to closely examine all Wesley said that could apply to the topic. To this end, an understanding of Wesley's views of true religion in *Hayy Ibn Yaqzan*, as well as its Islamic reception, can certainly play a role in these dialogues, and hopefully lead to greater mutual understanding between Wesleyans and Muslims.

⁵³Ibid., 21.

⁵⁴G. J. Toomer. *Eastern Wisdom and Learning: The Study of Arabic in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 220.

⁵⁵Ben-Zaken, *Reading*, 41.

ROB BELL AND JOHN WESLEY ON THE FATE OF THE LOST AND THOSE WHO NEVER HEARD THE GOSPEL

by

Kenneth W. Brewer

Most theologians seek to ground their theology in Scripture. Often, a conflict of interpretation emerges. When this happens, both sides claim that it is their position that is supported by Scripture, while other interpretations are not warranted. And so, the exegetical battle ensues. Recently, Rob Bell critiqued the traditional view of hell and the fate of those who never heard the Christian gospel in his bestselling book, *Love Wins*.¹ While admittedly not a sophisticated academic treatment, Bell charged that the gospel has been misread and that the biblical images of hell have been taken too literally. He seeks to revise the traditional storyline of the gospel by accenting the love of God, wondering how a God of love could torture people in hell forever. Bell is also disturbed by those who claim that only a few will be saved and by those who know that someone like Gandhi is doomed to an eternal hell without any possibility of redemption.²

Bell's book is highly controversial and its ideas hotly contested. *Time* magazine hypes that *Love Wins* "has ignited a new holy war in Christian circles and beyond."³ While that overstates the case, Christian leaders are divided over the book. On one side, Bell devotees celebrate his boldness and honesty in questioning status quo positions on heaven and hell. On the other side, Bell watchdogs charge him with "universalism" and "heresy." Numerous books have been released in the past year countering Bell's claims, specifically targeting his interpretation of the fate of the lost

¹Rob Bell, *Love Wins* (New York: Harper One, 2011).

²*Ibid.*, x.

³Jon Meacham, "Is Hell Dead?" *Time* (April 25, 2011), 38.

and those who never heard the Gospel.⁴ This essay is not a detailed response to Bell's book, but rather, a consideration of the status of the doctrines of the fate of the lost and those who never heard the Gospel.

John Wesley, to a large extent, represents the traditional view of hell that Bell critiques. While not as graphic as his contemporary, Jonathan Edwards,⁵ Wesley believed in the Last Judgment, where the dead will stand before God. All humankind will give an account of their words and deeds. Afterwards, a great separation will take place. Believers will be ushered into a new heaven and a new earth. Unbelievers, those who refused the grace of God, will be judged according to their thoughts, words, deeds, tempers, affections, desires, motives, and circumstances. Then they will be consigned to eternal torment in hell for their wickedness and rejection of God's grace.⁶ Wesley, however, suggests a special "dispensation" of judgment for those in other religions and those who never heard the Gospel. In a very humble and generous spirit, Wesley admits that:

. . . I have no authority from the Word of God "to judge those that are without" [i.e., outside Christianity]. Nor do I conceive that any man living has a right to sentence all the heathen and Mahometan world to damnation. It is far better to leave them to him that made them, and who is "the Father of the spirits and all flesh"; who is the God of the heathens as well as the Christians, and who hateth nothing he hath made.⁷

⁴Ibid, 38, 40; see also the following works: Mark Galli, *God Wins* (Carol Springs, IL: Tyndale House Publishing, 2011); Francis Chan and Preston Sprinkle, *Erasing Hell* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2011); Michael Wittmer, *Christ Alone* (Edenridge Press, 2001); Larry Dixon, *Farewell, Rob Bell* (Create Space, 2011); Jon Zens, *Christ Minimized* (Ekklesia Press, 2012).

⁵Jonathan Edwards, "Sinners in the Hand of an Angry God," in *The Sermons of Jonathan Edwards: A Reader*, ed. Wilson Kimnach, Kenneth Minkema, and Douglas Sweeney (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 49-65.

⁶John Wesley, "The Great Assize," in *The Works of John Wesley*. Vol. 1. Ed. by Albert Outler (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984), 351-375; "Of Hell," in *The Works of John Wesley*. Vol. 3. Ed. by Albert Outler (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1986), 30-44; "An Extract of a Letter to William Law," in *Wesley's Works*. Vol. IX (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1979), 466-509.

⁷John Wesley, "On Living Without God," in *The Works of John Wesley*. Vol. 4. Ed. by Albert Outler (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1987), 174; also, "On Charity," in *The Works of John Wesley*. Vol. 3. Ed. by Albert Outler (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1986), 295; and, "On Faith" in *The Works of John Wesley*. Vol. 3. Ed. by Albert Outler (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1986), 494-95.

Rob Bell and John Wesley are both “folk theologians,” although Wesley is certainly a folk theologian of a higher order. There are some parallels in how Bell and Wesley deal with disputed doctrines. Each offers exegetical evidence, bring theological considerations into the mix, and both push the limits of traditional thinking. Bell confronts the traditional view of the fate of the lost, while Wesley challenges the traditional view of the fate of non-Christians and those who never heard the Gospel.

In light of these debates, I proffer the following questions: Does Scripture provide clarity on all matters of doctrine? Should we synthesize what Scripture leaves open? How should we resolve conflicts of interpretation on disputed theological issues? Are all doctrines of equal status? These questions are vast. We cannot answer all of them, nor can we exegete all of the pertinent texts in this short essay. Instead, the doctrines of the fate of the lost and those who never heard the Gospel will be examined utilizing the theology of Bell and Wesley to see if these respective doctrines are essential beliefs of the Christian faith. I will argue that the fate of the lost and those who never heard the Gospel are disputed doctrines of the Christian faith and should not be considered dogmas of the church. We should, as a consequence, leave the matter open and entrust the ultimate fate of the lost and those who never heard the Gospel to the love and justice of God, who judges all. I make this claim for several reasons.

Not All Doctrines Are Dogmas of the Christian Church

Rob Bell and John Wesley agree that not all beliefs or doctrines are the same status or level of importance. Wesley divides doctrine into two categories—essential and non-essential or “opinions.” He has various lists of essential and non-essential doctrines. He puts the eternal punishment of the “unjust” in hell in at least one list of essential doctrines.⁸ He fails, however, to mention the eternal punishment of the lost in his famous sermon “Catholic Spirit” (1750), which deals more extensively with essential and non-essential doctrines.⁹ Wesley nowhere gives criteria to decide which doctrines belong in which category. He does, however, measure

⁸John Wesley, “A Letter to a Roman Catholic,” in *John Wesley*, ed. by Albert Outler (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 496.

⁹John Wesley, “Catholic Spirit,” in *The Works of John Wesley*. Vol. 2. Ed. by Albert Outler (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985), 79-95.

doctrines according to the so-called Wesleyan quadrilateral, as can be seen from his essay on original sin.¹⁰

While Scripture, tradition, and reason should be utilized as sources and norms for adjudicating the status of Christian theology, a more helpful and specific taxonomy of doctrines than “essential/non-essential” is the following:¹¹

- *Dogma* = a belief that is absolutely essential to Christian faith; a belief that makes Christianity distinctly “Christian”; dogma is clearly established on Scriptural evidence and affirmed by wide ecumenical consensus.
- *Doctrine* = highly important beliefs that have a strong biblical basis yet may be disputed by other Christians on the basis of other equally strong Scriptural evidence; ecumenical consensus diverges on interpretation.
- *Opinion* = non-essential doctrines to Christian core beliefs; open to various interpretations with little to no biblical evidence or ecumenical consensus.
- *Heresy* = a teaching that is completely incompatible with or directly contradicts Scripture and/or wide ecumenical consensus.

Protestants are not accustomed to speaking about theological beliefs with the concept of dogma. Moreover, liberal Protestants may even reject the concept of dogma altogether as authoritarian or even oppressive.¹² Nevertheless, the concept of dogma is helpful in discerning the essentials of Christian belief.

While varied understandings of dogma exist, dogma in this essay refers to “a propositional truth that is authoritatively taught in the church as revealed by God and binding on all members of the community.”¹³ Central dogmas of the church would be affirmations of faith such as God as Creator, the Trinity, the humanity and divinity of Jesus Christ, and the

¹⁰See Donald Thorsen, *The Wesleyan Quadrilateral: Scripture, Tradition, Reason, and Experience as a Model of Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990).

¹¹Adapted from Stanley Grenz and Roger Olson, *Who Needs Theology? An Invitation to the Study of God* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 1996).

¹²Walter Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971).

¹³very Dulles, “Dogma,” in *The Oxford Companion to Christian Thought*, ed. by Adrian Hastings (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 173.

resurrection of Jesus. These are affirmed by the majority of historic Christian traditions and are thought to have universal and permanent status. Doctrines differ from dogmas in authority, universality, permanence, and compulsion. Examples of doctrines that not all Christians are required to believe are predestination or free will, infant or adult baptism, theories of the atonement, and millennial views. One can certainly take a position on each of these disputed doctrinal positions as a Christian church or believer, but they are not authoritative or universal in character and, hence, are not binding on all Christian churches and believers.

Heresy also needs to be defined. Alister McGrath defines the essence of heresy in this way: "A heresy is a doctrine that ultimately destroys, destabilizes, or distorts a mystery [of faith] rather than preserving it."¹⁴ Early Christian creeds, confessions, and doctrinal statements were formulated in order to protect and preserve the core of Christian beliefs referred to above as dogma. Friedrich Schleiermacher maintained that heresy should be understood as "alien" elements that creep into the essential core of Christian beliefs from foreign thought influences.¹⁵ Heresy is doctrine that gives the external appearance of Christian faith, but actually contradicts the essential dogmas of the Christian faith.

Where should we locate the doctrines of the fate of the lost and of those who never heard the Gospel? Are these dogmas of the church? Based on the taxonomy and definitions above, I believe that these two doctrines are clearly disputed matters of the Christian faith, not dogmas of the church. Each of these doctrines possesses diverse Scriptural proof-texts and both lack clear ecumenical consensus. The evidence for this conclusion is presented in the following sections of this essay. What Karl Barth said about the doctrine of universal reconciliation applies equally to these two doctrines: "No such postulate can be made even though we appeal to the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ."¹⁶ While the fate of the lost and those who never heard the Gospel are not dogmas or postulates of the Christian faith, nevertheless, as Hans Urs Von Balthasar

¹⁴Alister McGrath, *Heresy: A History of Defending the Truth* (New York: Harper One, 2009), 31.

¹⁵Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, trans. H. R. MacKintosh and J. S. Stewart (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), 95-96.

¹⁶Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of Reconciliation*. IV/3/1. Trans. by G. W. Bromley (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1961), 477-478.

argues, they may be embraced as articles of hope.¹⁷ Hoping and knowing, he stresses, are two very different categories. We may hope, even when we do not know.

The Evidence from Scripture Is Inconclusive

When we look at Scripture on the fate of the lost and those who never heard the Gospel, there are numerous passages, but the evidence cannot be harmonized easily. Supportive biblical passages can be cited for each of the views. We will briefly state the competing views on the fate of the lost and those who never heard the Gospel, then cite the biblical evidence for those views, and provide a representative theologian who embraces each of these views. My point is that there is ample scriptural evidence to warrant at least these competing views. There are multiple plausible positions on the fate of the lost, with none overwhelmingly compelling. Here is a brief glance at the most prominent three.

1. Hell as Eternal Punishment. The first view is the traditional view of hell as a place of eternal punishment. There are numerous passages cited in support of this view: Mt. 5:22, 29, 30; 10:28; 18:9; 23:13, 15, 33; Mk. 9:43, 45, 47; Lk. 12:5; 13:25-29; Rom. 6:21; Phil. 1:28; 3:19; 1 Thess. 5:3; 2 Thess. 1:8ff.; James 3:6; 2 Pet. 2:4; Rev. 14:10; 20:10-15. Adherents of this view interpret statements regarding hell as literal. For example, when Jesus said to the damned in the parable of the sheep and goats, “Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels” (Mt. 25:42 TNIV), the traditional view takes the words at face value. John F. Walvoord makes the claim that: “If one accepts the authority of Scripture as being inerrant and accurate, it is clear that Christ taught the doctrine of everlasting punishment.”¹⁸ The traditional view has been the majority view throughout most of the history of the church and is embraced by most contemporary Evangelicals as the correct interpretation of the biblical text.

2. Conditional Immortality. The second view is that of conditional immortality or annihilationism. The passages cited in support of this view are: Dt. 29:20; Ps. 37; Mal. 4:1-2; Mt. 3:10, 12; 5:30; 10:28; 13:30,

¹⁷Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Dare We Hope “That All Men Be Saved”* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988).

¹⁸John Walvoord, “The Literal View,” in *Four Views on Hell*, ed. Stanley Gundry and William Crockett (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 21.

42, 49-50; Lk. 16:19-31; Rom. 2:8; Gal. 6:8; 1 Cor. 3:17; Phil. 1:28; 3:19; 2 Thess. 1:9; Heb. 10:39; 2 Pet. 2:1, 3; 2:6; 3:6-7; Jude 7; Rev. 20:14-15. Those who adopt this view emphasize that there are several passages that indicate that the fate of the lost is total destruction or annihilation. An example of this would be John the Baptist's statement about the coming Messiah: "His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire" (Mt. 3:12 TNIV). Annihilationists point out that in this and other passages the fate of the lost is to be "burned up" or totally extinguished. Clark Pinnock argues that it is ". . . more scriptural, theologically coherent, and practical to interpret the nature of hell as the destruction rather than the endless torture of the wicked."¹⁹ Pinnock, and other annihilationists, interpret images of fire and the words "burn up" and "destruction" as literal. Other prominent Evangelicals who have embraced the conditional view of hell are John Stott, Edward Fudge, Philip Hughes, Stephen Travis, and Michael Green.

3. Universalism. The third view is that of universalism or the restoration of all things. Universalists have derived their view from passages such as these: Rom. 5:12-21; 1 Cor. 15:20-28; Isa. 52:10; 66:23; Hab. 2:14; 3:3; Num. 14:21; Ps. 97:6; Phil. 2:9-11; Rom. 14:11; Isa. 45:23; Eph. 1:10; Col. 1:21-23. The texts most frequently marshaled as evidence for universal salvation are those by Paul in Romans 5:12-21 and 1 Corinthians 15:20-28. Universalism is now being debated even within Evangelical circles. Thomas Talbott, in making an exegetical case for universalism from an Evangelical perspective, says this concerning the use of "all" in 1 Corinthians 15: "The syntax of Paul's sentence, its parallel structure, and the construction 'For as . . . even so' seems to me to put the matter beyond dispute, quite apart from any other considerations. Both 'alls' refer to exactly the same group of individuals."²⁰ His view is not a sentimental universalist position where everyone simply goes to heaven when they die. Rather, it is a more complex and nuanced argument based upon scriptural, theological, and philosophical considerations. Talbott's basic contention is that the lost will eventually yield to the love and mercy of

¹⁹Clark Pinnock, "The Conditional View," in *Four Views on Hell*, 137.

²⁰Thomas Talbott, "Reply to my Critics," in *Universal Salvation? The Current Debate*, ed. Robin Parry and Christopher Partridge (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 253.

God's sovereign will after an indefinite time of punishment and after some degree of spiritual maturation.

Having surveyed the three views on the fate of the lost, even if one in the end objects to the two alternative views, it cannot be said that any of these three views lacks biblical backing for their respective positions. In fact, there seems to be ample biblical support for each of these views, although I would contend that the support for universal salvation is the weakest of the three. Again, the point is that, based on biblical evidence alone, there seems to be no conclusive or overwhelming position on the fate of the lost. Each view has considerable scriptural support.

What about those in non-Christian faiths and those who never heard the Gospel? With regard to the fate of those in other religions or those who never heard the Gospel, there are two main positions advocated by Christian theologians, exclusivism and inclusivism. Again, both positions cite and exegete numerous biblical passages in favor of their respective view. I leave out of consideration the pluralistic theology of religions group since they make their case for pluralism outside the source and norm of Christian Scripture.

1. Exclusivism. The first view is the traditional view of exclusivism or the restrictivist view. This view claims that Jesus' death is the sole ontological basis for salvation and one must have a personal, explicit, epistemological faith in Jesus Christ to obtain salvation. Cited are the following passages for support: Mt. 7:13-14; Jn. 3:16-18; 14:6; Acts 4:12; Rom. 1:18-22; 10:9-15; 1 Tim. 2:5; Heb. 9:27; 1 Jn. 5:11-12. Representative of the exclusivistic view is Ronald Nash. He states: "The New Testament repeatedly declares that salvation comes only through faith in Jesus Christ.... In addition Scripture also declares that human nature is so sinful that people are utterly hopeless apart from Jesus. The New Testament affirms the importance of hearing the gospel and believing. . . ." ²¹ Nash does not believe there is salvation in other religions, nor is there a second chance after death, not even for those who never heard the Gospel. He considers the inclusivist view to be built upon poor biblical exegesis, faulty logic, and a sentimental appeal to emotionalism. Nash's view is characteristic of most contemporary Evangelicals.

²¹Ronald H. Nash, *Is Jesus the Only Savior?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 16-17.

2. Inclusivism. The second view is the inclusivist view. There are many varieties of Christian inclusivism. Each view, however, claims that the work of Jesus Christ is the sole ontological basis for salvation, but maintains that it is not epistemologically necessary to know Jesus explicitly to experience final salvation. Inclusivists point to a number of biblical passages to establish their view: Dt. 30:15-29; Ps. 19:1-4; Ezek. 18:32; 33:11; Lam. 3:33; Mt. 25:36-46; Lk. 1:12, 47-48; 10:16; Jn. 1:9; 3:16; 8:12; Acts 10:34-35; 14:17; 17:27; Rom. 1:20; 2:14-16; 10:18; 1 Tim. 2:3-6; 4:10; Heb. 2:9; 11:6; 2 Pet. 3:9; 1 Jn. 2:21; Mal. 1:11-14. Representative of the inclusivistic view is Norman Anderson. He has argued that Christianity has a unique message, a unique path of salvation grounded in the atoning work of Jesus alone, and that Christian revelation is unique to the world's religions. When it comes to the question of the fate of those who never heard the Gospel, however, Anderson offers this opinion: "... but I myself cannot doubt that there may be those who, while never hearing the gospel here on earth, will wake up, as it were, on the other side of the grave to worship the One in whom, without understanding it at the time, they found the mercy of God."²² Anderson represents a growing number of Evangelicals that have adopted a more inclusivist view of the fate of non-Christians and those who never heard the Gospel, among whom are the following: John Wesley, C. S. Lewis, Lesslie Newbigin, Clark Pinnock, Gabriel Fackre, and John Sanders.

The above positions have been defended and challenged on exegetical, theological, philosophical, and historical grounds from a Christian perspective, including by Evangelical theologians. One may be convinced of the exegetical interpretation of one view over another. However, if one reads these passages with an open mind, one can readily affirm that there is adequate exegetical support for each of these views. One can reasonably conclude that the fate of the lost and of those who never heard the Gospel is not clearly and decisively settled, but rather is disputed doctrine, open to various interpretations and debate. On this basis, it certainly cannot be considered a dogma of the church.

The Evidence from Tradition Is Extensive but Not Beyond Question

With regard to the Christian tradition and the ultimate fate of the lost, it can be said that after Augustine the majority position has sided with the

²²Sir Norman Anderson, *Christianity and World Religions: The Challenge of Pluralism* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1984), 154.

view that hell is both eternal and punitive.²³ Augustine took issue with both annihilationism and universal reconciliation in Book 21 of his work, *The City of God*. Both views, he maintained, were absurd and contrary to Scripture. Augustine believed that God elected some for eternal life, and the rest of humanity, by default, spent eternity in the torments of hell. He expends considerable intellectual energy to argue that hell is both eternal and material: "But that hell, which is also called a lake of fire and brimstone, will be material fire, and will torment the bodies of the damned, whether men or devils. . . . One fire certainly shall be the lot of both, for thus the truth has declared."²⁴ This view of the duration and punitive nature of hell dominated the medieval period, which climaxes with Dante's *Inferno*.²⁵ Augustine's doctrine of predestination, however, was not universally accepted as official Catholic dogma. The idea of God tormenting the damned in hell for eternity did not seem to bother most Christian theologians, but God's unilateral will to predestine the reprobate to an eternal hell was viewed by many as theologically untenable and morally reprehensible.

It must also be acknowledged that there has always been a minority position either affirming or acknowledging the possibility of annihilationism or universal reconciliation. Before Augustine, there was much debate about the ultimate fate of the lost, especially with regard to where the dead are located before the final judgment and the relationship of bodies and souls in the after life. For instance, it was Origen (c. 185-254) who first raised questions about the possibility of all people, including the Devil, experiencing salvation in a universal restoration after the final judgment. He entertained the idea of whether punishment was in some way educative and redemptive rather than punitive in nature. Philip Jenkins offers this perspective to present day Christians regarding pronouncements at Ecumenical Councils:

For later generations of Christians—and, by implication, for other religions—the conclusion is humbling. The Christian experience includes an immense variety of different strands, different interpretations, and most find at least some justifica-

²³Alice K. Turner, *The History of Hell* (Orlando: Harcourt, 1993).

²⁴Augustine, *The City of God*, trans. by Marcus Dods (New York: The Modern Library, 1950), 781.

²⁵Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy: Inferno*, trans. and ed. by Robert Durling (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

tion in Scripture or tradition. Over time, a great many of these alternative forms have been labeled as heretical or activity excluded from the Christian worldview altogether, but it is not obvious why one current triumphs over another. Try as they might to develop institutions or structures to determine the truth, by trusting historical authority or by seeking consensus, churches have never found a path that avoids the powerful pressures of individual ambition and political interest. If nothing else, that experience argues strongly for being tolerant about the diversity of nonessential expressions of faith. Viewed historically, we know that other versions might have succeeded, and might yet do so in times to come.²⁶

The question of the fate of non-Christians has a similar profile, but some early Christian theologians were ready to concede the possibility of salvation for those who never heard the Gospel. The majority view is that those outside of the Church or outside of Christianity will not experience salvation. Cyprian (d. 258) defined the matter by his famous saying, "Whoever does not have the church as a mother no longer has God as father."²⁷ However, again, there have always been minority voices advocating for the salvation of those outside of the church and Christianity. Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Theophilus of Antioch, and Athenagoras all spoke of the possibility of salvation being offered to all people, though they also insisted that this salvation was grounded in the unique and final work of Jesus Christ.

Throughout Christian history, theologians wondered about the salvation of Jews and the faithful people of God in the Old Testament, about the fate of infants and the mentally impaired, and about "holy pagans" and those who responded to God's truth in general revelation (like Socrates and Plato). Would there be a chance after death to respond to the Gospel? What about those with "implicit faith," those sincerely seeking God and truth without explicit knowledge of Christ or Christianity? Does God have "middle knowledge," knowing who would have responded to the Gospel if they had the chance? Was the light of God's revelation in nature and conscience somehow sufficient to condemn and/or excuse

²⁶Philip Jenkins, *Jesus Wars: How Four Patriarchs, Three Queens, and Two Emperors Decided What Christians Would Believe for the Next 1,500 Years* (New York: Harper One, 2010), 268-269.

²⁷Cyprian, "On the Unity of the Church," in *Understandings of the Church*, trans. and ed. by E. Glenn Hinson (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 73.

those outside Christianity from judgment? It was not until Vatican II (1962-65) that the Roman Catholic Church made official pronouncements regarding those in other religions. It was agreed at this council, apparently without contradicting Scripture or tradition, that:

Those also can attain to everlasting salvation who through no fault of their own do not know the gospel of Christ or his Church, yet sincerely seek God and, moved by grace, strive by their deeds to do His will as it is known to them through the dictates of conscience. Nor does divine Providence deny the help necessary for salvation to those who, without blame on their part, have not yet arrived at an explicit knowledge of God, but who strive to live a good life, thanks to His grace. Whatever goodness or truth is found among them is looked upon by the Church as a preparation for the gospel. She regards such qualities as given by Him who enlightens all men so that they may finally have life.²⁸

If one investigates the historical evidence candidly, one can reasonably conclude that the question of the fate of those in non-Christian religions and those who never heard the Gospel is at least a possibility in the eyes of the church. There is no question that the fate of the lost and those who never heard the gospel are hotly disputed doctrines. However, the duration of hell and the damnation of those who never heard the gospel cannot be considered dogmas of the Church.

The Language and Imagery Regarding the Fate of the Lost Are Indeterminate

The language, imagery, and genre of the biblical texts that refer to hell provide additional support for the view that Scripture is inconclusive on the matter of the fate of the lost. Many of the passages depicting hell are in the genre of Scripture designated as prophetic, parabolic, or apocalyptic. These genres are highly stylized and saturated with figures of speech. Richard Bauckham has this to say about eschatological language: "Probably more than any other aspect of theology, other than the doctrine of God, eschatology deals in the symbolic and the imaginative. Like God, eschatological salvation transcends all our concepts. It can speak only of what we have not yet experienced by analogy with what we

²⁸*The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. by Walter M. Abbott (New York: Guild Press, 1966), 35.

have.”²⁹ And yet, in spite of this fact, one finds a tug-of-war over which of the words are literal when speaking of hell and the fate of the lost.

The key terms in the dispute are “eternal,” “destruction,” and “all.” John Walvoord, in his defense of a literal view of hell, contends that Jesus’ words, “Then they [the lost] will go away to eternal punishment” (Mt. 25:46), are to be understood literally, while the terms “destruction” and “all” are to be regarded as figurative.³⁰ Clark Pinnock, on the other hand, maintains that Paul “clearly,” “concisely,” and “literally” states that the destiny of the wicked is “destruction” (Phil. 3:19), while the terms “eternal” and “all” should be understood as figurative.³¹ In addition, Thomas Talbott says that Paul’s use of “all” in Romans 5 points to a literal universal reconciliation “with great clarity,” and the terms “eternal” and “destruction” are figurative.³² Further research into the matter only confirms that this kind of exegesis is characteristic of the literature on hell. Each exegete isolates their terms as literal, while assigning the other terms to the categories of metaphor or figurative. It is because of this conflict of interpretation that the language and imagery regarding the fate of the lost can only be classified as indeterminate.

This is not to say that hell, judgment, and punishment themselves are not realities. As George Caird asserts, the biblical writers can take the referent of eschatological metaphors and figures of speech as real without “flat-footed literalness.”³³ To his credit, Rob Bell believes in God’s justice, hell, judgment, and punishment as realities. What he challenges is taking the language and imagery employed as literal depictions. He concludes that the image of “everlasting fire,” “gehena,” and “lake of fire” are to be understood as metaphors. Bell is correct on that score. Even John Wesley, at least in one place, refers to eschatological language and imagery as “fig-

²⁹Richard Bauckham, “Eschatology,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology*, ed. by John Webster, Kathryn Tanner, and Iain Torrance (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 316.

³⁰John F. Walvoord, “The Literal Interpretation,” in *Four Views on Hell*, 11-28.

³¹Clark Pinnock, “The Conditional View,” in *Four Views on Hell*, 146.

³²Thomas Talbott, “Christ Victorious,” in *Universal Salvation? The Current Debate*, 15-22.

³³G. B. Caird, *The Language and Imagery of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 248; also see, Janet Martin Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985) and Dan R. Stiver, *The Philosophy of Religious Language: Signs, Symbols, and Story* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996).

urative,” yet at the same time upholds a literal view of hell, judgment, and punishment. Regarding eschatological language, Wesley exclaims further that: “But here all description falls short; all human language fails! Only one who is caught up into the third heaven can have a just conception of it. But even such an one cannot express what he hath seen—these things ‘it is not possible for man to utter’”³⁴ N. T. Wright astutely notes that metaphorical language should “warn us against the cheerful double dogmatism that has bedeviled discussion of these topics—the dogmatism, that is, both of the person who knows exactly who is and who isn’t ‘going to hell’ and the universalist who is absolutely certain that there is no such place or that if there is it will, at the last, be empty.”³⁵

It is best to acknowledge that the exact nature of the language and imagery of hell is beyond human interpretation. We should agree to disagree and leave the matter open to interpretation. Again, this arena of doctrine does not seem to be a strong candidate for dogma of the church.

The Tension Between the Love and Justice of God Is Unresolvable

The debate about the fate of the lost and those who never heard the Gospel is not simply about biblical exegesis. The debate also has to do with key theological concepts and motifs, like the love and justice of God, God’s sovereignty and human freedom, election, the atonement, and God’s victory over the powers of evil. These serve as an interpretative lens through which we read Scripture. No one reads Scripture without presuppositions and prior theological commitments. Some read Scripture through the lens of the love of God, favoring God’s mercy over God’s justice. Others read Scripture through the lens of the justice of God, siding with God’s legal obligations for righteousness over God’s love and mercy to sinners.

Rob Bell (and others) charges that if we take the language and imagery of hell as a literal place of everlasting torment, this makes God out to be a moral monster on the level of a Nazi death camp director, delighting in the destruction of the damned. Bell may have in mind the idea from Augustine that those in heaven will actually delight in their ability to see into the torments of hell.³⁶ It is this kind of view that

³⁴John Wesley, “The Great Assize,” in *The Works of John Wesley*, 359, 366.

³⁵N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (New York: Harper One, 2008), 177.

³⁶Cited in Clark Pinnock, “The Conditional View,” *Four Views on Hell*, 155.

repulses Bell. It makes God out to be some kind of sadist and heaven to be the kind of place where the blessed enjoy voyeuristic indecencies. In *Love Wins*, Bell cites and interprets biblical passages, but for him it is the concept of the love of God that finally decides the hermeneutical dilemma.

John Wesley used the moral character of God as a key interpretive lens in his dispute with Calvinists over the doctrine of predestination. He wrote much about this doctrine, but none more thorough than his 1773 treatise, "Predestination Calmly Considered."³⁷ Wesley uses the concept of the love and justice of God as a regulative norm in deciding that the Reformed doctrine of predestination is in error. Biblical passages are cited and interpreted throughout the essay, but it is the concept of the love and justice of God that finally decides the hermeneutical dilemma. For Wesley, double predestination violates the love and justice of God by overriding human freedom. It is unjust of God to damn those who had no choice and it contradicts God's mercy to punish those who only did what God foreordained. More to the point, Wesley employed the mercy of God when deciding the fate of non-Christians:

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

The moral character of God functions as a definitive *norma normans* in deciding the proper interpretation of Scripture for both Bell and Wesley. Bell affirms the concept of human freedom. If humans really do have free will, then a strong case can be made that this is not an issue of the character of God, but rather an issue of the nature of human freedom. If humans are free to decide their fate, then an eternal hell is not the fault of God, but rather the result of human free will. Bell can be charged with a category mistake. Wesley, on the other hand, argued against the Reformed doctrine of predestination on the basis of human free will. For Wesley,

³⁷John Wesley, "Predestination Calmly Considered," in *John Wesley*, ed. Albert Outler (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 427-472.

³⁸John Wesley, "On Charity," in *The Works of John Wesley*. Vol. 3. Ed. by Albert Outler (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1986), 296.

election to eternal damnation is a violation of human free will and thus reflects negatively upon God's justice and mercy. Likewise, Wesley suggests that, while we do not know the final destiny of non-Christians, we can hope that the mercy of God will prevail. Wesley, it must be stressed, seems to think that God's love and justice will balance out and those who never heard the Gospel have a possibility of salvation.

The love and justice of God do not violate the idea of an eternal punishment in hell if we hold to genuine human freedom. However, the Reformed doctrine of predestination and some strong Christian versions of universal reconciliation do violate human freedom by insisting upon God's irresistible will to either save some or all people. Pitting the love of God against the justice of God gets us nowhere. Separating these two attributes within God is to set God in conflict with God's self. While it is reasonable to question if eternal punishment is a just response to finite sin, the issue supposes that it is God who is sentencing the damned rather than human free will being the responsible agent. God's goodness and mercy may be a part of God's justice or the other way around. In any case, it does not help us resolve the dispute regarding the fate of the lost or those who never heard the Gospel. Thus, as Wesley maintained, it must remain a hopefully open question and not a dogma of the church.

Over-Systematizing Scripture May Circumvent Spiritual Formation

I have argued that not all doctrines are on the same level of importance; that Scripture is inconclusive in answering the question of the fate of the lost and those who never heard the Gospel; that Tradition has a majority opinion on the matter, but is open to question; that the language and imagery regarding the fate of the lost is indeterminate; and that the theological motifs of the love and justice of God remain unresolvable. My conclusion is that the fate of the lost and those who never heard the Gospel are disputed doctrines of the Christian faith and should not be considered dogmas of the church. There is room, therefore, to take a hopefully open posture toward the possibility of salvation for the lost, those in non-Christian religions, and those who never heard the Gospel.

A pastoral and a missional concern might arise at this point. The pastoral concern is that this hopefully open posture might give some people the impression that (1) the decisions they make in this life are not decisive, (2) that one can put off making a decision to be a Christ-follower until after death, or (3) that this view might encourage a morally lax lifestyle. It also might be inferred that we do not need to be evangelis-

tic, send missionaries, rescue people from hell, or call people to an explicit knowledge of God in Christ since people have the possibility of life with God after they die. These are genuine pastoral and missional concerns. Two responses must suffice for this essay.

First, people may misconstrue or take liberties not only with disputed doctrines of the Christian faith, but also with apostolic teaching and dogmas of the church. For example, in Romans 5, after Paul extrapolates that death came through Adam and life came through Jesus Christ, he goes on to show the superiority of grace over sin and the law. He ends Romans 5 with the thought: "The law was brought in so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more, so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (5:20-21 TNIV). Certainly one may conclude from Paul's exalted teaching on grace here that one can just go on sinning because grace is greater than sin and the law. Paul actually anticipates those who might misconstrue his teaching and begins Romans 6 with this cautionary word: "What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We are those who died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?" (6:1-2 TNIV). Just because a doctrine *can* be misconstrued does not mean that it necessarily *will* be misconstrued. Just as the doctrine of grace can be misconstrued, we must anticipate and caution against misconstruing the teaching on the fate of the lost and those who never heard the Gospel.

Second, the reason to evangelize, send missionaries, and call people to Christian conversion is not simply to save non-Christ followers from a future hell. There are many reasons to evangelize, send missionaries, and call people to Christian conversion. The present benefits of an explicit, personal, and epistemological encounter with Christ are, to name just a few, constant communion and fellowship with the Triune God, the joy of worship, the fellowship of the saints, holiness of heart and life, answered prayer, assurance of forgiveness and salvation, power over Satan and temptation, guidance and direction in life, relief from the oppressive guilt of sin, a good conscience, transformation of self and society, a life of peace and joy, divine healing, love of neighbor and enemies, and compassion to work towards social justice and the stewardship of the natural order. These aspects of salvation can all be experienced in the present time before we die. They are part of God's plan of redemption. They are reason enough to evangelize, send missionaries, and call people to Christian conversion.

In the end, then, it is prudent to recognize that Scripture does not answer all of our questions. Is it possible that Scripture purposefully leaves open the question of the fate of the lost and those who never heard the Gospel? What if God wants us to sit before a mystery to cultivate intellectual humility? Admitting that we do not know with certainty can create a charitable “catholic spirit” towards those with differing interpretations, instead of calling them “heretics.” The tension between the love and justice of God can spur us on to work out our faith “with fear and trembling.” Living with unanswered questions may be uncomfortable and unsatisfying, but it causes us to hope and pray for the healing and restoration of the lost and can motivate us to mission among those who never heard the Gospel.

In conclusion, we do not know the details of heaven or hell. Reinhold Niebuhr gave this sage advice in his famous Gifford Lectures: “It is unwise for Christians to claim knowledge of either the furniture of heaven or the temperature of hell; or to be too certain about any details of the Kingdom of God in which history is consummated.”³⁹ It is to our benefit to accept Niebuhr’s advice. We do not know if the punishment of hell lasts forever, if the lost will eventually be destroyed, or if there will be a universal restoration of all people and things. We do not know what God will do with those who never heard the Gospel. While we cannot be certain of particular eschatological matters, we can, like Rob Bell and John Wesley, be certain that God does not delight in the punishment of the wicked, that God is merciful and just, that God is not a sadistic monster, that God will pursue us into the valley of shadows, that God will never give up on us, and that God’s grace will finally triumph over sin, death, and evil. Only eschatological verification will yield epistemological certainty in these and other matters. Until the time when we see face to face and know as we are known, we must be content to say with Von Balthasar that we “never spoke of certainty but rather of hope.”⁴⁰ As for now, this is only a hope, not a dogma of the church.

³⁹Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*. Vol. 2 (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1943), 294.

⁴⁰Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Dare We Hope “That All Men Be Saved,”* 18.

DARK GREEN RELIGION AND THE WESLEYAN TRADITION: HARMONY AND DISSONANCE

by

Matthew Seaman

Religion and nature scholar Bron Taylor names and describes “dark green religion” in a recent volume. He illustrates it as being like a phantom. It is “unnamed and has no institutions officially devoted to its promotion; no single sacred text that its devotees can plant in hotel rooms in hopes of reaping a future harvest of souls; no identified religious hierarchy or charismatic figure responsible for spreading the faith, ministering to the faithful, or practicing its rituals.”¹ And yet there *are* charismatic figures and growing institutions who view dark green religion as offering salvation, there *are* texts that are gaining “sacred” status among the faithful, and there *are* figures and organizations championing the globalization of the gospel of dark green religion.

The gospel of dark green religion, among other things, sees nature as sacred, interconnected to all things, and full of inherent value. The ethical responsibility for earth, therefore, lies with humanity. It is part of the biosphere that we are to love and care for. The entire cosmos deserves an essential measure of reverence.² The growth in the ideas and ideals of dark green religion are becoming prevalent factors in determining the worldviews and actions of groups and individuals, right from the grass-roots through to the political sphere. This is cause for excitement or concern, depending on one’s perspective.³

In this current climate of increasing concern about the health of the planet, how does the Christian faith, with particular focus on those within the Wesleyan Tradition, encounter and relate to those who would see themselves belonging to this nebulous and yet global religious crowd? What affinities, connections and understandings might there be? Indeed,

¹Bron Taylor, *Dark Green Religion: Nature Spirituality and the Planetary Future* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2010), ix.

²Ibid.

³Ibid, x.

are there any among the broadly Wesleyan company that would see themselves and their faith entwined with dark green religion? What might this mean for the Christian faith in light of the potential emergence of a global, civic earth religion? I will aim to briefly review this dark green religion, trace obstacles to creation care within the broadly Wesleyan sphere, begin to uncover possible Wesleyan harmonies and dissonances that may arise or have already arisen, and suggest an enhancement of the Wesleyan “quadrilateral.”

What is Dark Green Religion?

Bron Taylor argues that “the heart of dark green religion is to be found in the belief that everything in the biosphere is interdependent, intrinsically valuable, and sacred.”⁴ There is a “central affective feeling and ethical sensibility present in dark green religion—a feeling of belonging to nature and kinship with its diverse life forms, and a corresponding sense of responsibility for their well-being.”⁵ Not only are there elements of emotional attachment and related ethical sensibilities; there is the basis for a religious system already evident. Paul Watson, the cofounder of Greenpeace and the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society, asserts that “religions are based on rules, and we already have the rules in place for the establishment of a religion based on nature.”⁶ The rules he links with this nature religion are the basic laws of ecology, namely:

1. The Law of Diversity. The strength of an ecosystem is dependent upon its diversity. The greatest current threat to the planet’s living species;
2. The Law of Interdependence. All species are interdependent upon each other;
3. The Law of Finite Resources. There are limits to growth in every species because there are limits to the carrying capacity of every ecosystem;
4. The Law that a Species must have Precedence over the interests of any individual . . . this means the right of a species to survive must take precedence over the right of any individual or group to exploit that species.⁷

⁴Ibid, 102.

⁵Ibid, 83.

⁶Ibid, 99.

⁷Ibid.

Taylor argues that dark green religion possesses many characteristics of other established religions. These characteristics include:

- Sacred texts (books such as *Walden* by Henry David Thoreau and *A Sand County Almanac* by Aldo Leopold);
- Rituals (“soul surfers” meeting the ocean at dawn);
- Prophets (writers and activists such as Henry David Thoreau, John Muir and Rachael Carson);
- Sacred places. While all of nature would be considered sacred, certain places appear to be pre-eminent for a number of significant figures.
- Dark green religion includes elements that some consider dangerous (radical “eco-terrorists”);
- Dark green religion has an inherently political component, particularly in regards to environmentalism;
- There are inherent ethical and moral responsibilities;
- Apocalypticism. Taylor asserts that environmental apocalypticism is in one way different and even innovative—“this is the first time that an expectation of the end of the known world has been grounded in environmental science.”⁸
- There is also one frequent characteristic that should cause us as Wesleyans, and more broadly Christians, some concern. This common critique centers on the separation of humanity from nature stemming from the anthropocentricity of Abrahamic religions.⁹

Thirty years before Lynn White’s famous article “The Historic Roots of our Ecologic Crisis” was published,¹⁰ Aldo Leopold, considered as a leading ecologist and environmental ethicist of the twentieth century, asserted that “conservation is getting nowhere because it is incompatible with our Abrahamic concept of land. We abuse land because we regard it

⁸Ibid, 84. See also: Bron Taylor, “The Religion and Politics of Earth First!,” *The Ecologist* 21, no. 6 (Nov./Dec. 1991): 258-66; and Bron Taylor, “Green Apocalypticism: Understanding Disaster in the Radical Environmental Worldview,” *Society and Natural Resources* 12, no. 4 (1999): 377-86.

⁹Taylor, *Dark Green Religion*, 75.

¹⁰Lynn White, Jr., “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis,” *Science* 155(3767), 1967: 1203-1207. White argues the Christian tradition has brought about an incorrect view of power and superiority of humanity on earth which has in turn been a primary driver of environmental degradation.

as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect.”¹¹ The view that Christianity has passed its use by date, or is no longer a positive worldview, appears to be a commonality from many voices within the dark green movement. Christianity, with its resistance to worshipping the creation and not the Creator, is said to sometimes implicitly advocate the destruction of the creation.¹² By contrast, the new biocentric “religion” is experiential and existential nature, claiming “that we can know the creation; we can see it, hear it, smell it, feel it and experience it. We can [and should] nurture and protect it.”¹³

In expounding the experience of lived biocentric religion, the “anthropocentric” idea of custodianship of the earth is rejected. This idea conveys human superiority, and humans have a terrible history of being custodians. In response to humanity’s apparent lack of qualifications, Paul Hawken brings an interesting slant to the conversation. He says, “It has been said that we cannot save our planet unless humankind undergoes a widespread spiritual and religious awakening.”¹⁴ He then asks, “would we recognize a worldwide spiritual awakening if we saw one? . . . What if there is already in place a large-scale awakening and we are simply not recognizing it?”¹⁵

Christianity, the Wesleyan Tradition, and Ecology¹⁶

Norman Habel suggests that Christian mission has over time progressively encompassed three elements, all applicable and relevant to the Wesleyan context. Habel’s first element involves mission focused primarily on the saving of souls. The second broadens the idea of mission and includes

¹¹Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac, and Sketches Here and There* (New York: Oxford University, 1989 [1949]): vii.

¹²Taylor, *Dark Green Religion*, 99.

¹³*Ibid.*

¹⁴Paul Hawken, *Blessed Unrest: How the Largest Movement in the World Came into Being, and Why No One Saw It Coming* (New York: Viking, 2007), 184. Cited in Taylor, *Dark Green Religion*, 216.

¹⁵*Ibid.*

¹⁶Portions of this section have been reworked from a paper presented at the Australasian Centre for Wesleyan Research conference “*Being Open to God’s Freedom: Wesleyan Roots and Contemporary Relevance*,” 6th August, 2011, published as Matthew Seaman, “Red, Yellow, Blue, and Green: Eco-Theology Within The Salvation Army,” *Aldersgate Papers*, 9 (2011), 48-66.

bodily and community-focused therapeutic evangelism (social justice). The third, and broadest sense of mission, takes the whole of creation as the focus of salvation, redemption and healing.¹⁷

Historically, the Wesleyan tradition has certainly focused on the first two elements: salvation of humanity, with a particular focus on those experiencing suffering, poverty and hopelessness. It can be argued that the focus on these first two elements has sidelined a broader discourse around the value and care of non-human nature, with this focus breeding especially well within evangelical theology and mission. Ross Langmead posits five reasons for this:

1. Evangelical views of the gospel are almost exclusively centred on the personal salvation of humans;
2. God's transcendence tends to be over emphasized;
3. Evangelicals tend to emphasize the historical Jesus and his atoning work at the expense of Christ the cosmic creator;
4. Evangelicals often hold to an apocalyptic and otherworldly hope for the future;
5. Many evangelicals believe that reality is divided into spirit, which is ultimately real, and physical matter, which is relatively unimportant and perhaps even sinful.¹⁸

In addition, J. A. Simmons condenses Calvin DeWitt's ten main evangelical environmental stumbling blocks into three categories:

First, there is a worry about the apparently inevitable slide towards liberal political positions that accompany environmental sensibilities. . . . Second, there is a worry about theological heresies, in particular what is often referred to as "pantheism" and "new age spirituality," which accompany so much of secular envi-

¹⁷Norman Habel, "The Third Mission of the Church," in *Trinity Occasional Papers* XVII: I (1998): 31-43. Cited in Clive Ayre, "An Approach to Ecological Mission in and through the Christian Community in Australia: Beyond Apathy to Committed Action," unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Queensland, 2008.

¹⁸Ross Langmead, "Ecojustice Principles: Challenges for the Evangelical Perspective," *Ecotheology* 58&6 (1998-99): 162-172. This fifth point is described by Christopher Bounds as a "virus," and "many Christians today are infected with [this virus,] a form of Gnosticism." Christopher T. Bounds, "God's Ongoing Redemption of All Creation," in Joseph Coleson (ed.), *Care of Creation: Christian Voices on God, Humanity, and the Environment* (Indianapolis, IN: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2010), 47-60.

ronmental positions. . . . Third, there exists a particular eschatological vision (popular among some evangelicals) that supposedly makes environmental concerns really quite irrelevant.¹⁹

These various stumbling blocks to evangelical environmentalism reflect, to some extent, the rich Christian ecological literary landscape, in that there are widely divergent views.²⁰ Indeed, Langmead's review of articles focused on the "greening of mission" in an evangelical Christian context claims there is a fairly common thread. This commonality appears to be a need to "justify the legitimacy of creation care theology" in light of its comparatively recent recognition as a significant topic within evangelicalism.²¹ More broadly underscoring this somewhat ambiguous relationship between environmentalism and religiosity, Lieberman's survey of quantitative studies of the effects of religious factors on environmental variables concludes that it is not a simple task to construct solid conclusions regarding the relationship between religiosity and environmentalism.²²

Some challenges to Wesleyan (and broadly speaking, Christian) eco-mission can be seen clearly in the problem of widespread environmental degradation. It is not hard to see the complexity and divergence in values within the rhetoric surrounding the heavily politicized areas of anthropogenic climate change and, in Australia, the carbon price debate. The divergent values and beliefs can make available options seem unclear, difficult, and they even present practical realities for various Wesleyan missions. Major contentions against eco-mission may also emerge through popular eschatological resistance to the idea of creation care, influenced to some extent by prosperity theology and the "Left Behind" style of dispensationalism.²³

¹⁹J. Aaron Simmons, "Evangelical Environmentalism: Oxymoron or Opportunity?" *Worldviews* 13 (2009): 58.

²⁰Ernst Conradie, *Christianity and Earthkeeping: In Search of an Inspiring Vision*. Resources in Religion and Theology 16 (Stellenbosch, South Africa: Sun PReSS, 2011).

²¹Ross Langmead, "Integrating Ecological Mission into Mainstream Mission: Can it be Done?" A paper delivered at the conference of the Australian Association for Mission Studies (AAMS), Sydney, 22 to 25, September 2011.

²²Gretchen Lieberman, "Caring for Creation: Investigating Faith Based Environmentalism," unpublished dissertation, University of Oregon, 2004.

²³See Michael S. Northcott, "The Dominion Lie: How Millennial Theology Erodes Creation Care," in Kyle S. Van Houtan and Michael S. Northcott (eds.), *Diversity and Dominion: Dialogues in Ecology, Ethics and Theology* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2010), 89-108.

Some conclude that “theological fundamentalism versus liberalism is the strongest religious independent variable for predicting environmentalism.”²⁴ From a 1993 study, it appears that Evangelicals were the least environmental, Protestants somewhat greener, and Catholics the greenest.²⁵ The negative correlation between fundamentalism and environmentalism stems from the factors of “dispensationalism, end-times ideology, and pessimism about the possibility of reform.”²⁶ Langmead suggests two more potential reasons for negative correlation: “Evangelicals often fail to pursue ecojustice. . . because of fear that it might lead to New Age thinking [and] evangelical activism tends to distract Christians from the full enjoyment of creation which would foster a pursuit of ecojustice.”²⁷ Dark green religion in many settings would fall into this category of “New Age” thinking, with notions such as Gaia and Mother Earth, resurgence in neo-pagan and shamanic rituals and texts, and other related activities.

There certainly are a number of deep-seated issues involved in declaring harmony between dark green religiosity and the Wesleyan tradition. However, I will argue that it is of great benefit to explore this sometimes mysterious and fluid space. Practical Wesleyan theological work would do well to identify related Christian themes within dark green religion. This would move us further toward empathy, understanding, holistic evangelical and healing, and Christ-focused mission. Identifying affinities that bridge the divide shows love toward the “other,” bringing with it constructive and positive critique for both dark green religion and the Christian faith. There must always be, however, a pointing back to the divine source of all creation.

David Bookless agrees and calls for evangelicalism to broaden the outlook of God’s purposes beyond human salvation or welfare.²⁸ He suggests that “evangelicalism has largely failed to be fully biblical, cross-centred, conversionist or activist in engaging with the non-human environment.”²⁹ If the evangelical values of biblicism, crucicentrism, conver-

²⁴Lieberman, *Caring for Creation: Investigating Faith Based Environmentalism*, 21.

²⁵*Ibid.*

²⁶*Ibid.*

²⁷Langmead, *Ecojustice Principles: Challenges for the Evangelical Perspective*, 168-169.

²⁸David Bookless, “Christian Mission and Environmental Issues: An Evangelical Reflection,” *Mission Studies* 25 (2008): 37-52.

²⁹*Ibid.*, 38.

sionism and activism “are rediscovered and applied to the environmental crisis, this approach to the gospel and to mission can offer a distinctive and valuable contribution to the current difficulties faced by the environmental movement, and to a world often paralysed by lethargy or fear.”³⁰ There are great strengths that the Wesleyan tradition could and should bring to the current environmental crisis.

Wesleyan Harmony and Dissonance

The conjunctive (both/and) rather than (either/or) pattern that Albert Outler noted in Wesley’s theology is certainly helpful in bridging the dark green divide. Rather than immediately dismissing the claims, beliefs and actions of the dark green crowd, Wesley would be keen to identify related Christian themes within dark green religion which could critique both dark green religion and the Christian faith, while always pointing back to the source of all creation. As an initial indication of potential affinities, Kenneth Collin’s helpful list of “10 Things You’ll Love about Wesley,”³¹ will be the lens through which I gather a sense of some points of harmony and dissonance between the Wesleyan and Dark Green traditions.

1. Wesley had an egalitarian spirit (at least sometimes).

Wesley’s main focus was certainly on equality among humans; however, this can be extended to all creatures and potentially all of earth. Michael Lodahl argues that “Wesley explicitly denied that [at least some] eschatological promises are addressed only to human beings, for there is no restriction in the text,”³² and that “Wesley finds nothing inherently distinctive about human beings; rather, it is the *relation toward God* for which the human creature is made, the telos towards which we are called, that marks our unique place in *God’s* creation.”³³ Therefore, we see signs of Wesley breaking down anthropocentrism. While seemingly innate within us, it can be tempered towards biocentrism—humans are not separate from nature.

³⁰Bookless, *Christian Mission and Environmental Issues: An Evangelical Reflection*, 39.

³¹Kenneth Collins, “*The Practical Theology of John Wesley*,” lecture series presented at Nazarene Theological College, Brisbane, Australia, 27th January, 2012.

³²Michael Lodahl, *God of Nature and of Grace: Reading the World in a Wesleyan Way*, 197.

³³*Ibid.*

2. Wesley was a true contemplative. To be aware, and increasingly so, of the Creator in the mundane, in the day to day activities of life, is an important part of becoming ecologically mindful, and is a God-honoring discipline. The more we are aware of how we use and sometimes abuse the created gifts we have, the more opportunity we have to then consider our options, repent and turn towards joining in the healing of creation. In this process, pride and anthropocentric thoughts and actions could give way to humility and care for the biosphere.

3. Wesley loved the poor and was generous. It is generally accepted that the world's poorest—those who are least able to prepare, move or adapt, will bear the greatest impact of increasing climatic variation. We have a responsibility to love the poor and not contribute to any further distress, pain and suffering due to our excesses. This is where the links between social-justice and environmental justice are clearly seen. For Wesleyans, to unite the passion for social justice with eco-justice, and recognize that their causes are mutually dependent, is a crucial step in bridging the dark green religious divide, and also an increasingly important step in our social justice agenda of being Christ's ambassadors to a hurting world.

4. Wesley rejected "cheap grace." Wesley speaks against "practical antinomianism," leaving people in a state of sin/bondage. Where is the bondage today? The attitudes that keep many in bondage (pride, selfishness, greed, focus on "things," and having more "things") enhance environmental crises. The fervent calls from many sectors to increase economic growth at the expense of God's creation can wash away the promises of the land "flowing with milk and honey."

5. Wesley was socially and politically concerned. Wesley wrote several political tracts, 'Thoughts on the Present Scarcity of Provisions' among them.³⁴ He believed that the rich were cheating the poor by their over-indulgence and consumption. This is certainly still the case economically, and we are now seeing the environmental outcomes of the rich cheating the poor.

6. Wesley loved God with all his heart. Kenneth Collins states that in Wesley the highest graces were evidenced in a life

³⁴Ibid.

of service and love, primarily to God and also to one's neighbor.³⁵ Who is our neighbor? Does our neighbor depend on certain ecosystems that are being ravaged by coal seam gas exploration and extraction, mining, or corporate greed? The journey towards holy love and responsible grace could be strengthened by increased focus on ecological care and humility.

Marc Otto and Michael Lodahl locate three main themes in Wesley's *Survey of the Wisdom of God in Creation*, two of which are particularly useful here to bring us closer in communion with the Creator of all: (1) We need to be constantly aware of the limits of human knowledge—humility is key. (2) To be aware of God's call, through God's creation, to wonder and worship.³⁶

A Helpful Variant of the Wesleyan Quadrilateral

David McEwan argues there is extensive agreement within current Wesleyan scholarship that Wesley did use Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience in the development and maturing of his theology.³⁷ There are, however, outspoken critics, some calling for the whole model to be abandoned. Some still see value in the model and would prefer additional elements in it. Randy Maddox maintains that Wesley's "theological authorities could more adequately be described as a unilateral rule of Scripture within a trilateral hermeneutic of reason, tradition, and experience."³⁸

I have taken note of de Souza³⁹ and Snyder's⁴⁰ separate yet related identification of creation as a descriptor which fits in the Christian con-

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Marc Otto and Michael Lodahl, "Mystery and Humility in John Wesley's Narrative Ecology," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 44:1 (2009), 124-125.

³⁷David McEwan, *An Examination of How John Wesley's Theological Methodology Functions In Pastoral Practice, Illustrated By His Doctrine of Christian Perfection*. Unpublished dissertation, The University of Queensland, 2006: 21.

³⁸Randy Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology* (Nashville, TN: Kingswood, 1994): 46.

³⁹Luís Wesley de Souza, "The Wisdom of God in Creation: Mission and the Wesleyan Pentalateral," in Howard A. Snyder, ed., *Global Good News: Mission in a New Context* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2001), 138-152. Cited in Howard A. Snyder, "The Babylonian Captivity of Wesleyan Theology," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 39, no. 1 (Spring, 2004): 20.

⁴⁰Howard A. Snyder, "The Babylonian Captivity of Wesleyan Theology."

text of seeing all matter as created by God, and thus as an important factor in doing theology. The resulting “pentilateral” model is seen as a “unilateral or central rule of Scripture within a quadrilateral of creation, reason, tradition and experience.”⁴¹ McEwan’s valuable contribution to updating the Wesleyan model brings a more fluid and “postmodern” description, which situates Wesley’s theological method as a “dynamic, neural network, with the four elements as the critical interlinked nodes, with the whole energised by the presence of the Spirit.”⁴²

Through the dynamic work of the Spirit, creation assists in informing and illuminating the four interrelated sources or nodes of scripture, reason, experience and tradition. This may be a debateable and problematic concept to some; however I would argue that all experience, reason, tradition and scriptures are mediated from God through creation. McEwan helpfully states: “The Spirit utilises the network differently for working with the doctrinal substance and then the experiential circumstance of Christian perfection.”⁴³ This model helps to gain insight into the various ways significance is applied or understood to certain nodes, and how giving more weight to certain elements in the system can of impact the holistic view of the network within which we all “live and move and have our being.”

Paul Watson’s quote from John Muir is fitting: “When you tug on any part of the planet, you will find it intimately connected to every other part of the planet.”⁴⁴ We individually impact each other with certain significance, actions, and understandings. Our actions, based on our own perceptions derived from the various network node and connection weightings, can influence others and the creation for or against God’s glory.

Conclusion

In looking forward to increased ecological concern within Wesleyan traditions, and countering previously mentioned suggestions about why evangelicals may be unenthusiastic about environmental issues, Langmead offers seven helpful responses:

1. A cosmic view of salvation will balance the human-centred soteriology of many evangelicals.

⁴¹Ibid., 20.

⁴²David McEwan, *An Examination of How John Wesley’s Theological Methodology Functions*, 4.

⁴³Ibid.

⁴⁴Ibid.

2. An understanding of God as both transcendent and immanent . . . will restore a lively sense of God's intimate involvement with creation.
3. A broader view of the atonement which links the redeeming work of Christ to his role as the creative and originating Divine Word will hold together creation and redemption more easily.
4. A stronger affirmation of the value of this world to God, as demonstrated in the incarnation, will offset and balance the otherworldly hopes so common in evangelical thinking.
5. An affirmation of the goodness of the material world, and even better, new integrated ways of conceiving the relationship of spirit and matter, will overcome the destructive dualism of spirit and matter.
6. A willingness to work with others of like mind is needed to overcome the fear of the New Age.
7. Finally, a healthy sense of wonder and grace that may allow a livelier relationship with creation which will nourish the pursuit of ecojustice.⁴⁵

As a fine example of recent movements in this direction by a member of the Wesleyan family, the Ethics Centre for the Canada and Bermuda Territory of the Salvation Army has produced a "Position Statement on Responsibility for the Earth."⁴⁶ The statement contains valuable biblical insights and is forward looking in its approach to the current state of God's creation. I take the liberty to include it in full:

The earth is an interconnected whole, each part interdependent. As an intricately ordered system it must be kept in careful balance. Human sinfulness continues to contribute to destruction of the earth and cause significant degradations: increased global temperature, unnatural changes to biodiversity, air and water pollution, ozone depletion, land and habitat destruction. These imbalances have consequences for the poor,

⁴⁵Langmead, *Ecojustice Principles: Challenges for the Evangelical Perspective*, 169-170. For further reading on these topics, I refer again to Lodahl's wonderful book which touches on many of these points from a Wesleyan perspective: *God of Nature and of Grace: Reading the World in a Wesleyan Way*.

⁴⁶The Salvation Army, "Position Statement on Responsibility for the Earth" (2009). Available: <http://www.salvationarmyethics.org/position-statements/responsibility-for-the-earth-2/>

our global neighbours and future generations, as more and more people are unable to meet their basic human needs. Environmental concerns are part of the broader reality of injustice and economic inequity in our world. Individuals, communities, religious organizations, businesses and governments must work to change this.

The Salvation Army believes that God created the earth and all living things. We believe that God delights in each part of creation and fills it with intrinsic value, regardless of its utility. As such, caring for creation is an act of worship to God, while neglecting or abusing it is an act of disobedience.

The Salvation Army believes that degradation of the earth is in part the result of human activity which has not adhered to the rhythms and regulations of biblical stewardship. We believe that human beings, created in the image of God, have a responsibility to care for all living things in a manner that reflects God's own relationship to creation.

Humans are called to careful stewardship of the earth and its resources. The call to stewardship must be seen as an invitation to inhabit God's garden, to tend to this bountiful planet, care for it and help it to flourish, joining with all creation in witnessing to God's glory. Proper stewardship ought to follow Christ's pattern of humility, service and sacrifice in the world.

The Salvation Army anticipates the day when God will make broken creation whole again, redeeming all created things and renewing the earth. However, this does not absolve us of the responsibility to be good earth-keepers. We believe that good earth-keeping is essential to the Christian faith. Salvationists as individuals and The Salvation Army as an organization resolve to accept responsibility for this world we live in by taking practical steps to conserve and regenerate creation.

As Taylor posits, Is Dark Green Religion a phantom? Is it a holy phantom? Is it a stirring for all of us to join together in becoming more responsible, full of grace and love, and thereby caring more deeply for all of God's creation? Taylor would see this movement as a new religion. I hope that this dark green movement may help us, the church, to recapture the fuller, more holistic nature of the Christian faith, bringing with it holiness, healing, and love to those who would otherwise be antagonistic toward the prevenient grace of the Creator. While there are numerous economic, political, theological, cultural, social and individual barriers, there is hope.

Michael Lodahl informs us that one Wesleyan hymn was initially titled “Grace before Meat.” It embraces the “affirmation of the *sacramental* character of our creaturely relations and experiences,”⁴⁷ and it shares hope that the current ecological crises can provide a way forward in humility, a way toward caring for all of God’s loved creation.

*Turn the full stream of nature’s tide;
Let all our actions tend
To Thee their source; thy love the guide,
Thy glory be the end.*

*Earth then a scale to heaven shall be,
Sense shall point out the road;
The creatures all shall lead to thee;
And all we taste be God.*⁴⁸

⁴⁷Lodahl, *God of Nature and of Grace: Reading the World in a Wesleyan Way*, 146.

⁴⁸Hymn #104, lines 25-32, *Works* 7:211-12. Cited in: Lodahl, *God of Nature and of Grace: Reading the World in a Wesleyan Way*, 145. Lodahl states: “This hymn was originally titled ‘Grace before Meat’ in *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1739). It is placed in a section titled ‘For Mourners convinced of Sin’ in the 1780 *Collection of Hymns*.”

INTERPRETING IDOLATRY: READING SCRIPTURE WITH THE FATHERS, WESLEY, AND CONTEMPORARY EXEGESIS

by

Scott Dermer and Stephen Riley

Recently there has been a revival of interest in patristic exegesis. Scholars of early Christianity are revisiting patristic commentaries, while “post-critical” approaches are taking a fresh look at patristic interpretation. Even so, this renewed interest is not purely academic. The recent *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* series collects extracts from the fathers on every book of the Bible with the aim of “the intensified study of Scripture by lay persons who wish to think with the early church about the canonical text.”¹ There is growing recognition of the value of patristic exegesis for the present-day church’s engagement with Scripture.

Our project emerged out of the desire to bring patristic exegesis into dialogue with exegesis in the Wesleyan tradition today. Our aim is not to argue for a full-scale recovery of a primitive ideal of biblical interpretation, nor is to argue that contemporary biblical interpretation stands in a privileged position above all previous exegesis (these are the dangers of nostalgia and presentism); rather, our aim is to analyze critically the resources within the Wesleyan tradition in order to continue to learn what it means to be faithful interpreters of Scripture.

To that end, we will examine how three interpreters, Augustine, John Wesley, and Nathan MacDonald, a contemporary exegete, read Exodus 32, the narrative of the golden calf, a *locus classicus* for the concept of idolatry.² One of the issues which we will attend to specifically is the use

¹Thomas C. Oden, general introduction to *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*, ed. Gerald Bray and Thomas C. Oden (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1998), xi.

²While we recognize that it is a leap from the fathers to Wesley and from there to anything that might be called “contemporary” exegesis, our intent is not to recount the numerous moves in biblical scholarship that occurred between these periods. Rather, it is to locate points of connection for the sake of ongoing reflection about exegesis in the catholic and Wesleyan tradition. Ultimately, we will argue that, despite differences between these sets of commentators, there are three points of connection between them which merit the attention of contemporary Wesleyans.

of allegory in these interpretations. The word allegory, according to its base parts, is *allos* (other) and *agoreuein* (to speak in public).³ Thus, by allegorical interpretation we mean any interpretation where the words, events, or characters of the text speak of another meaning besides the obvious one.⁴ Although some are inclined to distinguish allegorical from typological or figurative readings, we will treat these as synonymous since both aim to discern meaning in addition to the plain sense.

The Fathers of the Early Church

The early church fathers read both Testaments as the Word of God that conveys the message of salvation. In order to understand and communicate this saving message, the fathers used various exegetical techniques which they inherited from both their Judeo-Christian and Greco-Roman contexts. One such technique was allegorical interpretation.⁵ This involved discovering in the text a higher or deeper sense than the plain

³See the helpful definitions of allegory in Rita Copeland and Peter T. Struck, *The Cambridge Companion to Allegory* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 2–11, and Jeremy Tambling, *Allegory* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 1–18.

⁴John J. O’Keefe and R. R. Reno, *Sanctified Vision: An Introduction to Early Christian Interpretation of the Bible* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 87.

⁵In the modern period, beginning particularly with Jean Daniélou, *The Lord of History* (London: Longmans, 1958), scholars have made a distinction between allegory and typology in the fathers, arguing that the two terms represent mutually exclusive categories. By this account, typology is considered an acceptable interpretive move, for, unlike allegory, it does not undermine history. Yet Peter Martens, “Revisiting the Allegory/Typology Distinction: The Case of Origen,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 16 (2008): 283–317, argues that Origen does not make any clear distinction between the two. Also, David Dawson, “Figure, Allegory,” in *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1999), 365, states that Augustine “uses these terms [*allegoria* and *figura*] individually and often combines them in various, complex ways. Consequently, one should not make too much of the nuances of these terms as they appear in particular passages.... It can also be a misleading procedure if one anachronistically seeks to impose on Augustine the sharp, polemically formulated contrast between allegorical and typological interpretation found in the writings of the Protestant Reformers.” In this paper we use the terms “allegorical,” “figurative,” and “typological” in a broad sense to indicate any nonliteral interpretation. For more on the distinction between allegorical and typological readings, see Frances Young, *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

one.⁶ A precedent of allegorical interpretation was set in earlier pagan and Jewish exegetical practices. While Greeks applied allegory to objectionable material in their classics (e.g., Homer and Hesiod), Philo used it to resolve difficulties of anthropomorphism in the Hebrew Scriptures. Yet the fathers believed they were chiefly following the New Testament, especially Paul, in their attempt to discover a “higher” sense in Scripture.⁷ Through allegorical reading, especially of the Old Testament, they could ascend from the bare narrative to the spiritual sense which spoke of the Christian economy of salvation.

Allegorical interpretation was rooted in the notion of the inspiration of Scripture.⁸ Scripture’s inspired status meant that no word of the text could be taken as superfluous. According to Origen, “If the Holy Spirit has dictated [the words] with a scrupulous accuracy by the mediation of the servants of the word . . . then the wisdom of God reaches the whole of scripture to the very last word.”⁹ For Origen, every detail in scripture carries the wisdom of God and thus offers an occasion for spiritual edification. To discern this wisdom, however, the reader must search diligently for the higher sense, for it is not always obvious what theological significance attaches to certain details in Scripture.¹⁰

For fathers like Origen, discovering the higher sense involved using the best critical tools of their day, which were often learned from Greco-Roman rhetorical handbooks. In fact, Frances Young has shown that patristic exegetes were instrumental in developing a “professional”

⁶The fathers used several adjectives to describe this other sense: “spiritual,” “figurative,” “mystical,” and “higher,” to name a few. Peter W. Martens, “Scripture,” in *The Routledge Companion to Early Christian Thought*, ed. D. Jeffrey Bingham (New York: Routledge, 2010), 297.

⁷See 1 Cor. 10:4,11 and Gal. 4:24. In Galatians 4 Paul says that Sarah and Hagar, “allegorically speaking” (*allêgoroumena*), represent two covenants.

⁸See Origen, *On First Principles* 4.1.1.

⁹*Philocalia* 2.4, quoted in J. N. B. Carleton Paget, “Christian Exegesis in the Alexandrian Tradition,” in *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation*, vol. 1, *From the Beginnings to the Middle Ages (Until 1300)*, ed. Magne Sæbø (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1996), 510.

¹⁰For example, when Numbers 33:1–49 describes Israel’s passing through 42 different places in their journey from Egypt, Origen interprets each place as a different stage in the soul’s journey to God. He offers the Hebrew etymology for each place-name in the narrative, connecting it to a different phase of mystical ascent. Origen, *Homilies on Numbers* 27.

approach to exegesis in antiquity which included practices like establishing the correct text, etymology, grammatical analysis, explaining figures of speech, and providing the background information of a text.¹¹ The attempt to discern a spiritual sense was thus combined with a careful reading of the words and narrative of the text.

This fact calls into question the recurrent modern criticism that patristic allegory was fanciful or arbitrary.¹² For the fathers, allegorical interpretation was a “disciplined” exercise.¹³ Although they could offer more than one allegorical reading of a text,¹⁴ there were principles which guided those readings.¹⁵ This is seen clearly in Augustine’s manual for hermeneutics, *On Christian Teaching*.¹⁶ Here Augustine asserts that Scripture is composed of divinely given words or signs.¹⁷ The problem, however, is that sometimes the signs of Scripture are obscure or difficult.¹⁸

¹¹Young, *Biblical Exegesis*, 206.

¹²Origen’s allegorical approach was criticized in his own day. The concern, among some, was that it arbitrarily overturned the coherence or sequence of the biblical narrative. This is the concern of Eustathius of Antioch in his *A Critical Investigation on the Subject of the Belly-Myther, Against Origen*, trans. Rowan A. Greer and Margaret M. Mitchell, *The “Belly-Myther” of Endor: Interpretations of 1 Kingdoms 28 in the Early Church* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006). For an analysis of this ancient criticism against Origen, see Young, *Biblical Exegesis*, 161–185. The charge that allegorical interpretation is arbitrary, even fanciful, has become a constant refrain in modern times. Regarding Origen’s allegorical interpretation, Mark Edwards offers an instructive clarification that can be applied to other fathers as well: “The deeper sense is felt as the discovery not the creation of the exegete, . . . it seems to be part of the fabric of the work, and hence . . . a ‘real presence’ that is waiting to be deciphered, not an arbitrary function that the reader has found useful to impose.” Mark Edwards, *Origen against Plato* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2002), 125.

¹³O’Keefe and Reno, *Sanctified Vision*, 114.

¹⁴Augustine states: “Could God have built into the divine eloquence a more generous or bountiful gift than the possibility of understanding the same words in several ways?” Augustine, *On Christian Teaching* 3.27.38 (PL 34.80), trans. R. P. H. Green Oxford World’s Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 87.

¹⁵Martens, “Scripture,” 298.

¹⁶For an introduction to Augustine’s biblical hermeneutics, see Frederick Van Fleteren and Joseph C. Schnaubelt, eds., *Augustine: Biblical Exegete* (New York: Peter Lang, 2004); Karla Pollman, “Hermeneutical Presuppositions,” in *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1999), 426–429.

¹⁷Augustine, *On Christian Teaching* 2.3.4.

¹⁸Augustine, *On Christian Teaching* 2.10.15.

Thus, Augustine offers several directions on how to clarify obscurities. The interpreter should draw upon his knowledge of the larger corpus of Scripture, for often-times obscure passages are illuminated by clearer ones.¹⁹ The immediate context and the original language should be considered as well.²⁰ Furthermore, knowledge of the liberal arts should be used as an aid.²¹ Lastly, the interpreter must look to the rule of faith for guidance on how to resolve the difficulty.²²

After suggesting such disciplines for resolving obscurities, Augustine confronts the issue of how to determine whether the words of Scripture are to be taken as literal or figurative. He offers the following rule: "Anything in the divine discourse that cannot be related either to good morals or to true faith should be taken as figurative."²³ The goal of Scripture is to lead human beings to the love and understanding of God and neighbor. Therefore, if words or actions in Scripture run counter to this goal, they are to be taken figuratively.²⁴ A given passage can have multiple figurative meanings, as long as the meaning is consistent with love of God and neighbor and the creed. Thus, Christian morality and belief provide a robust framework for interpretation, yet within this framework there is room for interpretive creativity.

Augustine's interpretation of Exodus 32 is a telling example of his allegorical exegesis.²⁵ He is concerned mainly with an obscure detail at

¹⁹Augustine, *On Christian Teaching* 2.9.14. Interpreting Scripture by Scripture was a central practice in early Christian exegesis; it was the same principle which the Greeks called "interpreting Homer by Homer."

²⁰Augustine, *On Christian Teaching* 2.11.16.

²¹Augustine, *On Christian Teaching* 2.16.24–2.40.61.

²²Augustine, *On Christian Teaching* 3.2.2–5.

²³Augustine, *On Christian Teaching* 3.10.14 (PL 34.71), trans. Green, 75.

²⁴Augustine, *On Christian Teaching* 3.56. For example, "If your enemy is hungry, feed him" (Rom. 12:20) can be read literally because it enjoins love; yet heaping "coals of fire" on your enemy's head must be interpreted figuratively, for at the literal level it counsels malice.

²⁵Augustine, *Against Faustus the Manichaean* 22.93. The most detailed discussion of Exodus 32 is found in the response to Faustus the Manichaean. Faustus leveled an attack against the Old Testament, censuring the ritual requirements of the law and the moral shortcomings of the prophets. Augustine, in response, criticized Faustus for failing to understand the figurative nature of the Old Testament writings. Augustine argued that, when read figuratively, the very passages to which Faustus objects on moral grounds are symbols pointing to Christ and his church. For Augustine's other comments on Exodus 32, see *Expositions on the Psalms* 35.26, 62.5, 74.3, and 89.22–23.

the end of the narrative in verse 20. Why did Moses, after burning the golden calf, grinding it into powder, and dispersing it into water, make the people drink it? Augustine resolves the obscurity with the following allegory. The golden calf, as one of the main forms of idolatry among the Egyptians, stands for the idolaters of the Gentile nations. The burning of the calf symbolizes the transformation of the Gentiles under the power of the gospel. Augustine connects Jesus' saying, "I have come to send fire on the earth," to the act of burning the golden calf, illustrating the practice of interpreting Scripture by Scripture.²⁶ The grinding of the calf points to the destruction of the Gentiles' pride in light of the truth of the gospel. The sprinkling of the dust in the water indicates the baptism of the Gentiles. Finally, Israel's drinking the water is the Gentiles' incorporation into the people of God, the body of Christ. Augustine concludes: "So this calf, by the fire of zeal, and the keen penetration of the word, and the water of baptism, was swallowed up by the people, instead of their being swallowed up by it."²⁷ Thus, Augustine takes the literal sequence of actions in the text as pointing to spiritual realities like the gospel, baptism, and the church. The text functions not as a mere repository of historical artifacts, but as a collection of symbols providentially arranged for instruction on the saving work of Christ. Exodus 32 reveals the work of the church in absorbing pagans through the power of word and sacrament.

The use of such allegory has a pastoral aim. When Augustine speaks of how the people of Israel "swallowed up the idol, instead of being swallowed up by it," we must hear an exhortation to his own flock to *not* be absorbed by surrounding pagan customs. Although Augustine lived almost a century after Constantine began his program to privilege Christianity and suppress certain forms of pagan religion, various forms of pagan worship persisted in his North African context.²⁸ Thus, Augustine's use of allegory

²⁶ Lk. 12:49.

²⁷ Augustine, *Against Faustus the Manichaeon* 22.93 (PL 42.463), trans. Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, 1st ser., ed. Philip Schaff (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), 4:310.

²⁸ Peter Brown, "Conversion and Christianization in Late Antiquity: The Case of Augustine," in *The Past Before Us: The Challenge of Historiographies of Late Antiquity*, ed. Carole Ellen Straw and Richard Lim (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004), 103–117. In a letter to a priest, Augustine observed how lifeless idols in pagan temples could appear to move and breathe in the minds of their devotees. See Augustine, *Letter* 102.18. In his preaching he was not opposed to railing against certain "bad habits" of his parishioners, such as attendance at pagan festivals. See Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (Berkeley: University of California, 2001), 309.

was not only a matter of resolving ambiguities in Scripture; it was also a matter of discerning the usefulness of every part of Scripture for the sake of edifying his community by reminding them of the economy of salvation and urging them to resist the pagan customs that surrounded them.

John Wesley

John Wesley's approach to reading scripture has been well documented by a number of excellent scholars.²⁹ What is intended here is a focus on two guiding principles as points of analysis and comparison with the other sets of exegetes.

First, it has been noted that Wesley consistently affirms the need to use the best scholarly tools available for one's reading of Scripture while holding that the reading of Scripture should always point the way to heaven. On the one hand, he makes a translation of the New Testament and does some fairly interesting textual criticism for his day.³⁰ Still, the ultimate goal for Wesley is always a reading of the text that leads to spiritual edification and maturity. One can note how in the preface to his *Explanatory Notes Upon the Old Testament* Wesley finally states that the ultimate goal of reading Scripture is to understand the key doctrines of the faith and know God's will for one's life.³¹ Though it may be worth-

²⁹For a helpful summary of Wesley's approach to reading Scripture, see the works by Scott J. Jones, *John Wesley's Conception and Use of Scripture* (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 1995); Robert W. Wall, "Wesley as Biblical Interpreter," in *The Cambridge Companion to John Wesley* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 113–128; Joel B. Green, *Reading Scripture as Wesleyans* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2010); and the essays in Barry L. Callen and Richard P. Thompson, *Reading the Bible in Wesleyan Ways: Some Constructive Proposals* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 2004).

³⁰For some helpful examples, see the discussion in Jones, *John Wesley's Conception and Use of Scripture*, 208–214.

³¹John Wesley, "Preface To The Old Testament," *Wesley's Notes to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Francis Asbury Press, 1987), 20. Wesley writes, "To read this with a single eye, to know the whole will of God, and a fixed resolution to do it. In order to know his will, you should, 4. Have a constant eye to the analogy of faith; the connection and harmony there is between those grand, fundamental doctrines, Original Sin, Justification by Faith, the New Birth, Inward and Outward Holiness. 5. Serious and earnest prayer should be constantly used before we consult the oracles of God, seeing scripture can only be understood thro' the same Spirit whereby it was given. Our reading should likewise be closed with prayer, that what we read may be written on our hearts. 6. It might also be of use, if while we read, we were frequently to pause, and examine ourselves by what we read, both with regard to our hearts and lives. This would furnish us with

while to have the best translation or be able to understand literary devices to aid one's reading of the text, the goal of growing in one's faith is the highest good.

Perhaps more importantly for the present discussion is Wesley's affirmation that one should allow the "plain" or literal sense of Scripture to speak unless it leads to absurdity.³² Here, Wesley reflects much of his historical location, one which placed a high value on "scripture alone" and at least the perception of a minimal amount of interpretation.³³ His insistence on the plain sense of meaning from the text can be seen in a number of his *Notes on the Bible* which often simply restate what is in the biblical text for his readers with very little or no explication. In his notes on Exodus 32:1, Wesley remarks that the Israelites were "weary of waiting for the promised land. They thought themselves detained too long at Mount Sinai." It is worth noting that Wesley is often abridging Matthew Henry's commentary on the Old Testament in his *Notes* and this example is one such case.³⁴ However, it is worth considering why Wesley chooses to include this note from the multiple explanatory notes Henry offers on this passage. It would seem that it is because it fits Wesley's larger schema of explaining the plain sense of Exodus 32:1.

Even so, Wesley ends this note with a remark about the necessity of many gods: "They say, make us gods which shall go before us. Gods! How many would they have? Is not one sufficient? And what good would gods

matter of praise, where we found God had enabled us to conform to his blessed will, and matter of humiliation and prayer, where we were conscious of having fallen short. And whatever light you then receive should be used to the uttermost, and that immediately. Let there be no delay. Whatever you resolve, begin to execute the first moment you can. So shall you find this word to be indeed the power of God unto present and eternal salvation."

³²Jones, *John Wesley's Conception and Use of Scripture*, 110.

³³Jones gives a helpful historical context for Wesley in this regard, especially in light of particular movements in 18th-century England. See *John Wesley's Conception and Use of Scripture*, 114-116.

³⁴Wesley, "Preface to the Old Testament Notes," in *John Wesley's Notes on the Bible*, 16. Wesley states, "But it be reasonably inquired, 'If Mr. Henry's exposition be not only plain, sound, full, and deep, but practical, yes, and spiritual too, what need is there of any other?'" For a comparison of Wesley's notes on Exodus 32 with Matthew Henry, see Matthew Henry, "Exodus 32," in *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Genesis to Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1963), 106-107, and John Wesley, "Exodus 32:1," in *John Wesley's Notes on the Bible*, 87.

of their own making do them? They must have such gods to go before them as could not go themselves farther than they were carried!”³⁵ By saying this he turns the note from a purely explanatory, plain sense, reading into an opportunity to engage the reader in a larger reflection on the senselessness of idolatry in general. What appears to be a minimalist interpretive move is actually an opportunity to engage his readers in a reflection that will move them closer to maturity with God.

While Wesley does focus on the plain sense of the text, even if it is a way for his readers to reflect on their spiritual journey, he allows that not all texts will be as easy to explain as Exodus 32:1. There are cases where there will be contradictions between biblical texts or instances where the plain sense simply leads to absurdity. In most cases Wesley would allow that the best practice is to let Scripture interpret Scripture, and in these cases to let the text with the most obviously plain and clear meaning have sway.³⁶ Yet, as Scott Jones notices, Wesley also allows a second methodology for dealing with difficult passages, namely a “figurative sense” of the text.³⁷ What Wesley means by this figurative sense is a bit more difficult to understand. Jones highlights a few passages in Wesley’s works where it seems to imply that, when he thought the literal sense is too difficult to understand, an allegorical interpretation might work.³⁸ One example occurs in his sermon “Signs of the Times” where he says that one sign of the time of God’s approaching power will be that those who are blind will see. Wesley interprets this in a “spiritual sense” to suggest that those who were blind to their spiritual condition of sin can now see it and repent.³⁹ Wesley’s allegorizing of the text accomplishes his rhetorical purpose, which is to demonstrate the spiritual import of the passage.⁴⁰

³⁵John Wesley, “Exodus 32:1,” in *John Wesley’s Notes on the Bible*, 87.

³⁶Jones, *John Wesley’s Conception and Use of Scripture*, 114–119.

³⁷*Ibid.*, 119–121.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 120: “Be sparing in allegorizing or spiritualizing.” This comes in response to question 37 in the Large Minutes, “Are there any smaller advices relative to preaching, which might be of use to us?” Wesley also defines allegory in his notes on Galatians 4:24 as “a figurative speech, wherein one thing is expressed, and another intended.” John Wesley, “Galatians 4:24–27,” *John Wesley’s Notes On the Bible*, 532.

³⁹John Wesley, “Signs of the Times,” in *The Works of John Wesley* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1985), 2:526.

⁴⁰Robin Scroggs argues that Wesley allegorized passages in Matthew and elsewhere. See Robin Scroggs, “John Wesley as Biblical Scholar,” *Journal of Bible and Religion* 28, no. 4 (Oct. 1960): 415–422. Jones would disagree with this interpretation. See Jones, *John Wesley’s Conception and Use of Scripture*, 195.

Exodus 32 also offers two instances which raise the possibility that Wesley is doing something other than a plain sense reading of the text. The first example occurs in verses 10 and 32. In both verses Wesley refers to Moses as a type of Christ who intercedes on behalf of the people. Here Wesley explains the plain meaning of the text by reference to something other, in this case, to the intercession of Christ that would ultimately reconcile the world.⁴¹ The second example comes in verse 5 where Wesley is commenting on Aaron building the altar and proclaiming a feast. In his notes he remarks that the Israelites apparently did not design the image in order to be worshipped but rather that they might worship the true God through the image. Though this remark is something of an interesting move on its own, it is what comes next that is particularly fascinating. Wesley says, "And yet this did not excuse them from gross idolatry, no more than it will excuse the Papists, whose plea it is that they do not worship the image, but God by the image; so making themselves just such idolaters as the worshippers of the golden calf."⁴² It is extremely provocative that Wesley makes this kind of allegorical connection between the Papists and Israel in this passage.

In both of these instances one can see Wesley's principle of the plain sense at work in a way. He never denies the literal sense of the calves' image or Moses' intercession; however, he does go beyond that interpretation to add something to it, another language which relates something which is old to something which is new. Wesley's strategy parallels that of the fathers in that he attempted to explain difficult passages through contemporary images so that his readers could take something from the narrative that would help them live as God intends.

Contemporary Exegesis

Nathan MacDonald's essay, "Recasting the Golden Calf: The Imaginative Potential of the Old Testament's Portrayal of Idolatry," offers a contemporary example of exegesis on Exodus 32.⁴³ His reading proposes six options for understanding the sin of idolatry found in the golden calf narrative.

⁴¹Wesley, "Exodus 32:1," in *Notes*, 87.

⁴²Wesley, "Exodus 32:5," in *Notes*, 87.

⁴³Nathan MacDonald, "Recasting the Golden Calf: The Imaginative Potential of the Old Testament's Portrayal of Idolatry," in *Idolatry: False Worship in the Bible, Early Judaism, and Christianity*, ed. Stephen C. Barton (New York: T&T Clark, 2007), 22–39.

MacDonald believes these options resolve some of the issues “that critical scholarship has sought to solve.”⁴⁴ By critical scholarship, MacDonald means the processes of textual, redaction, and literary criticisms by which scholars have noted the presence of problematic terms, multiple layers of text, and narrative coherence in Exodus 32. Only one of MacDonald’s six offerings, his option of idolatry as political rebellion, will be necessary to show the pattern of his solid work.⁴⁵

In this section, he highlights the ways in which the golden calf can be understood as Israel’s rebellion against the covenant with God that had just been established in the writing of the tablets. He proposes that the calf can be understood as a contrast to the two tablets because of the language that is used to describe both the calf and the tablets. His exegesis of this option reflects a careful literary reading of the connections between the word for the “carving” of the tablets that God does and the “carving” of the calf that Aaron does. MacDonald works with the particularly tricky verse 32:4. He notes the ways in which the words *wayyatsar*, “he formed,” and *cheret*, “an engraving tool,” have different meanings and ambiguous referents that could influence one’s understanding of the narrative.⁴⁶ What he ultimately argues for is an interpretation that sees Israel as having done their own work in the calf that rivals the work of God in the tablets. This rebellion is political because it breaks covenant with God and must ultimately be repaired with the renewal of the covenant in Exodus 34.

Particularly striking about MacDonald’s reading is his use of a form of criticism to deal with difficulties in the text, and yet he attempts to open up theological possibilities which go beyond the plain sense. What he says at the end of his essay is telling:

Within the context of the Old Testament, canonically positioned and intertextually embedded, the sin of the Golden Calf is not a single sin. The concept of idolatry has an enormous potentiality as befits one of the primary expressions of rebellion against God. In dialogue with other biblical texts, the Golden Calf can forever be recast to deepen our understanding of, and enable our vigilance against, the sin of idolatry.⁴⁷

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 24.

⁴⁵MacDonald’s six options for understanding the sin of idolatry in Exodus 32 are: 1. Illegitimate representation; 2. Political rebellion; 3. Parody and False imagination; 4. Immorality; 5. Greed; and 6. Folly.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 30.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, 38.

The way he frames what he has done is by recasting the golden calves for our vigilance against the sin of idolatry. In effect, he has taken one thing from a particular world and given it new meaning for a contemporary audience by translating it through shared images, like political rebellion. By using the concept of the sin of idolatry, he has teased out some new possibilities for readers that are within the bounds of the narrative but require work that is beyond just the “plain sense.”

Conclusion

We have examined three interpreters and their general hermeneutical principles by looking at their readings of Exodus 32. In conclusion, it is important to draw some connections between their different approaches to this text and Scripture in general.

First, the three interpreters attempt to use the best critical tools of their day. For the fathers and Wesley this can be seen in their particular concern with reading the best possible translation of Scripture available. Often, this meant doing their own text-critical work and translation in order to deal with difficult texts. For contemporary exegetes such as MacDonald, the number of tools at their disposal has grown exponentially; yet, at the base of their work, an ability to work with the text at the linguistic level continues to be an indispensable part of their repertoire for offering the best interpretations.

Second, all of the exegetes are concerned with reading Scripture with a view toward the spiritual edification of their audience. The fathers and Wesley have a clear understanding that reading Scripture should lead one and one's spiritual dependents to a greater understanding of God's saving action in history and a deeper communion with God. In the contemporary example of MacDonald there is a more general concern to exhort his audience to vigilance against idolatry in its various forms, which is a spiritual end. The aim of all of these readings is to produce in the readers a better understanding of the economy of salvation and what it means to be faithful to God.

Finally, all three interpreters attempt to explain the difficult parts of Scripture in a way that relates to the sensibilities of their readers. For the fathers, like Augustine, this includes a relatively regular use of allegory, which is disciplined by a critical reading of the text, the rule of faith, and the double imperative to love. For Wesley, even in his perceived minimalist interpretive framework, there is both room for and practice of something that looks like allegorical interpretation. In one sense, Wesley's alle-

gory is very Christological: Moses is a type of Christ. However, in another sense it reveals an apparent prejudice against the Papists. For MacDonald, the use of allegory appears to be much more limited; there is not a clear attempt to use a Christological framework. However, if one considers the larger definition of allegory, then there is a sense in which his reading falls within the category. Thus, when MacDonald suggests that what Israel did in Exodus 32 was political rebellion, he has spoken otherwise about the golden calves and therefore expanded the possibilities for understanding idolatry.

In our view, these three connections—the use of critical tools, the goal of spiritual edification, and the use of allegory—have something of value for a contemporary Wesleyan approach to Scripture. It is doubtful that anyone will contend the first two. Yet the use of allegory remains contested territory. Fears of arbitrary and abusive readings of texts rightly keep many from engaging the practice. However, we would like to suggest one way forward in regard to reappropriating the practice. Rather than engaging in our own allegorical interpretations, which may lead to particularly bad and prejudiced readings, we can examine the allegories of the fathers and Wesley to see what images consistently appear in the tradition and consider their import, both good and ill, for contemporary interpretation.

Here is one example. How might considering the allegorical interpretations of Noah's ark as the church inform our reading of that text in particular as well as our understanding of what it means to be the church?⁴⁸ Here is another example. How might certain allegorical connections, such as the one seen in Wesley's connecting the idolatrous Israelites with the Papists, help us to become aware of the prejudiced associations which we read into Scripture? These two ways of appropriating allegory, along with the continual use of critical tools, will help contemporary Wesleyans broaden their theological imaginations, much as MacDonald has attempted. We will read Scripture with the goal a deeper understanding of what it means to be faithful to God.

⁴⁸For example, see Augustine, *City of God*, 15.26.

BOOK REVIEWS

Beach, Nancy. *Gifted to Lead: The Art of Leading as a Woman in the Church*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008. 176 pages. ISBN 0310285960.

Grenholm, Cristina. *Motherhood and Love: Beyond the Gendered Stereotypes of Theology*. Translated by Marie Taqvist. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011. 204 pages. ISBN 0802863881.

Reviewed by Amy L. B. Peeler, Postdoctoral Fellow, John Wesley Honors College, Indiana Wesleyan University, Marion, IN; Kiersten Beagan, John Wesley Scholar, Indiana Wesleyan University, Marion, IN; and Katherine Fitch, John Wesley Scholar, Indiana Wesleyan University, Marion, IN.

Thinking theologically about motherhood—or even riskier, thinking maternally about theology—might appear unusual or even suspect, but not for those in the Wesleyan tradition. Phoebe Palmer appealed to motherhood to describe the character of God.¹ She thought of her motherhood as ministry,² and her ministry as motherhood, praying that God would “condescend to make me a ‘Mother in Israel.’”³ The authors of two recent books follow in her footsteps and present fruitful discussions at the intersection of motherhood and theology.

On the one hand, *Gifted to Lead* by Willow Creek teaching pastor Nancy Beach spans a broader spectrum than just the issues of motherhood. But, because she *is* a mother, it offers subtle testimony that uniting the roles of mother and church leader bequeaths a great blessing to God’s people. Part biography and part guidebook, *Gifted to Lead* chronicles the celebrations and struggles of being a female in the church. The author, who from an early age displayed gifts for leadership, explains the problems she encountered as a woman in a ministry that was largely male-

¹Phoebe Palmer, *The Way of Holiness* (rev. ed.; Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1981), 277.

²*Ibid.*, 268.

³Richard Wheatley, *Life and Letters of Mrs. Pheobe Palmer* (New York: W. C. Palmer, 1876), 171.

dominated. Describing what it was like to be in the “Boys’ Club,” she sketches certain fundamental characteristics a female should have among a group of men: humility, self-confidence, humor, and integrity.

Although the book includes practical and even comical issues (where *do* you attach a microphone on a dress?) for women in the men’s world of ministry, it offers much more than that. Grounded firmly on active attention to the work of the Spirit in personal and ecclesial life, Beach’s reflections prove beneficial for *men* in leadership as well as women. As a leadership manual, the book offers insightful suggestions about how to “lead up” or respond to one’s boss and how to find your voice. It is not about who has the calling in ministry, whether male or female, but about the fact that if one is gifted to lead, then she *or he* had better obey.

Moreover, in addition to women serving in ministry, women who work in the home or in secular environments can relate to her honest yet encouraging picture of womanhood. One of the great strengths of the book is its recognition of the variety of women’s experience because of the individual giftings of the Spirit. “There is no one right way to navigate life as a woman” (90), Beach proclaims. Hence, she artfully avoids falling into the trap of stereotype or generalization. Women of all ages and life situations receive mention and validation.

At the same time, because she writes as a mother, Beach’s book is particularly helpful for women who are or who plan to be mothers. Her theology of motherhood counsels against working toward (impossible) perfection. Instead, it encourages women to embrace the various seasons of life where one area of life may get more attention than the others (97). This book may offer women who sense the call into pastoral ministry as well as motherhood the inspiration to believe that balance is possible.

Readers should know that this book does not present an argument for women in all aspects of ministry in the church. The forward by John Ortberg, a former pastor at Willow Creek, begins the book with some very strong points presenting the need for women in the church. In greater detail, Beach pens an open letter to male readers in chapter seven stating that the church misses essential parts of the Body of Christ if women are not included both as laity *and* clergy. The book provides a brief list of resources to explore theological and biblical components, but those who disagree or even remain on the fence on the question of women in ministry might find the book off-putting. Nonetheless, the book offers great encouragement for those who believe that the Holy Spirit was not focused

on gender when he gave women and men ministerial gifts. Reading more like a conversation than an academic treatise, *Gifted to Lead* offers some thought-provoking and heart-warming lessons for those who want to explore leadership of all God's people, male and female.

On the other hand, Cristina Grenholm's *Motherhood and Theology* is an academic treatise. A theologian of the Church of Sweden, Grenholm provides a theoretical and theological exploration of motherhood's contribution to theology and theology's contribution to motherhood. Like Beach's book, she aims at a broader audience than her title might suggest. Some may initially expect difficulties in reading or thinking about theology from this perspective, especially if the reader has never given birth. While challenging, the work is an enlightening resource of how one may be "motherly" while not yet understanding exactly what biological motherhood entails. Since everyone has a mother, everyone can relate to the insights into human love that motherhood provides. Similarly, all people, and not just Christians, can perceive the value that Christian theology brings toward understanding relationships. Her goal, then, is both broad and ambitious: she wants to understand the meaning of love and do so by exploring the meaning of motherhood.

Consequently, Grenholm's text first helps the reader to better understand the complexities of motherhood and grant it more value. Recognizing that Christianity has typically focused more on fatherhood, she argues that a mother's unique role provides a clear example of the *imago dei*. Mothers create and care for human beings just as God does. Hence, the basic definition of motherhood—having gone through childbirth—differentiates it from and elevates it above traditional conceptions of simple housekeeping (36). Society respects its mothers, but Grenholm provides a theological reason for doing so: because they show forth the image of God.

Second, studying motherhood provides insights into all human relationships. The particular vulnerability of motherhood, in pregnancy and in raising children, reveals the vulnerability present in all relationships. The recognition of vulnerability highlights the necessity of love, so that vulnerability does not result in exposure of the vulnerable one. In addition, a mother's lack of autonomy—as Grenholm states, "There is no clear distinction between her and the fetus she carries" (165)—shows that heteronomy, a lack of control and influence over one's own situation, characterizes motherhood. Yet this lack of control can allow one to "forget about oneself" and "bring about a state of intense joy" (167). Clearly, the selflessness encouraged by motherhood can be practiced by all.

Finally, Grenholm utilizes her description of motherhood to capture features of the human relationship with God. She catalogues theologians who appeal to erotic love to describe all relationships, but their emphasis on equality and lack of hierarchy simply cannot apply to a human's relationship to a sovereign God. However, motherhood, which is a necessarily asymmetrical relationship in which one member always has generational precedence, thrives in love. Similarly, God's relationship with humanity will always be asymmetrical, i.e. not equal, but can and does exhibit profound love.

To model her points, Grenholm appeals to Mary the mother of Jesus. Because the Bible reveals rather than hides her motherhood, all can learn from her moment of vulnerability, particularly at the annunciation. Mary had to bear Jesus alone with the threat of being persecuted for adultery and losing her fiancé. Yet, because God's love enveloped her, her vulnerability became a prerequisite for both "creativity and love" (102). By looking to Mary, we all learn to accept our own lack of control, our own vulnerability without changing it either to exposure or idealization and open ourselves up to God's enveloping love.

The insights of Grenholm's book come at a high price. A wooden translation and lack of structural organization make the book difficult to read. More importantly, Grenholm lacks a commitment to scriptural authority, most evident in her assertions that the paternity of Jesus remains an unanswered question. Nevertheless, her text forces consideration of some fruitful questions. First, is motherhood as absent in the theology of the church as she claims? Certainly, Christians have more to say about God as Father, but she does not engage the robust discussions in patristic, medieval, and modern theology of the *church* as mother. The insights she provides about motherhood could provide rich points of discussion when moved into the realm of ecclesiology.

Second, some of her arguments press the question: does a discussion of motherhood and theology always devolve into pantheism? Although she does not argue for viewing God as mother, she falls into a similar trap of many theologians who do. In Grenholm's assessment, God's relationship makes God vulnerable; hence, God becomes entwined with and dependent upon his creation. One may argue, against Grenholm, that the relationship between God and human beings is not unavoidable. It is God's choice to create people, a sovereign and effective will unavailable to mothers in the events of pregnancy and birth.

Both Grenholm and Beach provide necessary insights for those who champion women's participation in communities of faith because both

make the case that the church is greatly impoverished if it dismisses the participation and experience of half (or more) of its members. Beach reminds us that God empowers all women to serve in a variety of ways in the church, including in positions of leadership. Her life demonstrates that the calling to motherhood need not prevent a woman from pursuing other avenues of participation in the church. If she provides a way to answer the criticisms against combining motherhood and practical theology, Grenholm's primary insight (if her more spurious theological musings are overcome) provides the positive reason for combining motherhood and theoretical theology, namely that motherhood provides a near and powerful picture of the relationship between God and humanity, in which an asymmetrical relationship creates deep mutual love. Both the theories and the instructions in these books show that the church reaps great benefits when mothers bring their lives into its view, so that it can think and even live differently.

Callen, Barry L. *Beneath the Surface: Reclaiming the Old Testament for Today's Christian*. Lexington, KY: Emeth Press, 2012. 211 pages. ISBN-13: 9781609470265.

Reviewed by Peter Benjamin Boeckel, Ph.D. student, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, TX.

Why do Christians need the Old Testament? How can one appropriate seemingly irrelevant legal material in a (post)modern context? In what ways is the Old Testament authoritative? Such questions have endured throughout church history, and many interpreters have proffered valuable approaches in formulating answers. Barry Callen's *Beneath the Surface* joins this rich tradition with a refreshing approach to the Old Testament. Callen's thesis is that the Old Testament, which he calls the Foundational Testament, must be read through the lens of its Jewish context. Furthermore, he asserts that only when this is done can the Final Testament (the New Testament) be understood properly. Callen demonstrates that both testaments are Jewish documents that inform each other; neither reaches its potential in isolation from the other.

Callen begins his study by describing the need to consider the Jewish roots of Christianity. Tracing the history of Jewish-Christian relations from the first to twenty-first centuries, he provides a good synopsis of the factors that led to the schism between the two religions. He also illustrates excellently the Jewish foundation of Christianity. Because of this heritage, Callen observes that "the Word of God in the Foundational Testament is the sacred beginning of God's Truth—not merely a preface but an essential part of the truth itself" (39).

Having recognized the need to understand the Jewish roots of Christianity, Callen presents his hermeneutical methodology in chapters 3 and 4. He argues that the Old Testament, in its entirety, is authoritative for Christians and that the enduring nature of its authority is found in the *theology* informing its many texts (and often lying *beneath* them). This is the principle from which the book derives its title. Callen says that readers must focus on the "great theological themes" that inform the Old Testament and that they must search "beneath the text's surface" to find these themes (55). Once illuminated, Callen observes, these themes provide a foundation upon which Christians can build their theology (56).

These theological themes form the backbone of Callen's hermeneutic and therefore their discussion constitutes the majority of his argument. Callen states that underneath all biblical texts lies one primary theological truth: "One God for All" (66). This belief in one God who acts in history is

what Callen believes to be the central tenet of both Judaism and Christianity. This truth, metaphorically designated the “water source” by Callen, manifests itself throughout the Old Testament in four “truth streams.” These streams are: (1) the way of covenant, by which God chooses a people for his redemptive purpose; (2) the way of holiness, by which God sanctifies his people to carry out his purpose; (3) the way of ordering and questioning, by which God is present with his people in their questions, suffering, and despair; and (4) the way of radical hope, by which God grants his people a sustaining hope as they move toward God’s intended future.

Callen dedicates two chapters to understanding his foundational theological truth (“one God for all”) and one chapter to each of the four theological streams. Throughout this presentation, his argument is that both the primary theological truth and at least one truth stream underlies *every* text in the Old Testament. In each of these chapters, Callen illustrates his points with examples from both the Old and New Testaments. Occasionally, however, he has difficulty sustaining his argument that a theological interpretation is warranted. One notable example is in his treatment of the Song of Solomon. Callen willingly admits that this text describes human love, but is not as astute in stating the justification for why one needs to go “beneath the surface.” Callen’s argument throughout the book would be bolstered if space permitted deeper exegetical discussions of the texts he employs as examples.

Chapters 5-10 build to a climax in chapter 11 where Callen employs his hermeneutic in four inter-testamental case studies. In this chapter he discusses four problematic texts in the Old Testament and demonstrates how his approach assists in properly understanding these pericopes. The problems considered are holy war, sacrifice as worship, vengeance as seen in Psalm 137, and the virgin birth in Isaiah 7 and Matthew 1. With each issue, Callen describes the Old Testament text in light of other biblical texts (from both testaments). However, the critique offered above about Callen’s interpretation of the Song of Solomon also holds true for his approach in some of his case studies. For example, he asserts that the theological base behind the holy war text deals with living as a holy people, and that Jews in the Old Testament, at times, over-read what was meant when implementing commands from God. He further observes that protecting the faith cannot be accomplished through violence (165). While this may be true, Callen does not address texts like 1 Samuel 15 where Saul is rejected as king for failure to annihilate a certain people. Consequently, Callen’s use of case studies would be stronger had he chosen to

cover fewer problem texts in order to address the issues involved in one or two in a more thorough manner.

The above critique does not negate the usefulness of Callen's case studies, as he does make several good points throughout chapter 11. In his treatment of Psalm 137, he raises the important issue of considering how violent texts were heard by their original audiences. He correctly observes that the text was not intended to raise ethical questions such as whether or not a war was justified in the context of faith (180). Ultimately, chapter 11 provides four useful examples of Callen's approach.

The last two chapters address progressive revelation and the paradox of having a closed canon that is capable of being interpreted in new ways. Callen discusses the nature of Scripture as being more than a "comprehensive body of theological information" (191). Rather, it contains a limited number of truths that come to us in the four streams discussed above (196). These truths are inspired and must be foundational for Christian theology. However, he also affirms that the Spirit is dynamic and broods within the text to present the interpreter with fresh understandings of these truths, which are built upon the text.

In summary, Callen's choice of texts, as well as his approach to the Bible, places him firmly within the Wesleyan tradition. One final critique that may be offered here is that Callen, at times, presents his hermeneutic as though his interpretation were the only one with exegetical warrant. This, combined with his Wesleyan selection of texts, occasions a few potshots at other Christian traditions (e.g. Calvinists; see 97). Such critiques of these traditions may be appropriate, but his comments sometimes leave the impression that no one with an understanding of the Old Testament would ever be a Calvinist, something he surely would not have intended.

In conclusion, *Beneath the Surface* provides an excellent explanation of the relationship between the Old and New Testaments. Understanding the Jewish background of the Bible is mandatory if one is to understand the origins of Christianity. Callen's book provides an outstanding argument for the foundational nature of the Old Testament for the Christian faith. He writes at an introductory level with a style that would be understood by average readers. The book would fit well in both undergraduate Bible courses and in Sunday school classes focusing on deeper understandings of Scripture. While the book has occasional weak points in application of its methodology, this does not detract from the importance of its message: if one desires to understand Christian theology, one must search the Scriptures and dive beneath the surface of the Bible to examine the underlying theological teachings of the text.

Eason, Andrew M. and Roger J. Green, eds. *Boundless Salvation: The Shorter Writings of William Booth*. New York: Peter Lang, 2012. 207 pages. ISBN-13: 978-1433113918.

Reviewed by R. David Rightmire, Professor of Bible and Theology, Asbury University, Wilmore, KY.

Although writing several books during his lifetime, William Booth (1829-1912) also authored a number of shorter works that heretofore have been accessible only in archival collections of early Salvation Army periodical literature. Eason and Green, editors of *Boundless Salvation*, have provided a selection of nineteen such writings on a variety of topics, with the purpose of demonstrating how Booth and his mission were influenced by Wesleyan theology and nineteenth-century revivalist principles.

The introduction to this volume offers a brief but informative summary of the life of William Booth, the “founding father of the Salvation Army,” which focuses on the development of his call to ministry and developing sense of mission. The recounting of Booth’s theological journey provides the necessary context for understanding the forces that helped shape his theology and practice. Although nominally a member of the Church of England from birth, Booth credited his conversion to the influence of Methodism in his youth. Joining the Methodist New Connexion (1854), where he received his theological training and ordination (1858), Booth later resigned from this denomination (1861) to engage in independent evangelistic ministry among the poor. The result of such activity was the formation of a mission in East London (1865), which eventually became known as the Christian Mission (1869), and later changed its name to the Salvation Army (1878). The editors also highlight how the emergence of the Army’s socially-related ministries was crucially connected to the evangelistic goals of Booth’s mission.

The book’s six chapters are arranged thematically, and each includes an introduction to the selected theme, helpfully placing the incorporated primary sources in their respective contexts. In chapter one, “Origins and Early Days,” Booth recounts the influence of Wesleyan theology on his thinking, as well as the impact of the “new measures” of transatlantic holiness revivalism on the methodology employed in his ministry. The texts reproduced in this chapter also focus on the development of Booth’s mission among the poor, with its evolving ecclesiological identity and adoption of militaristic structures of organization and authority.

Booth's soteriological understanding is disclosed in the texts found in chapter two "Salvation." Dominant motifs of "rescue" and "deliverance" are apparent, as is his commitment to a Wesleyan understanding of the universal scope of salvation. Booth's "optimism of grace" is evident not only in his emphasis on "free salvation for all," but also in his postmillennial eschatological vision, which saw the ultimate goal of the Army's mission as the redemption of the world. In addition, Booth's growing understanding of the social dimensions of the gospel is revealed, as he came to view salvation as deliverance from not only personal sin, but also from social evil.

"Holiness" is the next theme included in *Boundless Salvation*. The excerpts of Booth's writings contained in this chapter reveal his long-term commitment to the doctrine of entire sanctification as foundational for his life and ministry. Evident are the influences of American Holiness Movement representatives (especially, Phoebe Palmer) on his articulation of the experience of entire sanctification. Booth understood holiness as essential not only to the personal experience of "full salvation," but also to the social outreach of the Army. Love of neighbor found tangible expression in Spirit-empowered works of service to the poor, and became institutionalized in the Army as an expression of corporate and individual holiness.

Chapter four reveals the development of Booth's position on the issue of women in ministry. The influence of his wife, Catherine Mumford, is clearly portrayed as the catalyst for William's emerging commitment to "female ministry" within his mission (although the editors omit any reference to Phoebe Palmer's influence on the Booths in this regard). Of particular importance in this chapter are the practical and theological tensions evident in Booth's decision to allow women to preach, and eventually to serve in leadership positions within the Army. Over time, he came to realize that the growth and spread of his movement was, to a great degree, due to the faithful service of female officers and soldiers.

"Missions and Missionaries" is the focus of chapter five. During a time when Victorian and Edwardian religious culture supported missionary endeavors which emphasized institution building and "civilizing mission," the Army's overseas outreach focused on culturally-adapted evangelism. This theme is illustrated by focusing on early Salvation Army mission work in India. In an address delivered on "The Future of Missions and the Mission of the Future" (1889), Booth reveals his vision for the Army as "one vast missionary society guided by apostolic principles of

adaptation and self-denial" (133), with the goal of "winning the world for Christ."

The final chapter, "Relationship to the Church," explores Booth's implicit ecclesiological understanding, as he wrestled with the nature of his mission in relation to the church. The excerpts provide some insight into his view of the Army's unique role, as complimentary to both Methodism and the Church of England. Also briefly dealt with, in light of the Army's emerging ecclesiological self-understanding, is the Founder's decision to abandon sacramental practice (although the treatment of this issue could have included reference to other extant scholarship on the theological influences affecting Booth's decision).

In the book's conclusion, Eason and Green summarize the main themes dealt with in their collection of Booth's shorter writings. They also reveal their hope that these primary texts will dispel any "misguided perception" of Booth as merely a pragmatist, devoid of any theological dependence on his "Methodist and revivalist background" (197). Although Booth's theology was always dynamically interacting with his pragmatic spirit, the editors aptly demonstrate that it would be a mistake to view his commitment to orthodoxy as necessarily subordinate to his orthopraxy.

Boundless Salvation, in addition to making accessible important primary source material on a variety of topics, also includes a helpful (albeit selective) listing of resources for further study, as well as an index and six photographic images of William Booth at various stages of his ministry. The reader interested in ready access to source citations and editorial comments will appreciate the footnote, rather than endnote, format. Despite the relatively high price of this hardcover volume, it is nonetheless a valuable collection of significant writings, providing insight into the life and thought of the Founder of the Salvation Army.

Halldorf, Joel. *Av denna världen? Emil Gustafson, moderniteten och den evangelikala väckelsen*. Skrifter utgivna av svenska kyrkohistoriska föreningen, II. Ny följd, 67; Skellefteå: Artos, 2012. 389 pages. ISBN-13: 9789175805948.

Reviewed by David Bundy, Research Professor, New York Theological Seminary, New York, NY; Co-editor, *Journal of World Christianity*.

It has frequently been argued by scholars, both those speaking from within the Holiness movements and from outside, that the Holiness movements of the nineteenth century provided an escape for their adherents from the challenges of modernity. Halldorf, a Swedish Pentecostal scholar, has in his Uppsala University dissertation tested this truism and found it wanting. Using as his foil the theory of modernity as proposed by Charles Taylor, he chose as his subject the Swedish Holiness leader Emil Gustafson (1862–1900). The sources for the analysis include diaries of Gustafson, his published and unpublished *oeuvre*, and ecclesiastical sources. Many of these were not earlier available to scholars, but are now mostly in archival collections in a variety of locations in Sweden.

Emil Gustafson experienced conversion in 1878, but initially felt called to a career in agriculture, following his family tradition. In 1881, after an illness prevented the agricultural career, he entered the ministry. He became a widely circulated author and was instrumental in the development of the Holiness Covenant Church in Sweden. Among his often-cited theological mentors were Wesley, Moody, Spurgeon, William Boardman, and Hannah Whitall Smith. He was a determined proponent of a “deeper Christian experience,” arguing as did Wesley that this was necessary to prevent backsliding. He became a prolific author and hymn writer/translator. His entrepreneurial style and personal charisma drew people to accept him as a leader and model who endeavored to promote his theological understandings. Gustafson’s theological understandings changed during his ministry, especially with regard to the experience and expectations of holiness. He moved from an eradicationist toward a Keswick understanding of holiness. Faced with the realities of his own physical infirmities, he moderated the expectations of healing received earlier and developed under the influence of Charles Cullis and William Boardman.

Halldorf provides a carefully nuanced exposition and analysis of Gustafson’s life, ministry, and thought in the context of contemporary Swedish culture and the international Evangelical revivalism of the last

decades of the nineteenth century. He argues that the “modernism” of Gustafson and his peers is quite distinct from the understanding of modernism proposed by Charles Taylor. He proposes that there are different approaches to modernity that are not escapes from modernity but instead are critical affirmations of modernity. Halldorf concludes that Gustafson did not conform to Taylor’s particular meta-theory of modernity. Thus, Gustafson is a part, product, and proponent of modernity, not a would-be escapee from modernity. Along the way, Halldorf points out that, similarly, simplistic meta-theories and derivative analyses of the Holiness movement (e.g., Bebbington’s arguments for romanticism) are also not adequate.

Halldorf’s work demonstrates the need for rethinking the theoretical frameworks of analysis applied to minority and non-state-supported religious movements in general and to the Holiness Movement in particular. His work is a very important contribution to this project. As well, it is both a model of the careful analysis of sources in the testing of a theory and an important introduction to the important figure of Gustafson, a long ignored figure in Holiness historiography. The volume is accompanied by an English summary that can give some access to the complex argument, but not the detailed interaction with sources found in the text.

Horton, Michael. *For Calvinism*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011. 208 pages. ISBN-13: 9780310324652. Paired with Olson, Roger E. *Against Calvinism*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011. 207 pages. ISBN-13: 9780310324676. (Olson wrote the foreword to Horton's book; Horton wrote the foreword to Olson's book)

Reviewed by Mark Murphree, Assistant Professor of English, Toccoa Falls College, Toccoa, GA; Ph.D. student in Bible and Theology, Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, Springfield, MO.

Not long ago, InterVarsity Press produced a pair of books addressing the Calvinist/Arminian debate, *Why I am Not a Calvinist* and *Why I am Not an Arminian* (2004). At first glance, this pair from Zondervan looks to fill the same niche. However, rather than having each book attack the opposing position, both of these focus on Calvinism (for or against). Michael Horton's book, *For Calvinism*, gives a positive explanation of the basics of Calvinism, while Roger Olsen's book, *Against Calvinism*, examines its weaknesses. Although obviously commissioned as a pair, it appears that Olsen and Horton largely wrote their books in isolation, as neither book references the other directly, and Olsen's foreword to Horton's book implies that he read it for the first time upon its completion. Both of these books are written in a popular style, without needless jargon, making them readily accessible to those outside the academy.

The first book, Michael Horton's *For Calvinism*, presents a thorough outline of basic Calvinist theology. He opens with a brief overview of Calvinism, and then spends chapters two through five exploring the five points of TULIP. In the next two chapters, he explains the relationship between Calvinism and Christian living and Christian missions. In the last chapter, he concludes with a self-critical analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the Calvinist movement, as well as the opportunities and threats it is facing today. The questions Olsen asks in his book—"Whose Calvinism? Which Reformed Theology?"—apply here. By and large, Horton presents his own understanding of Calvinism. He rejects "hyper-Calvinism" (13) for what he considers a more moderate, historically accurate understanding of Reformed doctrines. For instance, he rejects the doctrine of reprobation and double predestination (57, 105). Horton's presentation will not fully represent all those who hold the title "Calvinist" or "Reformed," but for a book this size, it does an admirable job on the basics.

Horton does not avoid the big questions about Calvinism but addresses them directly, although how convincingly he does so depends

on one's perspective. On the question of whether God is the author of sin, he says, "God is not the author of sin, since he does not directly cause or bring it about" (48). On the question of whether the doctrine of election is loving, he replies that the "important point is that Calvinism and Arminianism both affirm that God has chosen not to save everyone; the paths diverge over whether God's electing grace or our free will is the deciding factor in our salvation" (63). On the possibility of apostasy, he interprets Hebrews 6:4-6a as referring to outward conformation to Christian ritual (baptism and the Lord's Supper), not true salvation (120).

Horton distinguishes the Calvinist position, not only from the Arminian position, but also from the Lutheran and Roman Catholic positions and those of various church heresies. Although he does not interact with Olsen's *Against Calvinism*, he does interact extensively with Olsen's previous book, *Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities* (IVP Academic, 2006). Despite this, his depiction of Arminianism is questionable at times. For instance, he states, "Arminians begin with the central dogma of human liberty" (66), an accusation that Olsen spends an entire chapter of *Arminian Theology* debunking! At all times, however, his tone is respectful of others; he does not "go on the attack," as it were, against other positions. As a stand-alone book, Horton gives a decent and readable introduction to his version of Calvinism, but it is necessarily brief.

Roger Olsen's *Against Calvinism* is another kind of book entirely. Olsen does not get a chance to present a systematic exposition of Arminianism, but is forced by the type of book this is to focus on Calvinism. Unfortunately, this also makes Olsen sound more aggressive, even argumentative than Horton. This is not helped by the angry red cover of Olsen's book (in contrast to Horton's peaceful green), nor by the *wilted flowers* on the front cover. Nevertheless, Olsen does well with his task. In his first three chapters, he examines the neo-Calvinist movement, various branches of and disagreements within Calvinism, and basic Calvinist beliefs (TULIP). The next four chapters present points of Arminian disagreement with Calvinism: concerning the nature of sovereignty, election, atonement, and grace. These are followed by a final concluding chapter and two short appendices dealing with other, miscellaneous Calvinist arguments.

Anyone familiar with Olsen's *Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities* will be familiar with his major problems with Calvinism. In *Against Calvinism*, he argues that the Calvinist definition of God's sovereignty necessarily makes God the author of sin, quoting Calvin's line that God

“compel[s] the reprobate to obedience” (75). Olsen argues that “unconditional election *is* double predestination” (104), and that the “inner logic [of Calvinism] leads inexorably to exalting God’s glory over and even against his love” (114). The doctrine of limited atonement, he says, cannot make sense of 1 Corinthians 8:11 (147). Likewise, the doctrine of irresistible grace cannot make sense of prayer for the lost (162), Jesus’ lament for Jerusalem (164), or Jesus’ statement that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God (165). In short, Olsen argues that these doctrines not only do not make sense of Scripture, but necessarily impugn the character of God.

Through it all, Olsen treats Calvinists with respect, and is careful not to ascribe to them what he considers the (negative) logical consequences of their beliefs. He interacts with many different Calvinist sources, including Loraine Boettner, John Piper, and R. C. Sproul. This gives a better sense of the variety of positions Calvinists hold on some topics, while still presenting cogent counter-arguments. Surprisingly, *Against Calvinism* functions well as a stand-alone book. For instance, Olsen devotes his entire third chapter (32 pages) to an overview of TULIP so that, while *For Calvinism* (or a similar book) is useful to the general reader before beginning this read, it is not absolutely necessary. Furthermore, Olsen’s interactions with multiple Calvinist writers make it useful for pairing with another “introduction to Calvinism”-style volume.

These books are not two parts of a whole. Each can stand alone on its own merits, and I expect that many will find a use for one or the other without needing both. However, I could see them being used together in churches, campus ministries, or college classrooms to provoke thought and discussion leading to better mutual understanding. As a pair, these two books *do* function well together, especially as an example of how Christian scholars can disagree in mutual respect. Not only do they affirm their own respective positions, but they also affirm that the debate itself is important.

Leithart, Peter J. *Athanasius*. Foundations of Theological Exegesis and Christian Spirituality. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011. 224 pages. ISBN-13: 978-0801039423.

Reviewed by Jackson Lashier, Assistant Professor of Religion, Southwestern College, Winfield, KS.

Peter J. Leithart's *Athanasius* is the inaugural volume of a new series published by Baker Academic entitled "Foundations of Theological Exegesis and Christian Spirituality." The series is edited by Hans Boersma and Matthew Levering with the goal of presenting the "Patristic witness to [the] common Nicene faith" through a study of the thought of church fathers in three areas, namely, biblical exegesis, dogmatic theology, and participatory metaphysics (series preface, ix). Given the growing interest in the Patristic period among theologians of all ecclesial traditions, there is no shortage of books on Patristic figures with similar goals (e.g., Routledge's Early Church Fathers series, for which Khaled Anatolios wrote on Athanasius in 2004, and Ashgate's Great Theologians series that, while not focusing exclusively on Patristic figures, includes Thomas Weinandy's work on Athanasius in 2007).

The primary way Leithart's work stands apart from other offerings on Athanasius, and thus the aspect that will mark the Foundations series apart from others, is the degree to which current theological issues, as opposed to historical methods, dictate the presentation of the Patristic figure. Accordingly, Leithart's work is structured around the three theological foci of the series: chapter one addressing Athanasius' metaphysics; chapter two addressing Athanasius' "theological exegesis"; and the remainder of the work addressing his dogmatic theology, notably his understanding of the Trinity (3), creation (4), incarnation (5), and redemption (6). Throughout, Leithart continues to press Athanasius' metaphysical commitments and, to a lesser extent, his exegesis.

There are many strengths to Leithart's theological—as opposed to straight historical—study of Athanasius, two of which I will mention here. First, the theological study allows Leithart to refrain from traversing historical ground that has already been thoroughly covered. Missing from Leithart's account is any in-depth presentation of Athanasius' biography, discussion of the occasions of his individual works, or location of those works in Athanasius' theological development. One might find this absence a weakness, but I find it refreshing. The world does not need another account of Athanasius' various exiles, but it may need to see how

his understanding of creation, for example, can speak to the modern debate, represented in chapter four by Scheeben and de Lubac, over the relationship of nature and grace.

Second, Leithart's theological study is more effective in showing the relevance of a historical figure to the current theological milieu. Works that spend the majority of text space on historical issues allow little room for addressing the significance of the figure for current theology, and leave the reader to draw applications that may or may not be sound. Conversely, Leithart addresses these issues in the midst of his historical account. For example, in chapter two he provides a satisfying description of Athanasius' style of exegesis, the strengths of which are his abilities to read Scripture as one coherent account, to pass from exegetical conclusions to dogmatic assertions, and to apply the Scriptures to his life. In short, Athanasius emerges as a model for the actual practice of theological exegesis that, for all its voguish appeal this past decade, has yet to produce a consensus on its actual practice. Likewise, in chapter five, Leithart applies Athanasius' understanding of the incarnation to the current debate over the impassibility of God. He gives a reading of Athanasius against theologians who reject the divine attribute as unbiblical, which demonstrates how impassibility is necessary for the defeat of sin.

For Athanasius, sin is defeated precisely because the incarnation brings that sin into contact with the impassible divine nature. Leithart writes, "Jesus could suffer *triumphantly* only because his flesh was God's, only because the flesh was the proper flesh of the Word who is incapable of being terrified or defeated by pain or suffering. It was the flesh of the Word whose love *no* obstacle can block or frustrate, and thus in his suffering and death Jesus triumphs over death and suffering" (145, italics original). Thus, impassibility for Athanasius does not mean a distant, uncaring God, but a God who has the power and ability to care—the Word remains impassible in his divine nature precisely because he chooses to undergo suffering. Athanasius' understanding of impassibility, so aptly summarized by Leithart, offers a fresh perspective into what has become a stagnate debate. Wesleyans who are enticed by open and process theologies because of their emphasis on God's love would do well to consider Patristic perspectives on the compatibility of divine love and impassibility. Leithart's work makes such a consideration possible.

Leithart's theological account requires him to give a systematic, which is to say flattened, reading of Athanasius' theology that leaves little space for development within Athanasius' thought. Although such a prac-

tice may be permissible on the assumption that the account relates the figure's mature theology, it can result, as it does for Leithart, in some questionable conclusions. For example, he claims in several places that Athanasius defends *homoousios* because "Athanasius took [the Nicene Council] as the voice of God, virtually equating the creed with the Scriptures themselves" (35). In actuality, Athanasius, along with everyone else, appears to forget the creed in the decades immediately following the council. *Homoousios* only appears once in Athanasius' *Discourses Against the Arians*, which is Leithart's primary source in chapter three's discussion of Athanasius' trinitarian theology. It is not until the mid 350s, and his later works, such as *Defense of the Nicene Definition* and *On the Synods*, that *homoousios* begins to function largely in Athanasius' theology. The reason for this has to do with a development in Athanasius' own thought as well as a shift in what his opponents were emphasizing. The Nicene Council and creed emerged in the later 350s as a rallying point for pro-Nicene figures against their opponents. However, because Leithart has flattened Athanasius' theology into a systematic account, he can only say that Athanasius intended to omit *homoousios* in his anti-"Arian" polemic in order to appeal to more "equivalent" scriptural language (75). The conclusion is not only inaccurate, it also downplays the historical importance of Athanasius in making *homoousios* the standard of orthodoxy it would become.

This flattening technique also allows Leithart to omit some potential difficulties in Athanasius' theology. There is, for example, no mention of Athanasius' close relationship to Marcellus, a figure later condemned for "modalism," even though the two figures' theologies were very similar prior to 350. Similarly, while Leithart does note some difficulties with Athanasius' Christology in *On the Incarnation* (many scholars find "Apolinarian" tendencies in places), he is able to sidestep them by appealing to Athanasius' later theology, even though he wants to privilege *On the Incarnation* in chapter five's discussion (a curious move given the consensus among historians that the work is early). Such a systematic or flattened reading allows Leithart to subsume Athanasius' troublesome conclusions in a more dominant orthodoxy, when it may be more historically accurate to admit that Athanasius developed away from some earlier heretical tendencies.

Nevertheless, Leithart's theological study avoids the most egregious error of allowing modern theological concerns to manipulate and distort the historical figure and writings themselves. On balance, his account of

Athanasius' theology is thorough, detailed, and historically accurate. Because he has been so thorough and careful in his history, he is able to apply Athanasius' theology—as opposed to a falsely constructed theology—to modern concerns, thus accomplishing what the Foundations series intends. Readers are left pondering not only a historical figure, but also how this figure challenges theological assumptions today. Leithart's ability to show Athanasius' continuing relevance to theology is the book's greatest strength and will be its lasting contribution to Athanasian scholarship.

Oden, Thomas C. *The African Memory of Mark: Reassessing Early Church Tradition*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011. 279 pages. ISBN-13: 978-0830839339.

Reviewed by Mark Glen Bilby, Part-time Assistant Professor of Church History, Point Loma Nazarene University, San Diego, CA.

Having brought to completion a compendious systematic theology as well as a massive commentary series devoted to early Christian interpretation of the Bible, Oden has now reinvented himself late in life as a scholarly champion for early African Christianity. This is but one of three related books published in short order. The first appeared in 2007, *How Africa Shaped the Christian Mind*. A similar volume also appeared in 2011, *Early Libyan Christianity*. In the preface to this book, he situates such work as part of his role as director of the Center for Early African Christianity at Eastern University.

Reviewers of the earlier *How Africa Shaped the Christian Mind* often criticized Oden for not substantiating his claim that ancient Christianity was centered in and emerged from Africa more than any other place. In other words, reviewers saw the post-colonial and ecumenical value of Oden's call to recover the African roots of Christianity, but they did not find Oden making this case historically. In many ways, *The African Memory of Mark* is an attempt to answer that challenge. Oden essentially attempts to defend the historical plausibility of the hagiography about John Mark as found in the *Martyrdom of Mark* (3rd–4th century), the Ecclesiastical History of Eusebius (4th century), as well as Coptic liturgies (especially the synaxaries) and historians (especially the 10th century Sawirus and 12th century Girgis). Oden does cite various texts from the New Testament, yet he obviously reads these earliest texts in light of much later formulations.

As this story goes, John Mark was not only an early disciple and apostle of Jesus, a missionary companion to Paul and Barnabas, and the first to write a Gospel in Rome under Peter's patronage. He was also born in Cyrene to a Jewish-African family (hence his personal acquaintance with Simon, Alexander and Rufus). Local political troubles in Cyrene forced his family to relocate to Jerusalem. The upper room where Jesus kept Passover belonged to Mark's family, and this was also the room where the earliest house-church gathered in Acts. Before he wrote his Gospel, Mark preached and did miracles in the Pentapolis and founded the church in Alexandria. He returned to Rome just in time to witness

and survive Nero's persecution of Christians, and stayed just long enough (four years) to witness and survive the executions of Peter and Paul. Finally, he hastened to Alexandria, where he was martyred.

The same story was explored just fifteen years ago in a book written by the Coptic Pope Shenouda III (of blessed memory). While Oden praises Shenouda's book and benefits from it, he writes from a completely different vantage and for very different reasons, which he does not attempt to hide. For Oden, Western culture is decadent and decaying, and the scholarly methodology of doubt has overtaken and ruined much of Western Christianity. The future of Christianity is not in Europe or the United States, but in Africa. On this note, Oden nowhere mentions Philip Jenkins' seminal 2002 work *The Next Christendom*, which analyzes the demographic trends of global Christianity and argues that a Christianity of the southern hemisphere will soon dominate. Oden's whole project seems predicated on the shift that Jenkins substantiates and projects.

Oddly post-colonial *and* paleo-Orthodox, Oden claims solidarity with champions of Afrocentrism while also scolding them. He urges them to stop reading European philosophy, sociology, and psychology and instead go back to their African (Christian) roots, namely, the writings of Clement, Origen, Tertullian, Cyprian, Augustine, and Cyril. Oden presumes the existence of a monolithic Africa over the last 2,000 years and, in this vein, insistently claims that all of Africa has always believed the same legend about John Mark. Routinely succumbing to anachronism and over-generalization, Oden's post-colonial treatise has a very colonial feel. He seems intent to redress the messy and often nasty history of Western European, Christian colonialism by bypassing it and repristinating a foundational, permanent and unchanging Afrocentric Christianity.

Scholars who attend to the complexity (diversity) and inter-connections (unity) of early Christian *centers* of influence can and will do more for post-colonial scholarship, as well the future of the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic church wherever it thrives. No amount of scholarly effort will prove that Christianity was founded and centered in Africa because it is simply not true. Still, Africa was home to vitally important *centers* of early Christianity, as was Palestine, Syria, Asia Minor, Greece, and Italy. Palestine can claim the footprints of Jesus, Syria his language, Asia Minor most of the texts in the New Testament, Greece the *lingua franca* of the earliest Christians, and Italy the remains of Peter and Paul. In the (post-colonial) interest of scholarship and the Church, these claims ought never be exclusive.

On a closing note, there is no little irony in the fact that the very hagiography of Mark that Oden defends as foundational for Afrocentric Orthodoxy shows Mark living and working among many of the centers of early Christianity, even while bound to African soil in his birth and death. He was a Catholic saint, after all.

O'Malley, J. Steven and Jason Vickers, eds. *Methodist and Pietist: Retrieving the Evangelical United Brethren Tradition*. Nashville: Kingswood Books, 2011. 289 pages. ISBN-13: 978-1426714351.

Reviewed by Michael G. Cartwright, Associate Professor of Philosophy and Religion and Dean of Ecumenical and Interfaith Programs, University of Indianapolis, Indianapolis, IN.

This collection of essays, which evolved out of a conference hosted by United Theological Seminary to celebrate the fortieth anniversary of the merger of the Methodist Church with the Evangelical United Brethren, is one of the best indicators that Methodists *may have received more* in the merger than they have realized to date. This is a bit ironic, given the oft-heard complaint by former Evangelical United Brethren that what they received from the merger was “little more than the word ‘United’ in the name of the new body and a few hymns in the hymnal” (140). In their brief introduction, Jason Vickers and Steven O'Malley contend that the EUB tradition “is full of rich conceptual resources awaiting rediscovery and implementation in United Methodism today” (viii).

The essays in Part One explore the Pietist background of the EUB Church and the contributions of the founders, Martin Boehm and Philip William Otterbein (UB) and Jacob Albright (EA). James Stein's chapter offers an excellent introduction to the Pietist heritage, while also lifting up five “benefits” for United Methodists who dare to re-engage the Pietist sources of the EUB Church. Although it is helpful to individuate these emphases—Christology, discipleship, the new birth, fellowship, and ecumenism—it may be that it is the EUB Church's integration of these emphases that is most remarkable. The essays about Otterbein and Boehm (Scott Kisker) and the origins of Albright's people (Ken Rowe) provide rich distillations about the EUB progenitors that build upon the most recent scholarship, including Steven O'Malley's thesis about the influence of Radical Pietism on Otterbein and company.

Arguably, the essays that comprise Part Two of this collection are the most significant for projects of retrieval. Professor O'Malley's essay charts the ways that Otterbein and company reflect the theological heritage of Pietism, particularly the “New Pentecost” vision of the German Reformed and radical Pietist theology (73). Tyron Inbody's exploration of doctrine and theology in the Church of the United Brethren in Christ is thorough and thought-provoking. William Naumann's contribution about the Evangelical Association lifts up the important contributions of figures like

Joseph Cook, who mediated Scottish Common Sense Realism, and S. J. Gamertsfelder, a liberal who remained connected with the Evangelical mainstream (104). Jason Vickers' comparative study of the EUB Confession of Faith with the UMC's Articles of Religion is well executed. Indeed, this analysis provides a platform for more focused exploration of EUB doctrine in the coming years.

The five studies of "polity and practices" in Part Three provide the kind of focused exploration that grounds the issues discussed in the first two parts. James Kirby's essay on episcopacy and ordination identifies several features of EUB practice that should be considered as the role of the episcopacy continues to evolve. Kendall McCabe probes the commonalities as well as the critical differences pertaining to EUB liturgy and sacramental practices. And Ulrike Schuler's study of mission and evangelism assesses "the continuing influence of the EUB heritage in Germany today" (177) while also explaining the ways in which the EUB mission to Germany unfolded during periods of American growth and decline. Wendy Deichmann Edwards offers a hopeful assessment of the EUB witness of social holiness as a source for resolving current divisions in the UMC. Finally, Paul Chilcote's study of EUB women shows how "the primary elements" of prayer, faith, and work were "held together in the lives of authentic Christians" (203).

Projects of retrieval are almost always cast in the context of contemporary concerns, some of which may be in conflict with other strands of tradition. This collection is no exception. The United Methodist Church may or may not still be "in the grip of the legacy of Albert Outler" (217), as William Abraham claims, but retrieving the EUB heritage will certainly require rethinking the theological task of the UMC. Meanwhile, there are still plenty of questions about polity to resolve. It is also hard to know what to do with Tyron Inbody's claim that changes in the United Methodist *Book of Discipline* since 1996 reflect "a radical break with long-standing tradition in Methodism" and is "traceable, in part, to the continuing influence of United Brethren ecclesiology and polity" (91). However Methodist "historical connectionalism" may be, it is misleading to make "congregationalism" a stand-in for the EUB heritage, as if these tendencies do not exist in both strands. This kind of monolithic juxtaposition fails to do justice to the historical complexity of "Methodist and Pietist" ecclesiology in the American context.

At the same time, the proposals for "the renewal of Methodism today" offered by O'Malley and others, which invoke the UB dream of a

renewed Pentecost, need to take the social and spiritual effects of the fractures of the EUB heritage into greater account than this collection appears to do if they are going to invoke the UB dream of a new "Pentecost." Retrievals need to take the social and spiritual effects of the fractures of the EUB heritage into greater account than this collection appears to do. The doctrinal heritage is conflicted. The 1962 EUB Confession of Faith is a revision of the 1885 UB confession, which in turn was a revision of the 1842 UB confession. The late nineteenth-century split between the "Old Constitution" and "New Constitution" groups of United Brethren left one group looking back to the old confession while the "progressive conservatives" looked to the future. The evangelical side also lived in the shadow of a late nineteenth-century schism. The evangelical factions managed to find their way toward reconciliation in the early twentieth century, but thereafter their ecclesial dreams were tempered by repentance and humility.

This background of division also appears to have shaped the ways EUB leaders saw their theological heritage in relation to the ecumenical movement during the first half of the twentieth century. In his 1966 dissertation "The Role of Theology in the Church of the United Brethren in Christ and the Evangelical Association," William Naumann explains that the principal reason why UB and EA leaders tended to embrace the wider company of ecumenically minded Protestants was that this shift "occurred within a partial vacuum . . . [where] the ecumenical movement contained the potential for supplying what they lacked—a church-centered tradition" (Naumann, 425). If Naumann is correct, then it would seem that the project of retrieving the EUB tradition needs to explore its apparent loss prior to the 1968 merger.

In his Afterword, William Abraham calls for an "explicit confession-alism" that draws upon the "gifts" of the EUB heritage, but Abraham is by no means romantic about this prospect. "This deep work of renewal is a long-haul, cross-generational project that requires patience, gratitude, and fortitude" (226). In the meantime, the clergy and laity of the United Methodist Church are indebted to the editors for making these materials available. One way to repay this debt is to probe the differences in more focused ways. Another way is to take greater care in construing the tradition's resources so that we do not make the mistake of attributing more conceptual integrity to the EUB theological heritage than it can bear.

Proponents of retrieval also need to take responsibility for their selective interest in the EUB heritage. To take but one example, William

Abraham's objection to "facile pacifism" (218) displays his dissent from Article 16 of the EUB Confession: "We believe that war and bloodshed are contrary to the gospel of Jesus Christ" (134). The Confession is useful for the purposes of advocating "explicit confessionalism," but Abraham appears uninterested in the internal coherence of the document in seeking the integrity of doctrine and ethics. As this disagreement illustrates, the EUB tradition still appears to have the capacity to generate an ongoing argument even if it is not as "United" as anyone might wish it were, then and now.

Rack, Henry D., ed. *The Methodist Societies: The Minutes of Conference*, Volume 10 of *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2011. 1046 pages. ISBN-13: 9781426711909.

Reviewed by Andrew C. Thompson, Instructor of Historical Theology and Wesleyan Studies, Memphis Theological Seminary, Memphis, TN.

In the past, students of early Methodism, working with material from the *Minutes* of the Methodist Conference during Wesley's lifetime, have frequently turned to the most easily accessible material from the Doctrinal and/or Disciplinary *Minutes* in either the Jackson edition of Wesley's *Works* or the source volume, *John Wesley*, edited by Albert Outler for the Library of Protestant Thought series (Oxford University Press). That material is centrally important in its summary of early Methodist doctrine and pastoral theology, as well as for the role it has played in Methodist self-understanding, past and present. However, it was only the tip of the iceberg in terms of the history of the early Methodist Conference and the full body of *Minutes* produced out of it.

Dr. Henry Rack has given us the rest of the iceberg with the publication of *The Methodist Societies: The Minutes of Conference*. This is the seventeenth volume to appear in the ongoing 34-volume critical edition of the *Works of John Wesley* published by Abingdon Press. It is also the first to appear in print since the 2003 publication of the final volume of Wesley's journal and diaries (volume 24 of the *Works*). While the earlier collections are limited in scope, both in terms of chronology and historiography, Rack's new volume changes this situation dramatically. Students and scholars now have available to them all the annual MS *Minutes* extant from 1744 to 1764 (there are gaps in the manuscript record in the 1750s and 60s), the published annual (or "penny") *Minutes* from 1765–1783, the annual *Minutes* and MS Conference *Journal* from 1784 to 1791 (the creation of the *Journal* being stipulated by the 1784 Deed of Declaration), the Doctrinal and Disciplinary *Minutes* of 1749, and the "Large" *Minutes* that grew out of the 1749 Disciplinary *Minutes* and were elaborated upon and reissued in 1753, 1763, 1770, 1772, 1780, and 1789.

It should be noted that volume 10 serves as something of a companion to volume 9 in the Bicentennial edition of the *Works*. Volume 9 (edited by Rupert E. Davies and published in 1989) carries the title, *The Methodist Societies: History, Nature, and Design*, and contains material largely narrative in nature—i.e., Wesley's many historical *apologia* for the

revival over the course of his lifetime, as well as such key texts as the "General Rules of the United Societies." In that sense, Rack's work in volume 10 on the *Minutes of Conference* helps to fill out the historical picture of institutional Methodism as it developed, an effort that adds to our understanding of the early movement in areas as diverse as doctrine, the theology of ministry, the composition of Wesley's body of preachers, the intersection of the revival with external factors (e.g., from relationships with the Church of England to the growing economic prosperity of Methodists), the evolution of Methodist missiology, and a nascent Methodist ecclesiology.

An almost monograph-length essay heads the volume, in which Rack puts the phenomenon of the Conference in the context of the early Methodist movement itself. Rack gives attention in this introduction to the wider socio-religious environment in which Methodism developed, the role of John Wesley as the dominant figure in the Conference, the business of the Conference and participation of the lay preachers, the fiduciary responsibilities assumed by the Conference, the significance of the Deed of Declaration and the issue of post-Wesley leadership, and the role of the *Minutes* themselves. Some of Rack's most insightful and intriguing work is in his analysis of the nature and use of Wesley's power in the Conference (covered specifically on pages 62–74 but also looming in the background of his entire account). This introductory essay is crucial to setting the stage for the reader's engagement with the primary source material that follows, and equally important are the meticulously documented footnotes that are present throughout the primary sources contained herein.

Rack reports in his preface that the purpose of the volume is "not only to reproduce the Minutes as a formal record, but also, through the introduction and the information supplied in the notes, to convey something of the nature and role of the Conference in Methodist life and polity" (xvi). Together, the introductory essay and the notes (as well as additional brief introductory essays before each section heading) demonstrate the high-level historiography of the volume, a credit both to Rack and to the broader project that the Bicentennial edition of the *Works* represents. Note in particular the textual comparative work laid out in the sections on the MS *Minutes* from 1744–1764 (on pp. 120–298 and the "Large" *Minutes* on pp. 844–946.)

Little by way of critique can be offered here. The volume is indeed hefty at 1046 pages, but given the fact that it is covering some 45 years of

primary source material (in addition to the substantial introductory essay), it is difficult to see how it could have been made shorter. The 1784 Deed of Declaration is included in one appendix, and the Irish *Minutes* (1778–1790) in another. Rack mentions that the design of the volume had originally called for the inclusion of the early American *Minutes* as well as biographical sketches of the preachers mentioned in the records of the Conference. Given the scope of the work, it is certainly understandable why that was left on the cutting room floor.

In sum, students of early Methodism can be thankful that this new volume of the Bicentennial edition of the *Works* is now in print and can eagerly look forward to the publication of future volumes under the direction of the project's editors, Dr. Richard Heitzenrater (General Editor) and Dr. Randy Maddox (Associate General Editor).

Shuler, Robert P., III. *Fighting Bob Schuler of Los Angeles: God's Man for the Issues of His Time*. Indianapolis: Dog Ear Publishers, 2011. 469 pages. ISBN-13: 9781457508035.

Reviewed by David Bundy, Research Professor of World Christian Studies, New York Theological Seminary, New York, NY.

This book, written by the grandson of the subject on the basis of material saved and collected by three generations of the family, presents an account of a remarkable Holiness leader of the first half of the twentieth century. It is not accompanied by the normal scholarly apparatus, although the sources can normally be identified from the citations given in the text. More than anything else, a fulsome index would have been helpful. It is quite a good read that also tells a lot about the history, sin, and characters of Los Angeles.

Shuler (1880–1965) is a very different Holiness figure from those normally found in histories of the tradition. He and a Holiness layman, Clifford Clinton (son of a self-supporting Holiness missionary couple in China and founder of Clifton's Cafeteria in downtown Los Angeles) were instrumental in fighting political corruption in Los Angeles. Shuler was pastor of Trinity Methodist Church (Southern Methodist) in downtown Los Angeles, a prolific author, publisher of a religious magazine with a nationwide circulation (*Bob Shuler's Magazine*, which became *Methodist Challenge*), and a radio preacher with a large audience. He sometimes supported Fundamentalist causes, but he himself was not a Fundamentalist. He was proudly Appalachian and Southern, but arguably not a racist. He was determinedly Holiness and worked to make his church and city more righteous.

Many would cringe at his methods, which were combative and acerbic, in the pulpit, in print, and on the air. He worked with private, secret investigators to unearth the details of evil in Los Angeles and then preached against the perceived evil, both from his pulpit (which brought in a big crowd!) and through the air waves until corrupt city officials and William Randolph Hearst colluded to convince the federal government to silence his station, which was largely funded by Lizzie Glide. He and his church also supported a large number of missionaries, including Victor Wellington Peters (Korea) and J. T. Seamands (India). A close friend of J. C. McPheeters, Shuler served on the Board of Trustees of Asbury Theological Seminary until his professor son resigned under pressure of the heresy hunt in 1950. This heresy hunt sent his friend Claude Thompson

to Emory University and brought his son to Los Angeles as his assistant pastor. Among his intimate friends was Bishop James Cannon, Jr. He was a determined foe of Aimee Semple McPherson and more than anyone else was instrumental in her trial for perjury after her “disappearance.”

This complex matrix of political and ecclesiastical power was something that few other Holiness leaders around the world could hope to achieve. The volume reminds us that the story of Holiness and Pentecostal people, and of their children, in the public square has yet to be written. Matthew Sutton's *Aimee Semple McPherson and the Resurrection of Christian America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007) will remain useful as a case study of a much more complex social, political, and religious phenomenon.

This volume is quite a remarkable achievement. It is not critical scholarship; historians of California and of the Holiness Movement and Southern Religion will have many an interpretation with which to argue! But, it is a careful presentation of the subject on the basis of an assembling and reading of the sources. It will be a standard reference point in our efforts to understand the role of the Holiness and Pentecostal movements in American culture.

Wagner, John D., ed. *Arminius Speaks: Essential Writings on Predestination, Free Will, and the Nature of God*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2011. 394 pages. ISBN-13: 978-1610970303

Reviewed by Rustin E. Brian, Lead Pastor, Kansas City Trinity Church of the Nazarene, Kansas City, KS; and Adjunct Professor of Theology, Saint Paul School of Theology, Kansas City, MO, and Northwest Nazarene University, Nampa, ID.

If the terms “Arminian” and “Arminianism” are to be properly understood, and thus if they are to be more than mere adjectives, we must discover, or re-discover, the man from whom these terms are derived, Jacobus (Jacob) Arminius. The importance of this endeavor cannot be overstated. Today, for example, there is a tendency for many to identify themselves as “Wesleyan-Arminian,” having not actually read anything by Arminius. This is a problem that must be corrected, and John D. Wagner is to be commended for trying to do just that. This important compilation of Arminius’ works, edited by Wagner, will surely help to guide students and established scholars alike into the complex and rich theological writings of James Arminius. This collection is a must-read for any scholar identified as a “Wesleyan-Arminian” and is yet unfamiliar with Arminius’ works firsthand.

Wagner selected five key works to include in this collection: “A Declaration of the Sentiments of James Arminius” (1608), “An Examination of Predestination and Grace in Perkins’ Pamphlet” (1602), “A Defense Against Several Theological Articles Extensively Distributed,” (1609), and “A Letter to Hippolytus A. Collibus” (1608). Of these, the “Declaration of Sentiments” is probably Arminius’ most important work. In the “Declaration,” Arminius sets out a careful, systematic declaration of his theological positions that includes, necessarily, a refutation of the theology of his opponents (theological followers of Calvin, particularly of the Bezan persuasion). This work, which was given before and at the request of the Dutch States General, provides the theological framework for any theology that is to be intentionally “Arminian.” Arminius’ “Declaration of Sentiments” is, therefore, required reading both for all who would call themselves “Arminian,” and for students of theology in general.

While the “Declaration of Sentiments” is Arminius’ most comprehensive and systematic work, his “Letter to Hippolytus A. Collibus” is perhaps one of his most important and helpful works in terms of its simplicity and accessibility. Arminius’ career was plagued by caricatures of

his theology, as well as constant requests to clarify his positions. Such is the case with the Letter to Hippolytus. The accessible and concise manner with which Arminius puts forth his positions in this letter make it a great choice for a reader who needs a quick summary of Arminius' positions and chooses to look to the man himself, rather than secondary literature. This letter, therefore, was a great inclusion in *Arminius Speaks*.

It should be quite clear that I heartily endorse this book for all those who desire to learn more about Arminius and his theology, as well as for those who desire to do so by engaging with primary resources. That being said, there are several elements about the formatting and editing of the work that I cannot help but question. First, why were the dates for each of the works not included with the work itself? Most of the dates are listed in the excellent Foreword by Robert E. Picirilli, but why not also include them with the individual works? Moreover, why are the works grouped in the order they are? Second, and related, which version of Arminius' works did the editor use? There are two primary editions of Arminius' works available today. The first is translated by James and William Nichols, the other by William R. Bagnall. The former is commonly viewed as a better translation than the latter, and thus I assume that this was the version used in the reprint by Kessinger Publishing cited in the "Recommended Books" page at the end of *Arminius Speaks*, although this is not indicated. Or, is it the case, that Wagner translated these texts *himself*, directly from the Latin? A simple editor's note or introduction would have helped tremendously with these minor, but important, issues.

Finally, having myself used this work in an undergraduate course, I wonder if there might have been a better way to stylistically delineate between Arminius' positions and those of his opponents? I found that students really appreciate the opportunity to read Arminius, and thus Wagner has certainly done his job. That being said, they are often confused when Arminius refers to "this doctrine" in his "Declaration of Sentiments." This is partly due to the style of argument and the grammar of Arminius himself, and thus is not Wagner's fault. I cannot help but wonder, though, if there might have been an editorial way to mark Arminius' own positions as opposed to those he is critiquing. For the sake of the new reader of Arminius, these things would have been helpful.

Ultimately, though, critiquing this work is like a child grasping at bubbles, which will only burst upon contact: it begs to be done, and yet is fruitless. Wagner has given us a helpful and concise collection of some of Arminius' most important works. He has done so in an accessible manner

that makes it easy to use this edited work as prescribed reading for the classroom. Likewise, he has made it much easier for pastors and interested laypersons to familiarize themselves with the ideas and works of Jacob Arminius, probably for the very first time. For these reasons, John D. Wagner is to be praised for this helpful contribution to theological scholarship and, hopefully, to pastoral ministry as well.

Walls, Jerry L. *Purgatory: The Logic of Total Transformation*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2012. 211 pages. ISBN-13: 978-0-19-973229-6

Reviewed by Aaron Perry, Pastor of Discipleship, Centennial Road Church, Brockville, Ontario.

Any academic text that begins with a reflection on *Deep Thoughts* by comedian Jack Handy promises to be unique. Of course, a Protestant writing a critical, yet constructive book on purgatory is, in itself, unique (although positive consideration of purgatory among Protestants is not as unique as some Protestants might think, as this author himself points out in chapter 2). Jerry Walls' *Purgatory: The Logic of Total Transformation* indeed is a unique book that displays both an ecumenical spirit and a sense of humor as it makes a consistent, yet humble argument to a recovery of the teaching of one model of purgatory. While Walls previously tackled the subject of purgatory in an earlier volume, *Heaven: The Logic of Eternal Joy* (Oxford University Press, 2002), this full-length volume expands his study to include a history of purgatory, critical examinations of various models of purgatory, issues of personal identity, postmortem conversion, Protestant attitudes to purgatory, and a full chapter on C. S. Lewis.

The doctrine of purgatory has been, at times, misunderstood and, at others, poorly considered. While at different times purgatory has received different emphases, in its most appealing form, Walls argues that it focuses on sanctification of the soul rather than satisfaction for sins and, interacting with Pope Benedict XVI, that the sanctification model is the current dominant model among Catholics. This model of purgatory fits soteriologies that emphasize transformation and sanctification, perhaps especially Wesleyan soteriology.

This brings Walls to the question of personal identity, where Walls' argument requires the most philosophical, rather than strictly theological, consideration. He considers physicalist accounts from Kevin Corcoran and Pope Benedict (then Joseph Ratzinger), Thomistic accounts, and dualist accounts. While Walls argues that each of these could fit a doctrine of purgatory, Walls proposes a "purgatory that can be understood . . . as the process of changing the structure of a soul in a positive fashion by resolving the inconsistencies [between beliefs and desires] that remain" (112). This resolution is to make the soul's abilities compatible with loving God fully and seeking to do God's will consistently.

While the typical Protestant response is that this transformation happens instantly at death, instantaneous moral perfection poses a number of issues for Walls. Instantaneous transformation is not consistent with the free cooperation of individuals with God's transforming grace that is experienced in this life and the fact that transformation requires a temporal or narrational element. Further, "we would not recognize ourselves if we underwent such radical and abrupt moral transformation" (119). Perhaps the most pressing of Walls' concerns is the relational nature of identity. "What needs to be rectified and healed here are not merely our own personal sins and character defects, but also our relationships with various people, some of whom we have hurt, and others who have hurt us" (120). This involves what Walls calls "owning the truth." Processes of transformation, reconciliation, and reparation involve knowing how to love and coming to know God, as well, which takes time.

Walls' Wesleyan theology forms the basis for his next consideration of purgatory: whether purgatory is a second chance. Walls' argument flows from what he calls optimal grace: grace that is "deeply personal and individual in the sense that God knows how best to elicit a positive response from each person, without destroying or overriding their freedom" (129). Thus, postmortem conversion is a possibility for Walls because God's optimal grace will still minister to those who die without full understanding of the gospel, whether they be mentally handicapped, infants, or unreached to ensure their free response, either positive or negative, to God's gracious offer of salvation. Here some Protestants might be ill at ease, as Walls defends that this might mean that some who die in infancy ultimately reject the gospel and that it is at least possible, though improbable, that some who die in faith may reject the necessary continuing transformation of God's grace and so reject God. However, this is all cast under optimal grace and so those who do make such incomprehensible choices do so by their own free decision.

Finally, Walls turns his attention to C. S. Lewis. Walls highlights Lewis' common-sense and powerfully creative ability to frame discussions in ways that make his conclusions both pastorally appealing and rational, working chiefly with *Mere Christianity* and *The Great Divorce*. As with other Protestants, Lewis rejects that purgatory is a matter of satisfying the punishment of sins, and highlights the sanctifying nature of purgatory—painful though it may be. Purgatory is the experience of the granted desire of the soul to be transformed for the presence of God. Lewis' atti-

tude toward purgatory—fun but serious—captures Walls' own approach through this text.

Written by an analytical philosopher of religion of the Wesleyan tradition, this work reflects a commitment to logical argumentation and theological rigor, especially in its considerations of Wesleyan soteriology and libertarian understanding of free will. Beyond this, however, is a desire to be relevant pastorally by being sensitive to the tough questions. Walls often anticipates the challenges that those in such heavy life and death conversations might encounter. Thus, those who find his theological-philosophical commitments to full transformation, libertarian free will, and time-bound nature of transformation *and* those seeking pastoral resources will find Walls' line of argument at least partially compelling. Where Walls might have turned to present a more convincing case was in his use of Scripture. Walls' fullest examination of Scripture seeks to highlight passages that helped give rise to the doctrine of purgatory, without engaging their interpretations critically (13). Moreover, Walls only passingly addresses Hebrews 9:27-28 and offers it as being compatible with purgatory and various approaches to the final judgment. Walls, of course, is aware of this lack of critical engagement, and does offer other theologians who make more critical appropriation of relevant texts, like Donald Bloesch (196 n. 58). Moving in this direction would have shifted Walls' study more into the field of biblical theology rather than mainly philosophical theology, but would be necessary for some evangelicals to follow Walls' convictions.

Even so, Walls' careful distinction, developed both historically and theologically, between purgatory as satisfaction and purgatory as sanctification will draw the doctrine more closely heavenward for those who remain doubtful to its existence. Caricatures of purgatory will be found wanting and the doctrine itself will not be dismissed out of hand after reading this work. Its pastoral sensitivity, philosophical rigor, and theological commitment make it an appropriate text for interested undergraduates, graduate students in appropriate seminar studies, philosophical and systematic theologians, and interested clergy and laity.

Wilson, Kenneth. *Methodist Theology. Doing Theology*. New York: T&T Clark, 2011. 208 pages. ISBN 0567644987.

Reviewed by Justus H. Hunter, Ph.D. student, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Texas.

For some years now, many of us have puzzled over the question neatly summed up in the topic for a panel session in the Wesley Studies Group at the American Academy of Religion in 2008: “What makes theology ‘Wesleyan?’”—or, in this case, “What makes theology ‘Methodist?’” In his recent contribution to the T&T Clark “Doing Theology” series, Kenneth Wilson has attempted to answer the latter question. The aim of the series, edited by Gerard Mannion, is introductory and, while Wilson certainly accomplishes that, his volume is much more. *Methodist Theology* is a proposal. Wilson suggests that what characterizes Methodist theology is not its doctrine (a familiar position by now) but its aim at “holding together the natural human curiosity to understand our faith, with an open confidence in God’s gracious presence” (viii). There are other characteristics (e.g. Methodist theology is ecumenical, practical, dynamic, etc.), but this amalgam of curiosity and grace, birthing forth in radical inclusivity, is Wilson’s strong emphasis.

The bulk of this work is devoted to the unpacking of this characteristic. Wilson opens with a chapter on the historical origins of Methodism, notably emphasizing the influence of the Cambridge Platonists on the “latitude” of Methodist theology. Subsequently, a pair of chapters address characteristically Methodist methodological issues. First, he reflects upon the standard forms of Wesley’s theologizing: sermon and song. Here he revisits the contested quadrilateral as the source of Methodist preaching, thereby (further) accentuating the dynamic, expansive, and practical shape of Methodist modes of theologizing. These observations feed into a chapter on practical divinity/theology. Wilson demands a reciprocity between Methodist belief and practice—“being and doing”—and suggests a new category for understanding Methodist theology: “servant theology” (56-57).

Following these first three methodological chapters are three chapters that form the core theological proposal of *Methodist Theology*. Wilson here develops a Methodist doctrine of God, grace, and mission. In chapter four, he cleverly draws upon Wesley’s “Arminianism” to sketch a Methodist view of the Divine Essence and Creator-creature distinction and relation, out of which he develops an extensive theology of preve-

nient grace that proves a (the?) unifying theme of the remainder of the text. Chapter five develops that theme: prevenient grace, *qua* grace, is God (79-81). There are multiple resonances here with the notion of non-contrastive transcendence, although notably in Rahner's quasi-formal strain. Wilson revisits the Fall and sin in light of this insight. He then moves to a discussion of mission and evangelism, pressing the Methodist doctrine of unlimited atonement in a radically (if carefully) inclusivist direction, in a chapter entitled "A World Without Boundaries." Thus, Wilson interweaves characteristically Methodist doctrines: Arminianism, prevenient grace, and unlimited atonement.

Methodist Theology's final chapters move topically through recent developments in Methodist theology. His consistent emphasis, both methodologically and doctrinally, is on Methodism's intellectual inclusivity and range. He begins by drawing together theology and evangelism, socio-political-economic relationships, and science into a single chapter under the heading "The Mind of Christ." Subsequently, following a somewhat idiosyncratic analogy between Deuteronomy and Methodist theology, Wilson surveys Methodist engagement with the rise of biblical criticism. A final chapter gives an overview of Methodist theology, its key themes and figures, in the twentieth century.

Wilson presents a lovely, stimulating proposal with much to commend. Methodist theology, as presented here, is robustly ecumenical. He argues, somewhat convincingly, that Methodist theology is uniquely poised for the issues of our times. Moreover, the theological significance of connectionalism is very suggestive, and would merit further attention on this side of the Atlantic. Likewise, his development of an account of prevenient grace in conversation with Rahner deserves serious consideration.

The diversity of voices Wilson draws together in his frame of inclusive grace and curiosity is often surprising. For instance, it is somewhat amusing to find Stanley Hauerwas keeping company with Schubert Ogden and James Cone (161-62). Of these three (alongside many others), Wilson contends that they all share a "fundamental belief in the fact of God's prevenient grace and the expectation and hope arising from it that engagement with other philosophies and theologies will deepen their understanding of the Christian faith in general and the role of Methodist theology in particular" (165). Presuming this is the case, it serves to illustrate a befuddling point about Wilson's proposal: What sort of theological endeavor could hold together such diversity, as well as such disagreement? Ordinarily, we expect a referent such as "Methodist theology" to

pick out something, but in this case, it seems to pick out everything! It would be intriguing, and perhaps more productive, if Wilson applied the doctrinal criteria outlined in the middle portions of the text to his evaluation of these figures. How might Wilson square, say, Schubert Ogden's process theology with his earlier descriptions of the Divine Nature (esp. 59-60)?

Methodist Theology, while suggestive enough for academic theologians, would serve very nicely for theology undergraduates, seminarians, and educated laypersons. We have here a generous proposal from a major British Methodist theologian that would be a fine complement to other burgeoning answers to the pressing question: "What makes theology 'Wesleyan' (or, 'Methodist')?"

Woodruff Tait, Jennifer L. *The Poisoned Chalice: Eucharistic Grape Juice and Common Sense Realism in Victorian Methodism*. Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2011. 189 pages. ISBN-13: 978-0-8173-1719-5.

Reviewed by Harold E. Raser, Professor of the History of Christianity, Nazarene Theological Seminary, Kansas City, MO.

Editor's note: This book received the 2013 Smith/Wynkoop Book Award of the Wesleyan Theological Society.

The author of this excellent book, Jennifer L. Woodruff Tait, is to be congratulated for taking on a somewhat esoteric subject and writing about it in a clear, instructive, and readable fashion. The book's inspiration, however, came from the author's dissertation director at Duke University, Grant Wacker. Wacker's comment that no one had ever written on the connection between evangelicals and grape juice sent Woodruff Tait off on a quest to investigate and explain that connection. This reminds me of an off-handed comment Wacker made to me many years ago about something I had written: "Why do you think evangelicals are so serious?" I think Woodruff Tait has answered that question in this work by illuminating the historical path by which many American evangelical Protestants came to use non-alcoholic grape juice instead of wine in the celebration of the Eucharist.

The central thesis of the book is that conventional explanations of why non-alcoholic grape juice displaces wine on the Communion table of nineteenth-century Methodists and other evangelical Protestants after eighteen-hundred years of "Eucharistic fermentation" are simplistic and misleading. Most explanations hold theological and exegetical considerations to be only a minor part of the story. The major thrust of the story, according to these views, is that Victorian American Methodism became captive to emerging bourgeoisie capitalism and its values of asceticism, self-control, efficiency, and rationality (cf. Max Weber). The temperance crusade of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries both reflected and reinforced these bourgeoisie values. In swallowing the "respectable" middle-class culture of Victorian America, Methodists swallowed temperance and, more specifically, teetotalism, which led them to replace wine on the Communion table with the non-alcoholic grape juice perfected by Methodist dentist Thomas Welch and his son, Charles. While not rejecting this version of things altogether, Woodruff Tait argues that the story is

in fact much more complex, and that theology, biblical exegesis, and scientific inquiry play central, not peripheral roles in it.

Woodruff Tait's fundamental claim is that the philosophy of so-called Scottish common-sense realism, especially as articulated by Scottish Enlightenment philosopher Thomas Reid (1710-1796), is the key to understanding the story she is pursuing. Woven through everything, she argues and seeks to demonstrate, is the epistemology and world view of common-sense realism. Here she draws from the wide body of scholarship on common-sense realism and nineteenth-century evangelicalism produced over the last thirty years or so. Protestant theologians in nineteenth-century America eagerly embraced common-sense realism as an antidote to "skeptical" views of knowledge being put forth by thinkers like David Hume and Immanuel Kant. The "common sense" philosophy rejected "speculative" theories of knowledge, holding that any human being whose mind was operating normally would believe certain basic truths, including such things as the actual existence of the external world, the reality and continuity of the self, the existence and continuity of others, the reliability of sense perception, and the like. In other words, common-sense realism asserted that human beings can perceive the real world *directly* and with an assurance that what is perceived is actually there. This was a comforting alternative to philosophies that had begun to emphasize the limits of reason.

The widespread adoption of common-sense realism by religious thinkers in America during most of the nineteenth century had a host of consequences. First and most fundamental for the subject of this book is the belief that since "truth" is *directly* accessible by the senses, the senses must remain as unclouded and acute as it is possible for them to be. Nothing must be allowed to cloud, weaken, or interfere with their functioning. Impaired senses result in false perceptions of reality and in erroneous moral judgment and decision-making. Second, common-sense realism was perfectly suited to the popular empiricist, inductive scientific method of Francis Bacon, who held that the essence of scientific investigation is the observing and assembling of "facts" and the drawing of (virtually self-evident) conclusions from the assembled facts. Third, common-sense realism undergirded the popular view of the "perspicuity" of the Bible, the view that the truths of the Bible are absolutely clear, lucid, and intelligible to anyone who approaches with unimpaired common sense. And finally, common-sense realism rendered theology into a "scientific" endeavor in which the "facts" of human consciousness, the "facts"

of the Bible, and the “facts” of scientific exploration of the natural world (following Bacon) are gathered together and organized into a clear, harmonious, accurate portrait of reality.

Using common-sense realism as a sort of compass, Woodruff Tait deftly makes her way through a formidable forest of books, tracts, denominational reports, and other materials relating to the movement to replace Communion wine with non-alcoholic grape juice. In five compact chapters (plus an introductory and a concluding chapter), she uncovers the several layers of the story. In “Alcohol and Science” (chapter 2), she examines the work of nineteenth-century (and earlier) investigators on the effects on the body of drinking alcohol. Most of these investigators concluded that alcohol is a “poison,” not a “food,” produced through a process of “decay” (fermentation), and is hence injurious to the body. Such ideas coalesced with the “health reform” movement of the nineteenth century that held that diet is the key to a healthy and moral life, and that one should only consume “natural” foods and beverages and avoid “stimulating” substances (spices, caffeine, etc.) that upset the body’s natural “balance” and cause illness.

In “Alcohol and the Overthrow of Reason” (chapter 3), Woodruff Tait documents the application of the above ideas to the moral life, i.e., consuming alcohol and other “stimulants” results in thoughts, feelings, and behaviors incompatible with evangelical religion because it disrupts one’s sensory perception of the external world. Alcohol upsets the “natural” balance between mind, emotion, and will, enabling the imagination to create “unrealistic” thoughts and emotions. Alcohol fires the passions to overthrow reason, leading to impaired judgment and immoral behaviors. This same reasoning was also applied to “amusements” and “leisure activities.” Certain pastimes were judged to be too “stimulating” and to overthrow the “balance” of human faculties necessary for clearly perceiving “reality” (and hence to make proper moral judgments). Theater-going, dancing, reading fiction, and gambling were among the suspect activities. As one pamphlet put it, both fiction and alcohol “*intoxicate*—the one the mind, the other the body . . . both ruin— one the intellect, the other the health, and together, the soul” (44-45).

“Alcohol, the Ideal Worker, and the Poisoned Chalice” (chapter 4) examines the religious motives (fueled by the world view of common-sense realism) behind the concern with sobriety, industry, and self-control in nineteenth-century America. Woodruff Tait argues that this was not simply an issue of class or ethnic conflict or of pure economics.

Rather, it arose from “striving on a scientific foundation to preserve clarity of sense perception in all physical activities so as to ensure the correct performance of moral duties” (87).

“Alcohol and the Truth of the Gospel” (chapter 5) makes one of the most significant claims in the book. Here the author argues that nineteenth-century Methodism did not replace Communion wine with grape juice because Methodists thought so *little* of the Eucharist (as some have argued). Rather, Methodists made this move because they thought so *much* of the Eucharist. That is, given their common-sense realist outlook, and drawing from Baconian science and biblical exegesis colored by common-sense realist assumptions, Victorian Methodists concluded that fermented “unnatural” wine—a veritable poison—was unfit to serve as the embodiment of the life-giving blood of Christ in the Eucharist. Rather, natural, healthy, nourishing non-alcoholic grape juice was clearly the proper and appropriate substance.

“Common Sense and the Common Cup” (chapter 6) adds the final layer to the story by showing how common-sense realism undergirded the effort to not only adopt grape juice for the Eucharist, but also to use small individual cups in place of the common chalice, a practice that had become common in many churches by the beginning of the twentieth century.

This book takes the reader on a fascinating journey that throws light on nineteenth-century American Methodism in particular, but also on nineteenth-century American evangelical Protestantism in general and wider nineteenth-century American culture. In doing so, it especially highlights the (often unacknowledged) role of epistemological paradigms in theological debates. And, it (implicitly) explains why evangelicals are not given to humor: humor is an “intoxicant” that clouds the senses which are necessary for clear perception and proper moral judgment. Jennifer Woodruff Tait has given us a richly informative book.

WESLEYAN THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY
Membership Application

Complete and return this form *with dues enclosed* to:

Samuel M. Powell
Wesleyan Theological Society
3900 Lomaland Drive
San Diego, CA 92106

Name _____

Present Position _____

Address _____

City _____ State/Prov. _____ Zip _____

EDUCATION—Schools attended beyond high school, with degrees earned and dates:

IF CURRENTLY A STUDENT, indicate school and current degree program:

MEMBERSHIP in religious or professional societies:

BOOKS OR SCHOLARLY ARTICLES RECENTLY PUBLISHED:

MAJOR RESEARCH COMPLETED OR IN PROGRESS: _____

FIELD(S) OF SPECIAL THEOLOGICAL OR RESEARCH INTEREST:

CHURCH AFFILIATION: _____

MEMBERSHIP REQUESTED (payment enclosed):