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## EDITOR'S NOTES

Our thanks to the many writers who have contributed significant material to this journal issue. Included here are: (1) twelve full-length articles; (2) reviews of fourteen new books with relevance to the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition; and (3) a report on the 2013 winners of both the Smith/Wynkoop Book Award and the Lifetime Achievement Award given by the Society. Select material from the 2013 annual meeting of the Wesleyan Theological Society will appear in the spring 2014 issue.

The writers in this issue range from seasoned to younger scholars in the tradition. They address with depth and skill the subjects of sanctification, divine grace, open theism, Christian education, social reform, inter-religious dialogue, and more.

Be aware that the next annual meeting of the Society will convene March 7-8, 2014, on the campus of Northwest Nazarene University in Nampa, Idaho, around the theme "Atonement in the Wesleyan Tradition."

The identities of the current officers of the Wesleyan Theological Society are available in this issue. The WTS web site is [Wesley.nnu.edu/wts](http://Wesley.nnu.edu/wts). Available at this site is information about a searchable CD containing the full content of all past 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 are available elsewhere in this issue):

1. If you wish to write a book review—Dr. Richard Thompson
2. If you wish to nominate for the Smith/Wynkoop Book Award—Dr. Richard Thompson
3. If you wish to place a book advertisement—Dr. Barry Callen
4. If you wish to submit material for publication—Dr. Barry Callen
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Barry L Callen, Editor  
October, 2013



# FROM THE GARDEN TO THE GALLOWS: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF FREE GRACE IN THE THEOLOGY OF JOHN WESLEY

by

Kenneth J. Collins and Christine L. Johnson

In the nearly fifty years of Wesley scholarship that hails from Albert C. Outler's groundbreaking anthology, *John Wesley*,<sup>1</sup> a work that helped spawn a new generation of scholars, it is surprising to learn that, although the language of *sola fide* and "justified freely" have been considered at length in the literature, the well-attested theme of "free grace" that represents the larger theological expression of such language has not received comparable attention.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, not only is the terminology of "free grace" (and the strongly associated language of "free gift") employed repeatedly in John Wesley's writings, in which it makes up an important part of his sophisticated and balanced conception of grace (free grace *and* cooperant grace), but it is also a salient theme in many of the theological traditions that fed into Wesley's mature theological posture. By failing to make explicit the connection between the language of *sola fide*, "justified freely" and free grace, scholars run the risk of subsuming the whole of Wesley's theology under a synergistic (cooperant) conception of grace.

Accordingly, some of the elements of free grace that highlight divine mercy and action in a preeminent way can be seen in the language of *sola fide* and the terminology of justified freely, apart from the *works* of the law, that are expressed so clearly in the Anglican materials of the six-

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<sup>1</sup>Albert C. Outler, *John Wesley*, The Library of Protestant Thought (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964).

<sup>2</sup>Notable exceptions include an early work by Reist and two by the present author. See I. W. Reist, "John Wesley's View of Man; a Study in Free Grace Versus Free Will," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 7, no. 1 (Spring 1972): 25-35; Kenneth J. Collins, "Recent Trends in Wesley Studies and Wesleyan/Holiness Scholarship," *The Wesleyan Theological Journal* 35, no. 1 (Spring 2000): 67-86; and Kenneth J. Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley: Holy Love and the Shape of Grace* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007), 290 ff.

teenth century.<sup>3</sup> For example, the XXXIX Articles of Religion affirm the teaching “that we are justified by Faith only is a most wholesome Doctrine, and very full of comfort,”<sup>4</sup> a phrase that Wesley himself employed.<sup>5</sup> And Thomas Cranmer (1489-1556) maintained that human working is not the basis on which this justifying grace, this gift of God, is received.<sup>6</sup> As a good Anglican who aimed at balance in his theology, Cranmer added some material that kept such understandings of grace (highlighting that grace is a sheer gift) free from the taint of antinomianism or lawlessness. He states: “Nevertheless, this sentence, that we be justified by faith only, is not so meant of them, that the said justifying faith is alone in man, without true repentance, hope, charity, dread, and the fear of God, at any time or season.”<sup>7</sup>

Wesley employed in his writings not only the elements that often make up what is free grace (such elements as *sola fide* language and that of being justified freely) but he also utilized the *specific* phrasing of free grace to convey the fullness of his conception of the favor and mercy of God, from creation through death and on to glory. The most obvious place in which some of this material is found is the sermon “Free Grace” produced in 1739. Written in a polemical context in which Wesley was challenging George Whitefield’s teaching on predestination and determinism, this sermon evidences two basic lines of argument.

First, Wesley underscores the gospel truth that the grace of God is *free in all*, that is, it is not dependent “on anything he *has done*, or any-

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<sup>3</sup>While the literature of Wesley studies in the last fifty years has considered Wesley’s doctrine of justification by grace through faith alone, this doctrine has rarely been connected specifically to Wesley’s sophisticated and well developed conception of free grace. One notable exception has been in the work of the late William R. Cannon, *The Theology of John Wesley, with Special Reference to the Doctrine of Justification* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1984), 93.

<sup>4</sup>Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, Vol. III (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1983), 3:494. *Article XI* is cited here.

<sup>5</sup>Wesley states some have claimed that justification by faith is an “uncomfortable doctrine” and treats it as an objection in his sermon, “Salvation by Faith.” In this context Wesley, ironically enough, quotes Anglican materials (*The XXXIX Articles*, “The Homily of Salvation”) to make the point that the teaching of justification by faith is indeed “very full of comfort.”

<sup>6</sup>John Edmund Cox, ed., *Miscellaneous Writings and Letters of Thomas Cranmer*, 2 vols., *The Works of Thomas Cranmer*, vol. 2 (1846), 131 (The Homily of Salvation).

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.* (The Homily of Salvation).

thing he is.”<sup>8</sup> In other words, taking into account the Apostle Paul’s radical notion that God justifies not saints but *sinners* (Rom. 4:5), Wesley affirms that one does not have *to do* or *to be* something else *first* in order to be justified.<sup>9</sup> This is precisely where his theology and that of Whitefield and other Calvinists looked remarkably *similar*. Second, Wesley develops the gospel truth that offers hope to a suffering humanity. The grace of God is *free for all*. In other words, the love of God manifested in Jesus Christ at Golgotha is universal; it embraces all of humanity in a movement that seeks the lost and is indicative of the character of the divine being as holy love. Rejecting the Calvinist notion that Christ died only for the elect, Wesley’s theology was kept from a simple universalism (in which all of humanity would be unequivocally redeemed) by his careful recognition, evident in Richard Baxter’s *Aphorisms of Justification*, that such saving grace, though offered to all, must be *received*.<sup>10</sup>

It is precisely this second theological maxim that Whitefield and other Calvinists found to be so troubling. Wesley therefore, devotes the lion’s share of the content of the sermon “Free Grace” to this consideration in a discussion that focuses on predestination, election and reprobation. But such attention, caught up in a theologically charged context, must not obscure the truth of the first maxim that the grace of God is *free in all*,<sup>11</sup> a truth that was shared by both Wesleyan Methodists and Calvinist Methodists alike. The exploration that follows, then, will be mindful of both maxims as it displays the theological significance of free grace from creation to redemption in its highest reaches, an endeavor that will high-

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<sup>8</sup>Albert C. Outler, ed., *The Works of John Wesley*, Vols. 1-4. *The Sermons III* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1986), p. 545. (“Free Grace”). Emphasis is ours.

<sup>9</sup>This is exactly the same language (“You think, ‘I must first *be* or *do* thus or thus’”) that Wesley employs on the way to entire sanctification. The parallelism is striking. See Outler, *Sermons*, 2:169 (“The Scripture Way of Salvation”).

<sup>10</sup>Wesley published *An Extract of Mr. Richard Baxter’s Aphorisms of Justification* in 1745 in which Baxter observes: “Yet without this acceptance and application this blood will not be effectual to justify us. So that, as Austin saith, ‘He that made us without us, will not save us without us.’” See Randy L. Maddox, ed., *The Works of John Wesley: Doctrinal and Controversial Treatises I*, vol. 12 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2012), 66. (*An Extract of Mr. Richard Baxter’s Aphorisms of Justification*).

<sup>11</sup>Interesting enough, even Albert Outler mentions nothing of the first theological maxim (“free in all”) in his otherwise very able introduction to the sermon “Free Grace.” See Outler, *Sermons*, 3:542-543. (“Free Grace”).

light the balance and careful reflection indicative of Wesley's mature practical theology.

### Free Grace and Creation

Free grace, unlike cooperant, synergist conceptions, has the capacity to focus on divine rather than human action in a *preeminent* way. Indeed, at times in Wesley's writings he employs this distinct terminology in a manner that embraces a genuine monergism with respect to creation, and he approaches a monergism (while avoiding Calvinist determinism) with respect to redemption. Wesley uses the language of free grace to highlight the work of God *alone* in bringing Adam and Eve into being in the Garden of Eden. In his 1738 sermon "Salvation by Faith," he begins with a bold declaration of the plenitude and efficaciousness of free grace in general: "All the blessings which God hath bestowed upon man are of his mere grace, bounty, or favour: his free, undeserved favour, favour altogether undeserved, man having no claim to the least of his mercies."<sup>12</sup>

After this general declaration of grace, Wesley turns his attention specifically to creation and underscores the work of God *alone* in the unique action of bringing humanity into being in the first place, an action that is not in any way a human possibility. He observes: "It was *free grace* that 'formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into him a living soul,' and stamped on that soul the image of God. . . ."<sup>13</sup> And in a *Collection of Prayers for Families*, Wesley praises the Creator for a truly magnificent handiwork and underscores ongoing creaturely dependence for every blessing: "Almighty and everlasting God, the sovereign Lord of all creatures in heaven and earth, we acknowledge that our beings, and all the comforts of them, depend on thee, the Fountain of all good. We have nothing but what is owing entirely to thy free and bounteous love, O most blessed Creator, and to the riches of thy grace, O most blessed Redeemer."<sup>14</sup> In this context, Wesley underscores the sovereign and sin-

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<sup>12</sup>Outler, op. cit., ("Salvation by Faith"). Wesley also employs the rhetoric of "free, unmerited love" to communicate the same sort of things that the language of free grace does. In his sermon "Justification by Faith," he points out: "Such, then was the state of man in Paradise. By the free, unmerited love of God, he was holy and happy." See Outler, *Sermons*, 1:184-185 ("Justification by Faith").

<sup>13</sup>Ibid. ("Salvation by Faith"). Emphasis is ours.

<sup>14</sup>Thomas Jackson, ed., *The Works of John Wesley*, 14 vols. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1978), 11:245 (*A Collection of Prayers for Families*).

gular role of God in creation in a way similar to the magisterial reformers such as Martin Luther. Once humanity is created, however, men and women are invited by a gracious God to *participate* in an ongoing creation through the blessings of procreation.

### Covenantal Grace and Original Sin

Like the Puritans William Ames and William Perkins, John Wesley understood that the salvific graces of redemption are communicated through a covenant relationship established by God. However, unlike some Reformed theologians, such as Herman Witsius [1636-1708] in particular, Wesley parsed the distinction of a covenant of works and a covenant of grace somewhat differently.<sup>15</sup> Whereas some theologians considered the moral law to be the primary feature of the covenant of works, Wesley rejected this judgment, likely because it failed to recognize the gracious nature of the moral law itself which is holy, just and good (Rom. 7:12).<sup>16</sup> In Wesley's estimation, as expressed in his 1746 sermon "The Righteousness of Faith," the dividing line between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace does not mirror the distinction between Moses and Christ but rather that of Adam on the one hand and *both* Moses and Christ, on the other hand. Put another way, it is only the covenant made with Adam in paradise (and in innocence) that is rightly termed a covenant of works. The covenants represented by Moses and Christ are *both* gracious.<sup>17</sup>

More important for the task at hand, it is precisely free grace, especially in the sense of being a "sheer gift" representing divine love and favor, that is not only behind the created order, but also richly informs the

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<sup>15</sup>Witsius considered the Mosaic law, in some sense, to be a continuation of the covenant of works established with Adam and Eve. He writes: ". . . by this means, the whole design of the covenant of works, and all the righteousness which is by the law, are quite destroyed." See Herman Witsius, *The Economy of the Covenants between God and Man, Comprehending a Complete Body of Divinity*, trans. William Crookshank, 3 vols. (Dublin: R. Stewart, 1774), 1:89.

<sup>16</sup>See Wesley's sermon "On the Original, Nature, Properties and Use of the Law," in Outler, *Sermons*, 2:4-19). For a consideration of the influence of covenant theology on John Wesley's soteriological judgments, see Stanley J. Rodes, "From Faith to Faith: An Examination of the Servant-Son Metaphor in John Wesley's Theological Thought" (University of Manchester, 2011).

<sup>17</sup>Outler, *Sermons*, 1:203. ("The Righteousness of Faith").

Mosaic and Christian dispensations.<sup>18</sup> This means that, in Wesley's practical theology, free grace precedes both the covenant of works (given to Adam and Eve alone) as well as the one covenant of grace with its distinct dispensations of Mosaic and Christian.

Operating out of a Western understanding of original sin that was in many ways similar to the teachings of Augustine and Calvin, Wesley underscores the extent of this sin, apart from grace, using a vocabulary of negative superlatives. To illustrate, in his 1759 sermon "Original Sin," Wesley exclaims: "Is man by nature filled with all manner of evil? Is he void of all good? Is he wholly fallen? Is his soul totally corrupted? Or, to come back to the text, is 'every imagination of the thoughts of his heart evil continually?' Allow this, and you are so far a Christian. Deny it, and you are but a heathen still."<sup>19</sup> Such an observation illustrates the utter inability of humanity to do any good apart from the grace of God. The doctrine of original sin, then, functions in Wesley's theology in a way that will highlight the divine initiative in redemption and that will secondly underscore the ongoing need of grace in the form of human dependence on the power and goodness of God.

### Prevenient Grace as a Species of Free Grace

In the face of the extensive consequences of original sin, the question was asked even in Wesley's day about how is it possible that men and women are indeed moral agents, that is, accountable for their actions and "capable of performing [their] duty"?<sup>20</sup> Wesley's response to this query, giving evidence of considerable reflection, is a good window on his overall theology that proceeds from grace to grace. In 1757, for example, he observes in his treatise *The Doctrine of Original Sin: According to Scripture, Reason and Experience* (written in response to the denial of the doctrine by John Taylor) that moral responsibility is not a function of nature but of grace. "And a measure of this is given to all men,"<sup>21</sup> Wesley

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<sup>18</sup>Granted the Old Testament can be perverted and misunderstood as a covenant of works in which obedience to the law is viewed as the path to justification.

<sup>19</sup>Outler, *Sermons*, 2:183-184. ("Original Sin").

<sup>20</sup>Randy L. Maddox, ed., *The Works of John Wesley: Doctrinal and Controversial Treatises I*, vol. 12 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2012), 254. (*The Doctrine of Original Sin, Part II*).

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.* (*The Doctrine of Original Sin, Part II*).

exclaims. Even more pointedly in this same treatise Wesley reasons that a “denial of original sin contradicts the main design of the gospel, which is to humble vain man, as to ascribe to God’s *free grace*, not man’s *free will*, the whole of his salvation.”<sup>22</sup>

The affirmation that prevenient grace at least in some of its manifestations is in fact a species of free grace must be understood in two key ways. First of all, free grace illuminates the necessity of the *priority* of divine action in the face of human depravity and inability;<sup>23</sup> secondly, free grace in this specific context highlights the work of God *alone* in the face of these same considerations. Put another way, the efficaciousness of this grace is best understood not synergistically but in a manner that celebrates the divine role by being mindful of what *only* God can do in the face of utterly corrupting sin and human inability.

This same dynamic, in which the initial action of prevenient grace is a species of free grace, is readily seen in the four major *faculties* of (1) a measure of freedom rendering people accountable, (2) conscience, (3) a basic knowledge of the moral law, and (4) knowledge of the attributes of God, all of which must be sovereignly restored in the face of human inability and depravity. In other words, the debilitating effects of original sin are so severe, given Wesley’s Augustinian understanding of sin,<sup>24</sup> that the Most High must sovereignly prop up humanity, so to speak. This restoration enables those who still in some sense bear the image of God (natural and political images) to be rendered fit to be redeemed by

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 12:441. (*The Doctrine of Original Sin, Part II*). For a very readable account of how American Methodism made the shift from underscoring free grace to free will (in other words highlighting human ability rather than the grace of God), see Robert E. Chiles, *Theological Transition in American Methodism, 1790-1935* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1984).

<sup>23</sup>The notion of *priority* in this context of free grace is different from that affirmed in the context of cooperant grace because the former grace presupposes rank human inability (total depravity) while the latter does not.

<sup>24</sup>Of depravity Augustine writes: “And thus the first depravity, whereby God is not obeyed, is of man because, falling by his own evil will from the rectitude in which God at first made him, he became depraved. Is, then, that depravity not to be rebuked in a man because it is not peculiar to him who is rebuked, but is common to all? Nay, let that also be rebuked in individuals, which is common to all.” See Augustine of Hippo, “A Treatise on Rebuke and Grace,” trans. Robert Ernest Wallis, in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, First Series, Volume V: Saint Augustine: Anti-Pelagian Writings*, ed. Philip Schaff (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1887), 474-475.

preparing the way for a renewal of their moral nature, the emblem of holiness and righteousness. Observe that it is not that the self *receives* such faculties of prevenient grace but that these very same faculties actually *constitute* a renewed and accountable self that is thereby rendered addressable and therefore redeemable.

Viewed in another way, if the restored faculties of prevenient grace actually constitute the self in some sense by making it response-able, then such free grace must of necessity be irresistible, that is, it displays once again the work of God *alone*.<sup>25</sup> Two objections are often raised against the Wesleyan understanding of irresistible, free grace. The first assumes that a viable person, soteriologically speaking, is already in place and the grace of God, therefore, overruns the self in a deterministic way for the sake of the larger good of restoration and redemption. The second objection assumes an addressable person already exists because total depravity has been subtly repudiated or redefined (trading on a notion of responsibility that has not yet been re-established) and this self, so construed, is then equipped with various faculties. However, both of these objections involve a serious misunderstanding of the concept of prevenient grace as Wesley understood it. They fail to take the Methodist leader's notion of *utter* corruption seriously and they thereby continually presuppose the reality of an accountable person even before the renewal of prevenient grace. Indeed, for Wesley, it is prevenient free grace that restores the very elements required for responsible personhood and accountability in the first place—*so destructive are the effects of original sin*.<sup>26</sup>

### Atonement and Repentance

Free grace is not only associated with creation and the very beginnings of salvation in terms of the prevenient action of the Most High, but it is also operative at various points along the path of redemption. Indeed, free grace in the form of salvation as a sheer *gift* to be graciously received is evident in Wesley's summary sermon, "The Scripture Way of Salvation," written in 1765. Here he celebrates the activity of God, "his *free almighty*

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<sup>25</sup>A distinction must be made between the restored faculties and the overtures by the Holy Spirit made to these faculties, through conscience for example. The former is irresistible the latter is not.

<sup>26</sup>See Kenneth J. Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley: Holy Love and the Shape of Grace* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007), 81 from which this paragraph, in a slightly different form, is taken.

grace, first preventing us, and then accompanying us every moment.”<sup>27</sup> To be sure, so mindful was Wesley of the sheer giftedness of the various elements of redemption that he and the Methodist Conference of 1745 noted that this very recognition was the way they had come to the very edge of Calvinism: “(1) In ascribing all good to the free grace of God. (2) In denying all natural free will, and all power antecedent to grace. And, (3) In excluding all merit from man; even for what he has or does by the grace of God.”<sup>28</sup> And this is the first sense of free grace (“free in all”) that was articulated earlier in the sermon by the same name.<sup>29</sup>

Wesley, however, also employed the terminology of free grace to *distinguish* his theology from Calvinism. This is evident as he explores the universality of the atoning work of Jesus Christ in his counsel to the Methodists to “Admire, more and more, the free grace of God, in so loving the world as to give ‘his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him might not perish, but have everlasting life.’”<sup>30</sup> This is the second sense of free grace (“free for all”) developed in the sermon produced in 1739 in response to some of the theological initiatives of George Whitefield, as noted earlier, and it allowed Wesley to highlight the love of God that was not only free but also universal in its offer.

What is so remarkable about Wesley’s theology at this point is that one would normally think that the transition from the universal offer of redemption to the particular realization of that offer, that is, as sinners *receive* the forgiveness of sins, would be marked by cooperant grace—and it is—but it is also characterized by free grace. Wesley cites the observation of a gentleman in Bristol who declared that “The free grace of God applies to sinners the benefits of Christ’s atonement and righteousness by working in them repentance and faith.”<sup>31</sup> Wesley tacitly approves of this construction in a missive to the gentleman, but he adds, making a connection to cooperant grace: “Then they are not applied without repentance and faith; that is, in plain terms, these are the conditions of that applica-

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<sup>27</sup>Outler, *Sermons*, 2:166. (“The Scripture Way of Salvation”).

<sup>28</sup>Henry Rack, *The Methodist Societies: The Minutes of Conference*, vol. 10 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2011), 153. (August 2, 1745).

<sup>29</sup>Outler, *Sermons*, 3:545. (“Free Grace”).

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 2:148. (“Satan’s Devices”). Wesley, of course, is quoting John 3:16.

<sup>31</sup>Jackson, *The Works of John Wesley*, 10:308-09. (“Letter to a Gentleman in Bristol”).

tion.”<sup>32</sup> Wesley’s implicit approval of the elements pertaining to free grace is made explicit in this same letter: “It is true, repentance and faith are privileges and *free gifts*. But this does not hinder their being conditions too. And neither Mr. Calvin himself, nor any of our Reformers, made any scruple of calling them so.”<sup>33</sup> Again, observe how Wesley appeals to both understandings of grace (where free grace is once again understood chiefly as a free gift) as he considers the intricacies of repentance and faith:

“But what is promised us as a free gift, cannot be received upon the performance of any terms or conditions.” Indeed it can. Our Lord said to the man born blind, “Go and wash in the pool of Siloam.” Here was a plain condition to be performed; something without which he would not have received his sight. And yet his sight was a gift altogether as free, as if the pool had never been mentioned. “But if repentance and faith are the free gifts of God, can they be the terms or conditions of our justification?” Yes: Why not? They are still something without which no man is or can be justified.<sup>34</sup>

Such material demonstrates that, as the normal *processes* of redemption are considered, as humanity cooperantly responds to the prior grace of God, these same processes must be viewed in another distinct way—one that takes into account the operations of free grace. That is, even in Wesley’s Arminian theology that often functioned as a counterpoise to Calvinism, repentance and faith are to be understood as gracious gifts to be received, celebrating the goodness and freedom of God. Thus, on the one hand, if one simply gives attention to the conditions and processes entailed in this context, then repentance and faith will not be seen for the gifts that they are. On the other hand, if one simply takes note that both repentance and faith are indeed gifts of grace, then what conditions normally lead to their reception (if there be time and opportunity) will be obscured. Both frameworks are necessary to understand the ongoing processes of redemption, processes that are usually subsumed under a simple synergistic understanding of grace.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid. (“Letter to a Gentleman in Bristol”).

<sup>33</sup>Ibid. (“Letter to a Gentleman in Bristol”). Emphasis is ours.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid. (“Letter to a Gentleman in Bristol”).

<sup>35</sup>The notion in Wesley’s theology that, as one framework (cooperant grace for example) is chosen the insights of the other (free grace) are immediately lost,

## Justification

The strength of free grace in all its manifold aspects is most fully realized in the two foci of justification/regeneration on the one hand and entire sanctification on the other hand in what has been termed the *ordo salutis* or *via salutis*. Indeed, the elements that constitute free grace and that so richly inform Wesley's understanding of justification/regeneration as a theological complex are revealed in the following list that has been culled from Wesley's 1739 sermon:

- "It does not depend on any **power** or **merit** in man."
- "It does not in anywise depend either on the **good works** or **righteousness** of the receiver;"
- [It does not depend] "on anything **he has done**, or anything **he is**."
- "It does not depend on his **good tempers**, or **good desires**, or **good purposes** and intentions;"<sup>36</sup>

Moreover, after a clear and forthright enumeration of these elements, Wesley concludes in a way that glorifies the divine role along the path of redemption: "Thus is his grace free in all, that is, no way depending on any power or merit in man, but on *God alone*, who freely gave us his own Son, and 'with him freely giveth us all things.'"<sup>37</sup>

When Wesley turned his attention specifically to the matter of justification itself, in a letter to the Moravians drafted on June 24, 1744, he praised this community for its clear and forthright declaration that "the *free grace* of God [is] the cause, and faith the condition of justifica-

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is reminiscent of the Heisenberg uncertainty principle with respect to the atom. Accordingly, if the location of the electron is determined, then knowledge of its velocity is lost. Again, if the velocity of the electron is ascertained, then awareness of its location is lost. For an explanation of this significant shift in scientific thought, see Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1962).

<sup>36</sup>Outler, *Sermons*, 3:545. ("Free Grace"). Boldface emphasis is ours.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid ("Free Grace"). Emphasis is ours. For more on Wesley's doctrine of justification by faith and how it was informed by the theology of the Reformation, see William R. Cannon, *The Theology of John Wesley, with Special Reference to the Doctrine of Justification* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1984), 81-102 and Kenneth J. Collins, "The Doctrine of Justification: Historic Wesleyan and Contemporary Understandings," in *Justification: What's at Stake in the Current Debate*, ed. Mark Husbards and Daniel J. Treier (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 177-204.

tion. . . .”<sup>38</sup> In his sermon “Justification by Faith” written two years later, he illuminates the theological ideas that are gathered up in the notion of free grace, are reflected in the doctrine of justification, and offer such hope to sinners steeped in their sins. He elaborates: “Thou who feelest thou art just fit for hell, art just fit to advance his glory; the glory of his *free grace*, justifying the ungodly and him that worketh not.”<sup>39</sup> In this same sermon Wesley refers to justification, employing a slightly different rhetoric that uses the language of “free gift”<sup>40</sup> to display the substance of free grace in several of its operations.

Elsewhere in *An Extract from the Shorter Catechism of the Westminster Assembly* which Wesley edited and published in 1753 for his *A Christian Library*, he reproduces an historic definition of justification:

Q 29. What is justification?

A. Justification is an act of God’s free grace wherein he pardoneth all our sins and accepteth us as righteous in his sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone.<sup>41</sup>

One of Wesley’s most well-worked rhetorics revealing that the doctrine of justification is best understood in the context of free grace is the phrase “free justification” and its variants. For example, in the preface to his journal of February, 1738, Wesley recounts how many who had heard his preaching “found the beginning of that salvation, ‘being justified freely.’”<sup>42</sup> And in a “Letter to a Friend,” penned on September 20, 1757, he encourages listening to those preachers who live as they speak and who therefore declare “free, full justification, and [enforce] every branch of inward and outward holiness.”<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>38</sup>Frank Baker, ed., *The Works of John Wesley*, Vol. 26. *The Letters II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 110. (To the Moravian Church, June 24, 1744). Emphasis and bracketed material are ours.

<sup>39</sup>Outler, *Sermons*, 5:64. (“Justification by Faith”). Emphasis is ours.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid. (“Justification by Faith”).

<sup>41</sup>Maddox, *The Works of John Wesley*, 12:10. (*An Extract from the Shorter Catechism of the Westminster Assembly*). Emphasis is ours.

<sup>42</sup>Reginald W. Ward, and Richard P. Heitzenrater, eds., *The Works of John Wesley*, Vol. 18. *Journals and Diaries I* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1988), 219 (The Preface).

<sup>43</sup>Jackson, *The Works of John Wesley*, 13:218 (“A Letter to a Friend”). We have changed the tense to make the word fit the remainder of the sentence.

Moreover, the employment of the vocabulary of “free justification,” as found in Wesley’s 1770 sermon “On the Death of George Whitefield,” calls for special attention. He observes: “Here then is the sole *meritorious cause* of every blessing we do or can enjoy; in particular of our pardon and acceptance with God, of our full and free justification.”<sup>44</sup> That the atoning work of Jesus Christ is the meritorious cause of justification, instead of its formal cause, keeps Wesley’s understanding of free grace clear of any hint of Calvinist determinism. In other words, the term “meritorious” in this context suggests that even free grace must be understood, at least in some sense, with respect to human agency in the form of *receiving* such gifts. Simply put, salvation is not unconditional; the condition is faith.

In this setting, then, Wesley holds two theological truths in tension in his sophisticated “conjunctive” theology.<sup>45</sup> On the one hand, the light of free grace clearly shines through his understanding of justifying belief in that faith itself is a *gift* from God. Late in his career, Wesley observes in his 1785 sermon “Of the Church”: “There is one faith, which is the *free gift* of God, and is the ground of their hope.”<sup>46</sup> On the other hand, since faith is a condition of redemption, it must be received, a teaching that suggests some form of human action, however understood. “Faith also is the gift of God,” Wesley records in his Journal, taking note of the words of Christian David, a Moravian leader: “It is his free gift, which He now and ever giveth to everyone that is willing to *receive* it.”<sup>47</sup> Those interpreters of Wesley’s theology who are utterly within a synergistic paradigm will no doubt claim that this working is just another instance of cooperant grace. However, once such a judgment is made, many of the elements that constitute free grace may be misprized, lost or even outright repudiated. In other words, not only will Wesley’s conjunctive tension unravel in this interpretive move, but free grace in this theological context will not be recognized for what it properly is.

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<sup>44</sup>Outler, *Sermons*, 2:342. (“On the Death of George Whitefield”).

<sup>45</sup>Outler lists a number of conjunctions and he adds that “One might apply a faintly fuzzy label to this distinctive doctrinal perspective: *evangelical catholicism*. See Albert C. Outler, *John Wesley*, The Library of Protestant Thought (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), viii.

<sup>46</sup>*Ibid.*, 3:49. (“Of the Church”).

<sup>47</sup>Ward and Heitzenrater, *Journals and Diaries I*, 18: 272 (August 10, 1738). Emphasis is ours.

In the face of such interpretive difficulties, it is perhaps better to suggest that in terms of justifying faith there is first of all a *receiving* of grace before there is any *responding*. This is an element often repudiated in tight synergistic readings of Wesley's conception of grace. The agency entailed in receiving grace is very different from that of responding. That is, the former is *almost* passive; the latter suggests a full-throttled human activity ("strive, strain and labor") that is informed and energized by preceding grace: "God worketh in you; therefore you can work. . . . God worketh in you therefore you *must* work."<sup>48</sup> Thus, when Wesley understood justifying faith as a species of free grace, he championed the work of God *alone* in a way that Luther and Calvin had done as well. When, however, he denied the irresistibility of justifying grace, in a way unlike the Continental Reformers, Wesley underscored the importance of *receiving* such grace, an activity that does not actually constitute a synergism but instead establishes the freedom and integrity of human personhood that decisively reject determinism.<sup>49</sup> That is, justifying faith as one of the foci of the Wesleyan way of salvation represents the nexus of Wesley's theology in which he celebrates a work that only God can do while at the same time underscoring that such a work must after all be *received*, thereby avoiding any trace of determinism.

Such a tension will seem paradoxical at times and the recognition of such may be a good indication that Wesley's conjunctive, sophisticated, carefully crafted and balanced theology is in fact being properly understood. Thoroughgoing synergistic readings of Wesley's theology, in contrast, flatly deny this paradoxical nature of Wesley's understanding of grace by effectively rejecting the whole notion of the "work of God alone."<sup>50</sup> Such a move, however, fails to reckon with Wesley's own theo-

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<sup>48</sup>Outler, *Sermons*, 3:206, 208. ("On Working Out Our Own Salvation").

<sup>49</sup>In terms of saving grace, properly speaking, that is justifying and regenerating grace, Wesley affirms that human beings are persons, not stones, and that such grace therefore *cannot* be given irresistibly. This is a very different soteriological situation from the "natural state," one which is considered apart from all grace and therefore one in which God must re-establish irresistibly, in the wake of original sin, the very elements that constitute personhood.

<sup>50</sup>For a view that sees free grace subsumed under a larger synergistic paradigm that hardly makes room for the work of God *alone*, see Randy L. Maddox, "Responsible Grace: The Systematic Perspective of Wesleyan Theology," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 19, no. 2 (Fall 1984): 17. He writes: "In brief, while the affirmation of the possibility of entire sanctification may be distinctive of Wesley, the conception of sanctification (as a whole) as the progressive responsible application of the free grace of God is characteristic of Wesley."

logical vocabulary, indicative of free grace, as reflected in his following observation: "If then you say, 'We ascribe to God alone the whole glory of our salvation;' I answer, So do we too. If you add, 'Nay, but we affirm, that God alone does the whole work, without man's working at all;' in one sense, we allow this also. We allow, it is the work of God *alone* to justify, to sanctify, and to glorify; which three comprehend the whole of salvation."<sup>51</sup>

### Regeneration and Entire Sanctification

In a similar fashion, regeneration or the new birth are predicated upon free grace which is the source of such gifts. Although Wesley did not always employ the terminology of sanctification distinctly, with clear and exact referents, it is best for the present analysis to parse the terminology of sanctification along the following lines so that the three movements of grace are discernible: (1) regeneration, the new birth or initial sanctification, (2) the process of sanctification, (3) entire sanctification. Wesley's understanding of cooperant grace richly informs the temporal factors *leading up to* the distinct graces of regeneration and entire sanctification, that is, the two foci of the Wesleyan *ordo salutis*. Moreover, cooperant grace also makes sense of the ongoing process of sanctification, the changes in *degrees* of holiness on the way to entire sanctification. Nevertheless, cooperant grace, despite these benefits, is unable to illuminate the qualitatively distinct graces of either regeneration (the transition from sin to initial holiness) or entire sanctification (the transition from impurity to purity). Indeed, for that a different conception is required, namely, free grace.

In terms of the liberty entailed in new birth, of being set free from the power or dominion of sin, Wesley points out in a letter to his brother Samuel, Jr., on October 10, 1738: "For till then [May 24, 1738] sin had the dominion over me . . . but surely, then, from that time to this it hath not;—such is the *free grace* of God in Christ."<sup>52</sup> Later, in his sermon, "On the Means of Grace," written in 1746, Wesley affirms that "Ye are saved from your sins, from the guilt and *power* thereof, ye are restored to the favor and image of God, not for any works, merits or deservings of yours, but

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<sup>51</sup>Jackson, *The Works of John Wesley*, 10:230-231. (*Predestination Calmly Considered*). Emphasis is ours.

<sup>52</sup>Baker, *Letters I*, 25:575. To Samuel Wesley, Jr. October 30, 1738. Bracketed material is ours.

by the *free grace*, the mere mercy of God, through the merits of his well-beloved Son.”<sup>53</sup> And much later, in 1768, Wesley continues this theme of the strong association of the new birth with free grace, this time expressing such gracious liberty not in terms of *freedom from* (the power of sin) but in terms of *freedom to* (the power of the spirit), evident in the following observation: “The Methodists do not want you; but you want them. You want the life, the spirit, the power which they have, not of themselves, but by the *free grace* of God.”<sup>54</sup>

The genius of Wesley’s theology, and its significant contribution to the larger church, is evident in that he continued the Reformation by teaching that not simply justification is to be received by grace through faith, in other words as a sheer gift, but that entire sanctification is to be received by grace through faith as well, that is, as a gracious boon from the Most High. In other words, the elements of free grace and giftedness pertain not simply to forensic themes such as justification but to participatory ones, such as entire sanctification (and regeneration). Indeed, Wesley sets up a parallel relation between these two doctrines, these two foci of the Wesleyan *ordo salutis* in his 1765 sermon “The Scripture Way of Salvation”: “Exactly as we are justified by faith, so are we sanctified by faith. Faith is the condition, and the *only* condition of sanctification, exactly as it is of justification.”<sup>55</sup>

The parallelism between the two foci of justification and entire sanctification is also evident in Wesley’s observations made in his *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, published in 1766. He states: “We allow, we contend, that we are justified freely through the righteousness and the blood of Christ. And why are you so hot against us because we expect *likewise* to be sanctified wholly through his Spirit?”<sup>56</sup> Earlier in 1753, just as Wesley had reproduced the segment on justification from *An Extract from the Westminster Assembly’s Shorter Catechism* for his *A Christian Library*, so too did he include the section in which the relation between sanctification and free grace is made explicit: “Q. 30. What is sanctification? A. Sanctification is the work of God’s *free grace* whereby we are

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<sup>53</sup>Outler, *Sermons*, 1:383. (“The Means of Grace”). Emphasis is ours.

<sup>54</sup>Telford, *Letters*, 5:99. (To Thomas Adam; July 19, 1768).

<sup>55</sup>Outler, *Sermons*, 2:163. (“The Scripture Way of Salvation”). Emphasis is ours.

<sup>56</sup>Jackson, *The Works of John Wesley*, 10:230-231 (*A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*) 11:445. Emphasis is ours.

renewed in the whole man after the image of God, and are enabled to die unto sin and live unto righteousness.”<sup>57</sup> Moreover, in a letter to Mrs. A. F. on October 12, 1764, Wesley counseled: “THAT great truth, ‘that we are saved by faith,’ will never be worn out; and that sanctifying as well as justifying faith is the free gift of God.”<sup>58</sup>

Entire sanctification, as a discrete salvific event, is distinguished from the process of sanctification, and gives every indication of being richly informed by free grace that recognizes *only God* can bring about the qualitatively distinct change from impurity to purity. Entire sanctification does not represent a change in *degree*. Instead, something *new* emerges here, namely, heart purity. However, if there be time and opportunity (just as there was in terms of justification and regeneration) on the way to entire sanctification, then Wesley will stress the importance of cooperant grace in the form of a second repentance, which he calls evangelical repentance, that deals not with actual *sins* but with *inbred sin*, the carnal nature. Put another way, the process of sanctification, in the form of evangelical repentance and works suitable for such repentance, should be in place on the way to entire sanctification—again if there be time and opportunity.<sup>59</sup>

Such working and responding will likely be the means *through which* entirely sanctifying grace is *received*, but not the *basis* upon which such grace is received. Wesley’s richly balanced conjunctive theology is clearly evident in this context as he holds in tension both cooperant (process) and free grace (a qualitatively distinct soteriological event). He elaborates: “Though it be allowed that both this repentance and its fruits are necessary to full salvation, yet they are not necessary either in the *same sense* with faith or in the *same degree*. Not in the same degree; for these fruits are only necessary *conditionally*, if there be time and opportunity for

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<sup>57</sup>Maddox, *The Works of John Wesley*, 12:101-102. (*An Extract from the Shorter Catechism of the Westminster Assembly*). Emphasis is ours.

<sup>58</sup>Jackson, *The Works of John Wesley*, 12:333. (Letter to Mrs. A. F.; October 12, 1764).

<sup>59</sup>Nevertheless, even here free grace has to be recognized as well. Indeed, Wesley has parallel treatments in terms of *legal* repentance, and the works suitable for such, and *evangelical* repentance, and its associated works, the present concern. Simply put, evangelical repentance, broadly speaking, like legal repentance, must in some sense be viewed as a *gift* of God’s grace. See Outler, *Sermons*, 2:169 (“The Scripture Way of Salvation”).

them. Otherwise a man may be sanctified without them. But he cannot be sanctified without faith.”<sup>60</sup>

Accordingly, in order to gain the proper perspective on the process of sanctification, the divine and human cooperation on the way to heart purity, Wesley reminds his readers at the end of the sermon “The Scripture Way of Salvation” to consider the temporal elements entailed with respect to the reception of *entirely* sanctifying grace. These temporal elements are often comprehended in a chronological way by Wesley’s subsequent interpreters. Although that dimension is important, it is perhaps more helpful to view them, as Wesley clearly did, in a *soteriological way*, that is, as one that highlights the divine role, the work of God *alone* expressive of free grace. Wesley explains:

Look for it then every day, every hour, every moment. Why not this hour, this moment? Certainly you may look for it now, if you believe it is by faith. And by this token may you surely know whether you seek it by faith or by works. If by works, you want something to be done *first, before* you are sanctified. You think, “I must first be or do thus or thus.” Then you are seeking it by works unto this day. If you seek it by faith, you may expect it *as you are*: and if as you are, then expect it *now*. It is of importance to observe that there is an inseparable connection between these three points—expect it *by faith*, expect it *as you are*, and expect it *now!* To deny one of them is to deny them all: to allow one is to allow them all.

Simply put, the “instantaneous” language in this context was one of Wesley’s favorite ways to celebrate the divine role in redemption in the form of free grace. Entire sanctification, precisely because it is a sheer gift, can be received by grace through faith *now*.

### **What Practical Difference Does a Theology of Free Grace Make?**<sup>61</sup>

Some of the Caroline divines of the seventeenth century, Jeremy Taylor (1613-1667) in particular, were fearful of the possible antinomian interpretations of the doctrine of justification by faith *alone* and so expressed a

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<sup>60</sup>Outler, *Sermons*, 2:167. (“The Scripture Way of Salvation”).

<sup>61</sup>Some of the material here draws on the research of Christine L. Johnson with respect to her doctoral thesis being undertaken at the University of Manchester.

number of cautions.<sup>62</sup> Such reservations were often expressed very practically in denying the suitability or even at times the reality of deathbed conversions. Taylor, for instance, in his *Rules and Exercises of Holy Dying* remarks: "A Repentance upon our Death-bed, is like washing the Corps [sic], it is cleanly and civil, but make[s] no change deeper than the skin."<sup>63</sup> Indeed, it is precisely Taylor's holy living sensibilities that led to such denials, especially in terms of the repentance associated with such late conversions: ". . . on a Man's Death bed the day of Repentance is past,"<sup>64</sup> Taylor warns.

One of the chief difficulties thought to be entailed in either deathbed conversions or sudden deaths, such as an execution, is that each left little room for the possibility of the belabored actions often associated with the processes of genuine repentance in the holy living tradition. In this setting, not only is sanctification in some sense confused with justification, but also the temporal elements entailed in repentance and forgiveness are judged to be lengthy and considerable. Beyond this, Taylor hardly breaks from a cooperant, processive understanding of redemption as he contends, "A true penitent must all the days of his life pray for pardon, and never think the work completed until he dies. . . . And whether God hath forgiven us or no, we know not. . . ."<sup>65</sup>

This is the same holy living tradition that was mediated to Wesley in 1725 as he read Taylor's writings. Although such works helped Wesley as a young man to see very clearly the end or goal of religion as holiness, these writings left him confused as to how to *realize* all of this in his own life. Not surprisingly, many of Wesley's Anglican contemporaries had imbibed this same theology. What had become clouded, rendered virtually opaque by the overlay of several traditional elements in Anglican theology by the time of the eighteenth century, was the doctrine of justification by faith *alone*, a teaching that is best comprehended not as a species of cooperant

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<sup>62</sup>Wesley defended himself against the charge of not holding justification by faith alone properly, leveled by Josiah Tucker who was a local Anglican priest. Wesley's response took the form of his *Principles of a Methodist*. See Maddox, *The Works of John Wesley*, 12:16.

<sup>63</sup>Jeremy Taylor, *The Rule and Exercises of Holy Dying*, Twenty-First ed. (London: John Meredith, 1710), 145. Bracketed material is ours.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., 277. *The Rule and Exercises of Holy Living*.

<sup>65</sup>Taylor, *The Rule and Exercises of Holy Living*.

but of free grace.<sup>66</sup> In other words, if justification by faith, the forgiveness of sins that are past, is indeed a sheer gift of God's blessed free grace, as the Protestant Reformers had maintained, then such a boon could be received *now*. And it is precisely that shift in context, with its associated temporal elements, that was precipitated for Wesley by the Moravian Peter Böhler and his Reformation theology. That theological change was not only reflected in the theology of Wesley and the Methodists from 1738 forward but it was also revealed in several of their *practices* as they ministered to the poor, the forgotten and the condemned.

### Free Grace for Condemned Criminals

Emboldened by his insight that justification by faith alone is best understood in the context of free grace, one of Wesley's first acts of ministry was to offer to a certain Mr. Clifford, a condemned malefactor, "salvation by faith alone."<sup>67</sup> Although Peter Böhler on several occasions had urged Wesley to take up this distinct ministry, he nevertheless failed to do so until March, 1738, "being still (as I had been many years) a zealous asserter of *the impossibility of a death-bed repentance*."<sup>68</sup> On September 19<sup>th</sup> of that same year, Wesley wrote in his journal that "I went to the condemned felons in Newgate and offered them free salvation."<sup>69</sup> Consistent in his theological understandings that finally embraced the significance of free grace, in 1784 Wesley preached once again to forty-seven condemned criminals at Newgate prison in London,<sup>70</sup> an activity that some Anglican clergy not only found distasteful but also theologically inappropriate.

Furthermore, not only John Wesley but also some of the Methodists were involved in this incarnational ministry. To illustrate, Silas Told was introduced to the Methodists in 1740 and four years later he began to

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<sup>66</sup>Understanding justification by faith alone *in the context of free grace* solves the problem raised by Outler, that is, how Wesley in 1738, as a good Anglican, could have claimed that he had never heard of the doctrine of *sola fide*. See Albert C. Outler, "The Place of Wesley in the Christian Tradition," in *The Wesleyan Theological Heritage: Essays of Albert C. Outler*, ed. Thomas C. Oden and Leicester R. Longden (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1991), 83-84.

<sup>67</sup>Ward and Heitzenrater, *Journals and Diaries I*, 18:228. (March 6, 1738).

<sup>68</sup>Ibid. (March 6, 1738).

<sup>69</sup>Ward and Heitzenrater, *Journals and Diaries II*, 19:12. (September 19, 1738).

<sup>70</sup>Ward and Heitzenrater, *Journals and Diaries VI*, 23:340. (December 26, 1784).

teach at the Foundery. In that same year Mr. Told, along with Sarah Peters, prayed with several condemned criminals at Newgate, John Lancaster among them,<sup>71</sup> who were very grateful that someone other than the usual Anglican official, the Ordinary, would pray with them.<sup>72</sup> Knowing of Wesley's ministry among the condemned, Told took this a step further by actually accompanying those in the death cart as the wagon slowly made its way, in a procession of mocking and shame, from the portals of Newgate prison to the gallows at Tyburn.

Accordingly, the two senses of free grace ("free for all" and "free in all"), each important in its own way, streamed into the practical theology of Wesley and those who assisted him—and they made a world of difference. First of all, comprehending that the holy love of God is universally offered, the Methodists were both motivated and empowered to offer a free grace that was separated from its Calvinist predestination moorings. They offered it to the despised and the condemned, to those who in the theological estimation of some hardly constituted the elect. McKenzie remarks: "Methodist publications [preached] God's 'wonderful method of saving sinners, the worst of sinners . . . the vilest of the vile, the foulest of the foul not excepted.' Many of these works drew explicit parallels between the reader and the common felon, the gentlemen and the highwayman, all of whom alike were 'under sentence of death' for sin."<sup>73</sup>

Second, that free grace is "free in all" and therefore available to condemned criminals who have little time left to *be* or *do* anything is evident as Wesley records in his journal: "Yea, that wherever the *free grace* of God is rightly preached, a sinner in the full career of his sins will probably receive it, and be justified by it, before one who insists on such previous

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<sup>71</sup>See Silas Told, *The Life of Mr. Silas Told: With a Note to the Serious and Candid Reader by John Wesley, A.M.* (London: The Epworth Press, 1954), 70-72.

<sup>72</sup>Complaining of how "some empirics in theology may boast of instantaneous conversions," Ordinary Stephen Roe maintained that "the seeds of virtue required time before they could truly bear fruit." See Andrea McKenzie, *Tyburn's Martyrs* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2007), 182. Moreover, the Ordinary was responsible for the *Account* which often detailed the confession of the condemned and from which the Ordinary profited. Such a state of affairs at times led to provocative fabrications of the prisoner's confessions. See McKenzie, *Tyburn's Martyrs*, 126-130.

<sup>73</sup>*Ibid.*, 184. The verbal form of the bracketed material has been changed to fit the context.

preparation.”<sup>74</sup> Since Whitefield could join with Wesley in this sense of free grace, he too preached to malefactors under the sentence of death, though he was sharply criticized by Horace Walpole, the youngest son of the famous prime minister, Sir Robert Walpole, precisely for this activity.<sup>75</sup>

Some Anglican clergy lacked compassion for the doomed at Tyburn’s gallows, dulled by a tradition whose unrelenting emphasis on the *processes* of redemption taught that such unfortunates were simply out of time. By contrast, itinerating, parish-boundary-breaking Methodists found their social and theological way into the death carts, right along with the condemned. William Hogarth, painter and satirist of the period, made sport of the Methodists in a famous print entitled *The Idle Prentice Executed at Tyburn* produced in 1747. Hogarth places the Anglican Ordinary in a comfortable coach by himself at the head of the death procession. Farther back, surrounded by troops and a mocking crowd, is the death cart itself. Inside is Tom Idle, whose head is touching the coffin in which he will soon lay, and right next to him is a preacher who is holding a book in one hand and pointing towards heaven with the other. If one looks carefully at the letters inscribed on the book held by the preacher, it will be evident that they spell the name W-E-S-L-E-Y! Below the print is a caption, citing Proverbs 1:27-28, that may represent the judgment of Hogarth and many others but hardly that of Wesley: “When fear cometh as desolation, and their destruction cometh as a Whirlwind: when distress cometh upon them. Then they shall call upon God, but he will not answer.”

Wesley’s own view on the matter is perhaps best expressed in an excerpt drawn from his journal on December 1, 1756, in which he records the death of one for whom the free grace of God was precious: “The following week his peace increased daily, till on Saturday, the day he was to die, he came out of the condemned room clothed in his shroud and went into the cart. As he went on, the cheerfulness and composure of his countenance were amazing to all the spectators.”<sup>76</sup> Wesley then con-

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<sup>74</sup>Ward and Heitzenrater, *Journals and Diaries I*, 18:280. (August 10, 1738). This is an excerpt drawn from a letter from the Church of Herrnhut. Emphasis is ours.

<sup>75</sup>McKenzie, *Tyburn’s Martyrs*, 185.

<sup>76</sup>Ward and Heitzenrater, *Journals and Diaries IV*, 21:82. (December 1, 1756).

tinues the narrative, taken from a letter he had received, whose theology, no doubt, represented his own: "At the place of execution, after he [the condemned] had spent some time in prayer, he rose up, took a cheerful leave of his friends, and said, 'Glory be to God for *free grace*.'"<sup>77</sup> Wesley affirmed in many ways, from 1738 forward, that so much that matters can happen in such a short period of time simply because the Almighty, flush with gifts, is wonderfully gracious to *all*, even to the vilest of the vile, who call on the name of the Lord. Yes, indeed, glory be to God for free grace!

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<sup>77</sup>Ibid., (December 1, 1756). Emphasis is ours.

# DOES OPEN THEISM LIMIT GOD?

by

**Richard Rice**

Both critics and supporters of open theism resort to “limit” language when describing the open view of God. Open theists hold that God created beings who enjoy genuine or “radical” freedom and that God acquires knowledge of their decisions when and as they are actually made, but not before. For its critics, these aspects of open theism impose unacceptable limits on God’s power and knowledge, leaving us with a God who is “lesser” or “diminished” in significant ways. For its supporters, these characteristics constitute a self-limitation on God’s part: God expresses kenotic love by voluntarily restricting the range of God’s power and knowledge.

My contention is that open theists should avoid limit language in describing God. Such language implies that open theism suffers in comparison to classical theism with its concept of divine control and absolute foreknowledge. Far from limiting God’s power, however, creating a world that contains genuinely free beings uniquely expresses it. And God’s progressive experience of the creatures’ decisions and actions enriches the divine life in unique and irreplaceable ways. To describe God’s relation to the creaturely world in terms of limits on divine power and knowledge, therefore, is both unnecessary and misleading.

## **Reactions to The Openness of God.**

Since InterVarsity Press published *The Openness of God* eighteen years ago, the position presented there has been the object of extensive analysis, vigorous criticism, and a rather wide range of characterizations.<sup>1</sup> The harsher voices assert that open theism undermines biblical Christianity and call on Christian leaders to declare it “beyond the bounds of orthodox Christian teaching.”<sup>2</sup> The attractions of open theism, one of them

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<sup>1</sup>Clark Pinnock, et al., *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994).

<sup>2</sup>John Piper, Justin Taylor, and Paul Kjoss Helseth, eds., *Beyond the Bounds: Open Theism and the Undermining of Biblical Christianity* (Wheaton IL: Crossway Books, 2003).

insists, “come only at the cost of God’s majesty.”<sup>3</sup> In the view of some, anything other than all-inclusive determinism and exhaustive foreknowledge is incompatible with divine sovereignty, God’s most important quality, as titles like these imply: *No Place for Sovereignty: What’s Wrong with Freewill Theism*<sup>4</sup> and *Still Sovereign: Contemporary Perspectives on Election, Foreknowledge, & Grace*.<sup>5</sup>

Over time the rhetoric has become less strident and the assessment of open theism more measured. Although a few regard open theism as a slightly modified version of process theism,<sup>6</sup> others, including such diverse figures as David Ray Griffin<sup>7</sup> and John W. Cooper,<sup>8</sup> to mention a process and a Reformed theologian, recognize that it is not a species of process theology. Instead, says Cooper, open theism should be viewed as “revised classical theism” since it retains “a supernatural view of God’s existence, power, revelation, and acts in history.”<sup>9</sup> In the same vein, Steven C. Roy describes open theism as “a variation on classical Arminian theology.”<sup>10</sup>

Along with considerable criticism, open theism has also generated a measure of appreciation. Even among its critics there are those who concede that, despite its alleged deficiencies, open theism has made important contributions to theological discussion. According to Barthian scholar Bruce L. McCormack, for example, “what is valuable in the open theistic proposal is its critique of a putative divine impassibility and time-

<sup>3</sup>William C. Davis, “Why Open Theism Is Flourishing Now,” in *Beyond the Bounds*, 118.

<sup>4</sup>McGregor R. K. Wright, *No Place for Sovereignty: What’s Wrong With Freewill Theism* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996).

<sup>5</sup>Thomas R. Schreiner and Bruce A. Ware, eds. *Still Sovereign: Contemporary Perspectives on Election, Foreknowledge and Grace* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1995, 2000).

<sup>6</sup>Fernando Canale, “Doctrine of God,” in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, ed. Raoul Dederen (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2000), 148.

<sup>7</sup>For David Ray Griffin, open theism is simply another form of “classical freewill theism” (“Process Theology and the Christian Good News,” in *Searching for an Adequate God: A Dialogue between Process and Free Will Theists*, ed. John B. Cobb, Jr. and Clark H. Pinnock [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000], 7).

<sup>8</sup>John W. Cooper, *Panentheism: The Other God of Philosophers: From Plato to the Present* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 192.

<sup>9</sup>Cooper, 343-44.

<sup>10</sup>Roy, Steven C., *How Much Does God Foreknow? A Comprehensive Biblical Study* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006).

lessness. . . .”<sup>11</sup> And one of the contributors to the book *God Under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents God* lists several “lessons to be learned from open theism,” including the importance of affirming the relationality of God and reevaluating the doctrine of divine impassibility.<sup>12</sup>

### Examples of “Limit Language” Applied to Open Theism

The issue of interest to us here concerns a way of characterizing open theism that is popular across a broad spectrum of theological scholars, including both its critics and supporters. As the following examples indicate, whenever open theism is under discussion—whether favorably or unfavorably—the word “limit” in one form or another almost always appears.

1. In “Does God Take Risks?” an essay in *God Under Fire*, James Spiegel’s summary of the open view of providence includes the statement that “God’s power is limited by human freedom.”<sup>13</sup>
2. In *What Does God Know and When Does He Know It?*, Calvinist theologian Millard Erickson characterizes open theism as endorsing “limited foreknowledge” rather than “the traditional view of exhaustive divine foreknowledge.”<sup>14</sup>
3. Historian Gary Dorrien attributes to proponents of the openness of God “the classical Arminian position, in which God is viewed as having limited God’s power in relation to the world in order to give God’s creatures freedom to live and flourish within it.”<sup>15</sup>
4. According to Barthian scholar Bruce L. McCormack, “Limited divine foreknowledge” is foundational to open theism. Open theists abandon the ideas of divine timelessness and impassibility, he

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<sup>11</sup>Bruce L. McCormack, “The Actuality of God: Karl Barth in Conversation with Open Theism,” in *Engaging the Doctrine of God: Contemporary Protestant Perspectives*, ed. Bruce L. McCormack, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 209.

<sup>12</sup>James S. Spiegel, “Does God Take Risks?” in *God Under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents God*, ed. Douglas S. Huffman and Eric L. Johnson (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 210.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, 196.

<sup>14</sup>Millard J. Erickson, *What Does God Know and When Does he Know It? The Current Controversy Over Divine Foreknowledge* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 256.

<sup>15</sup>Gary Dorrien, *The Remaking of Evangelical Theology* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 176.

asserts, as a logical consequence of “limited divine foreknowledge and a mode of relating to the world that is characterized by affectivity and reciprocity.”<sup>16</sup>

5. In an online piece entitled “God’s Self-Limitation,” Roger Olson, an Arminian theologian, identifies the idea that God limits himself in creation as in incarnation is “an important presupposition of classical Arminian theology and of open theism.” God’s power is limited, Olson argues, because God chooses to limit it. Although God could exercise omnipotence, God elects not to “for the sake of having real, rather than imaginary, relations with human persons.” Moreover, only if God “limits [God’s] power in relation to creation” can God avoid responsibility for evil. Divine determinism “inevitably makes God the author of sin and evil.”<sup>17</sup>
6. The late Clark Pinnock, perhaps the best known proponent of open theism, uses limit-language in an attempt to show the similarities between open theism and other theological positions. The openness model is “not alone in positing libertarian freedom of divine self-limitation of power to make room for the creature. It is not unusual for contemporary theologians to speak of the divine self-limitation or kenosis whereby God freely chooses to allow the world to impact [God] without, however, losing [God’s] lordship over it.” The openness model, he also notes, “echoes many themes of the theology of hope, which recognizes a God who limits [Godself] in creating a world which has the capacity to affect [God]. . . .”<sup>18</sup> Not surprisingly, the sixth edition of Pojman and Rea’s *Philosophy of Religion: An Anthology* introduces a selection from Pinnock by describing open theism as “a view that stands in contrast to ‘classical theism’ and maintains that God is, among other things, temporal, subject to change and passion, and limited in his knowledge of the future.”<sup>19</sup>
7. Finally, Philip Clayton embraces a position he calls “open panentheism,” which involves the notion of a “freely self-limiting God.”

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<sup>16</sup>McCormack, 198.

<sup>17</sup><http://evangelicalarminians.org/olson.Gods-self-limitation?page=2>

<sup>18</sup>Clark H. Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover: A Theology of God’s Openness* (Grand Rapids, MI. Baker Academy, 2001), 12.

<sup>19</sup>Louis P. Pojman and Michael Rae, eds., *Philosophy of Religion: An Anthology* (6<sup>th</sup> ed; Boston: Wadsworth, 2012), 22.

As Clayton describes it, open panentheism draws a number of features from open theism, including “creation *ex nihilo* and the free self-limitation of God.”<sup>20</sup>

To summarize, both critics and supporters of open theism commonly resort to “limit” language when describing the open view of God. Open theists hold that God created beings who enjoy genuine, or “radical,” freedom and that God acquires knowledge of their decisions when and as they are actually made, but not before. In creating such a world, as they often phrase it, God limits both God’s power and God’s knowledge. For its supporters, these characteristics constitute a self-limitation on God’s part: God expresses kenotic love by voluntarily restricting the range of God’s power and knowledge. For its critics, these aspects of open theism impose unacceptable restrictions on God. Calvinists reject the notion that either God’s power or knowledge is limited. Traditional Arminians accept a limited view of divine power, but they reject the notion that God’s knowledge is limited. Like Calvinists, they affirm/endorse exhaustive divine foreknowledge.

### Reasons To Avoid “Limit” Language for God

Pervasive though limit language is in discussions of open theism, my contention is that open theists should avoid such language entirely in their descriptions of God. Why? It is both unnecessary and misleading. Open theists can make their points effectively without employing the notion of limits. And, more important, the use of limit language tends to obscure the positive features of the divine reality which open theism seeks to emphasize.

**Reason 1: The Connotations of “Limit” Language.** A preliminary reason to avoid limit language is the fact that the very word *limit* carries negative connotations. To describe something as “limited” suggests that it is inferior to, or less than, something similar that is unlimited. When applied to God, the word “limits” or “limited” often carries pejorative connotations. It conjures up a God who is restricted, hampered in what God can do and know, indeed a God who is decidedly inferior to the more robust alternatives that most Christians embrace. If we think of God along traditional lines as “the greatest conceivable being,” the very notion

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<sup>20</sup>Philip Clayton, *Adventures in the Spirit: God, World, Divine Action* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 210.

of a “limited God” will seem oxymoronic. When open theists use limit language for their view of God, therefore, when they describe God’s power and knowledge as limited, they invite the criticism that open theism suffers in comparison to classical theism, which attributes to God unlimited power and absolute foreknowledge. It is little wonder that classical theists find their view of God superior.

When critics of open theism and open theists themselves describe the open view of God in terms of “limits,” they imply, intentionally in the one case, no doubt unintentionally in the other, that the God of open theism is somehow less than, or diminished in comparison with, the God of traditional theism.

**Reason 2: The Logic of Omniscience.** Turning to more substantive reasons to reject limit language, we come to the most widespread objection to open theism, namely, its view of divine foreknowledge. One of the most prevalent descriptions of open theism may also be the least accurate, viz., the idea that it limits God’s knowledge, or holds to the concept of “limited foreknowledge.”

The question of divine foreknowledge has perplexed Arminians from the time of Arminius himself. Arminius departed from Calvinism with his affirmation of human freedom, but he had no coherent alternative to the Calvinist account of divine foreknowledge. According to Calvin, God knows the future infallibly because he determines it exhaustively. Nothing happens outside God’s eternal decrees, God’s perfect plan. Since God “foresees future events only by reason of the fact that he decreed that they take place,” “it is clear that all things take place . . . by [God’s] determination and bidding.”<sup>21</sup> Like Calvin, Arminius affirms God’s absolute foreknowledge, but unlike Calvin, he has no way to account for it. “The knowledge of God,” he states, “is eternal, immutable and infinite, and . . . extends to all things, both necessary and contingent. . . . But I do not understand the mode in which [God] knows future contingencies, and especially those which belong to the free-will of creatures. . . .”<sup>22</sup> Arminius rejected divine determinism but affirmed exhaustive divine foreknowledge. But if humans enjoy libertarian freedom, free-

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<sup>21</sup>John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), 3.23.6; 2:954-955.

<sup>22</sup>*The Works of James Arminius*, trans. James Nichols and William Nichols (3 vols.; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1986), 3:64-66.

dom to do otherwise, how could God know their decisions in advance? Arminius admitted that he didn't know.

Arminius' problem has perplexed Arminians ever since. How can God infallibly foresee the content of future free decisions? And, while this is not the place to review them, none of the proposed attempts to affirm coherently both free will and absolute divine foreknowledge has proved satisfying.<sup>23</sup> One is the familiar view that God stands outside time, so past, present, and future are all alike to him. Another is middle knowledge, or Molinism, according to which God knows not only all actualities and all possibilities, he also knows "conditional future contingent events." That is to say, he knows everything each individual *would* do in all conceivable circumstances. And because God has decided to create a particular world, or actualize a particular set of circumstances, he knows all the future decisions of the beings it contains. And a third response is simply to deny that the question of divine foreknowledge and human freedom really requires an answer. If my knowledge of past events doesn't cause them, why should God's knowledge of future events mean that they are somehow caused or inevitable?

For open theists, the best response to the problem of freedom and foreknowledge is not to solve it, but to dissolve it, to show that there is no such problem. If future free decisions do not become real, or do not exist, until they occur, there is no need to explain how God could know them, because prior to their occurrence there is nothing there to know. And to those who maintain that this constitutes an unacceptable truncation of divine knowledge, open theists respond that omniscience, perfect knowledge, includes every possible object of knowledge. The question, then, is not the scope, let alone the excellence of divine knowledge, but the status of future free decisions. If they are "knowable," then God knows them, period. But if they are not "there to know" until they occur, it implies no deficiency in God's knowledge to say that it does not include them. This is not because God's knowledge leaves something out, but because in the case of future free decisions, there is nothing there to include.

For open theists, the logic of omniscience is parallel to that of omnipotence. Most theologians who attribute omnipotence to God—from Thomas Aquinas to C. S. Lewis—define it, not as the ability to do

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<sup>23</sup>See Richard Rice, "Divine Foreknowledge and Free Will Theism," in *The Grace of God, The Will of Man: A Case for Arminianism*, ed. Clark H. Pinnock (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 1989), 121-139.

anything, period—fill in the blank with anything you please—but as the ability to do things that fall within the range of logical possibility. This avoids attributing nonsense to God, along the lines of drawing square circles, creating married bachelors, or making two and two equal five. According to the generally accepted view of omnipotence, God cannot do such things—not because he lacks the power to do so—but because these expressions do not refer to anything “do-able.” They have no reference. They are logical absurdities.

If it makes good sense to define omnipotence in terms of logical possibility, it makes good sense to define omniscience the same way. Omnipotence does not include what is logically undoable; omniscience does not include what is logically unknowable. To quote John Sanders, “If omnipotence, following Aquinas, is defined as the ability to do all that is logically possible, and if this is not an attenuated understanding of divine power, then why should omniscience, defined as knowing all that is logically possible to know, be an attenuated view of divine knowledge?”<sup>24</sup>

It is misleading, then, to describe open theism as endorsing a concept of limited foreknowledge, let alone as resting on it. On the open view of God, there is nothing limited about God’s knowledge. God’s knowledge is perfect, or all-inclusive. The crucial question is what there is to know. For open theism, future free decisions do not exist until they occur, and then they enter God’s knowledge. John Sanders refers to this as “dynamic omniscience.” At all times, therefore, God’s knowledge is the full and complete register of all there is to know, every possible object of knowledge.<sup>25</sup>

**Reason 3: The Logic of Decision.** Another reason to avoid limit language to describe open theism is the fact that it denotes nothing distinctive about open theism. There is an important sense in which the notion of limits applies just as well to other views of God, including that of Calvinism.

Open theists believe that God had a choice when it came to creation. God could have created a world in which God determines everything that happens. But open theists believe that God also had the option of creating

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<sup>24</sup>John Sanders, *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Divine Providence* (2d ed.; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 208.

<sup>25</sup>In this way open theism avoids the conundrum of classical Arminianism, viz., trying vainly to reconcile foreknowledge and free will. Indeed, it would not be inaccurate to describe open theism as the quest for consistent Arminianism.

a world in which (at least some of) the creatures would contribute to the ongoing course of events by making choices not determined by God. In other words, God could create a world in which there are creatures who enjoy libertarian freedom and whose choices are not foreknown to God.<sup>26</sup> In the one world, God decides everything. In the other, both God and the creatures make decisions. If both worlds are possible, then which of them actually exists depends on God's sovereign choice. As John Sanders puts it, "God is the sovereign determiner of the sort of sovereignty [God] will exercise. God is free to sovereignly decide not to determine everything that happens in history."<sup>27</sup>

It is also important to note that the choice between these options is genuine only if the two worlds are significantly different. A significant choice presupposes genuine alternatives, and real alternatives involve different consequences. After all, not all goods are "compossible," or simultaneously realizable. In choosing between these options, therefore, God embraces the values available in one world but not the other. Either way, God's decision involves a "limitation" of sorts. The values in a divinely determined world are not available in a world where the creatures are free to make undetermined choices. By the same token, the values available in a world where the creatures enjoy the freedom to make such choices would not be available in a world where God's decisions, or decrees, include everything that happens. The question that divides Calvinists (and other divine determinists) from open theists is, Which of these two worlds has God created? But either way, limitations are involved.

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<sup>26</sup>For Molinists, future free decisions are known to God because God has decided to create this particular world and knows everything that will ever happen in it (see Thomas V. Morris, *Our Idea of God: An Introduction to Philosophical Theology* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1991], 95-96). So God brings it about that creatures make the free decisions they do. For others, including open theists, this is inherently contradictory. According to Richard Creel, for example, there is a serious problem with the idea that God can know free decisions in advance because he has decided to create the world in which they will occur. "The flaw in this theory," he says, "is its assumption that God can know which possible world is the actual world. . . . God . . . has given free creatures the capacity and responsibility to participate with him [God] in creating this world, and not even God knows in advance which possible world we will bring into actuality" (Richard E. Creel, *Divine Impassibility: An Essay in Philosophical Theology* [Cambridge University Press, 1986], 90-91).

<sup>27</sup>Sanders, 174.

An interesting question is whether the world of open theism represents a genuine possibility. Could God, if God chose, create a world containing creatures whose decisions become known only when they make them? If the answer is No, then we have identified something that God lacks the ability to do. And unless such a world is as logically contradictory as a square circle—a flat-out logical impossibility—God’s inability to create it represents a significant “limitation” to God’s power.

On the other hand, if the answer is Yes, that is, if God indeed has the power to create a world with an open future—a future unknown to God—then the question that separates open theism from other views of God is not, What sort of power does God have?, or What sort of world *could* God create? The real question that divides them is this: What sort of world *did* God create? And, perhaps, why *would* God create this particular world?

**Reason 4: The Subtlety of Divine Power.** A further reason for open theists to avoid limit language in describing God concerns the nature of divine power. According to open theism, God endows the creatures with the capacity to exercise freedom, to make choices, to contribute to the ongoing course of events. As it is sometimes put, God shares God’s power with the creatures, or makes room in God’s life for their experience. And this is often expressed as a self-limitation on God’s part: God gives up a measure of divine power so that the creatures can have a measure of their own.

There are several problems with this construal of divine and creaturely power. For one thing, it presupposes a zero-sum distribution of power in the world, according to which there is only so much power to go around. Consequently, God can only grant the creatures power by giving up some of God’s own. And the more power God lets the creatures have, the less power God has for Godself. But why should we think of power this way? We don’t think of God as limiting God’s happiness or God’s love, for example, by creating beings who are capable of these qualities. What compels us to think of power this way?

Then there is the way in which God manifests divine power in a world where other agents, too, have power. There are good reasons to think that such a world involves a greater display of divine power than one in which God determines everything. First of all, such a world may express God’s nature more fully and adequately than one in which God decides everything unilaterally. Open theists also believe that it requires a

greater manifestation of power, or a higher kind of power, for God to accomplish God's purposes in a world where the creatures' choices are entirely their own, and therefore not foreknown, than in a world where God's creative decision includes all that happens.

To risk a personal example, I tried for years to play classical piano music. The challenge was always to play the notes exactly as written, to fulfill the composers' intentions precisely. I never did, but I tried. Years later I learned an instrument and joined a jazz group, thinking that jazz performers had a much less difficult task. After all, they weren't bound by a score that prescribed or "determined" ahead of time the notes they were to play. They could play more or less anything that came to mind. That's what I thought, but I was wrong. I quickly discovered that the jazz musician not only has to play the right notes, she or he has to compose the right notes . . . right on the spot. And that, I discovered, can be far more difficult than following a score. Composing notes on demand, so to speak, required a higher type of musical skill than having someone else provide the notes ahead of time. In an open reality, a world whose future is not foreknown, God manifests divine power by creatively bringing about God's objectives in, through, and in response to the decisions of the creatures. Their decisions are truly theirs, neither a direct nor indirect fulfillment of God's decisions. But God responds to their choices in ways that serve God's purposes.

Joseph's betrayal at the hands of his brothers provides a helpful illustration of this phenomenon. When they begged Joseph to forgive their "crime," he replied in a way that acknowledged the evil that they had done, and the beneficial use that God made of their actions. "Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people, as he [God] is doing today" (Gen. 50:20).

Then, too, there is the important distinction between exerting power over others and empowering others to exert themselves. The latter need not be viewed as a limitation of power. Instead, it may represent a manifestation of power, indeed, a manifestation that deserves, if anything, greater admiration. Consider, for example, the shift of emphasis in contemporary philosophy of education from teaching to learning. According to this revisionary approach, the instructor's role is not to impart information to his or her intellectual subordinates, but to inspire and enable—empower—students as "co-learners" to make their own discoveries, to acquire information and insights for themselves. During my own

attempts to implement this revision in educational philosophy, I have found it much more challenging to devise student-centered learning experiences in class time than to dispense information because I know it and it interests me. It is harder to generate and manage a really fruitful discussion than it is to give a lecture. In a somewhat similar way, it conceivably entails a higher form of divine power for God to empower the creatures themselves to act and to inspire them to cooperate in pursuing God's objectives than for God to achieve those objectives unilaterally. If so, then it seems highly inappropriate to describe open theism as limiting God's power. Far from limiting God's power, the act of creating a world that contains genuinely free beings uniquely expresses divine power.

**Reason 5: The Richness of Divine Experience.** A final reason for avoiding limit language in describing open theism involves a concern that is more important to open theists than either God's knowledge or God's power. And that is the richness of divine experience. To some extent this emphasis was obscured when the original book *The Openness of God*,<sup>28</sup> was republished under the title *God's Foreknowledge and Man's Free Will*.<sup>29</sup> The revised title suggests that the book's principal concern was to provide yet another discussion of a well-known, and well-worn, problem in philosophical theology. What is really at stake in open theism is much more sweeping, however. What open theism seeks to do is recapture the biblical portrait of a God who is intimately acquainted with, acutely sensitive to, profoundly affected by, and dynamically interactive with the creatures God made in the divine image.

The various aspects of this portrait to which open theists appeal are well-known. They include a broad sweep of biblical passages in which God is described as variously experiencing joy and delight, disappointment and regret, as learning from events in the world, such as the actions of God's people, and as "repenting," that is, as changing God's mind, or altering God's plans, in response to the decisions and actions of human beings, as well as in response to their direct petitions to him. Terence Fretheim succinctly summarized the Old Testament evidence for an interactive view of God under the headings "the divine perhaps," "the

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<sup>28</sup>Richard Rice, *The Openness of God* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1980).

<sup>29</sup>Richard Rice, *God's Foreknowledge and Man's Free Will* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1985).

divine if” “the divine consultation,” and “the divine question.”<sup>30</sup> The one feature of open theism that even its critics seem to appreciate is its emphasis on the personal qualities embedded in the biblical descriptions of God. And the growing interest in the topic of divine suffering in recent decades indicates that a number of theologians appreciate one of open theism’s principal concerns.

The essential thesis of open theism is that this portrait of God has abundant biblical support, is eminently defensible philosophically, and provides a rich resource for personal religion. In other words, it nicely meets all the essential criteria of theological adequacy. Far from limiting God, open theism provides a rich and vivid portrait of God’s relation to the creaturely world. The concept that God dynamically interacts with the creaturely world attributes to God a range of positive experiences that traditional views of divine power and knowledge exclude. With an open future, God is capable of surprise, delight, the momentary appreciation of the creatures’ experiences as they undergo them with all their concrete detail. In comparison, it is the traditional view of God’s relation to the world that is limited. It excludes from the divine reality some of the most important features of personal existence.

There are those who appreciate the emphasis that open theism places on God’s momentary sensitivity to the experiences of God’s creatures and seek to combine this feature of open theism with the traditional view of divine foreknowledge. The fact that God knows ahead of time that something will take place, they argue, does not prevent God from experiencing it in a more concrete way when it actually happens. “Just because God knows in advance that some event will occur, this does not preclude God from experiencing appropriate emotions and expressing appropriate reactions when it actually occurs.”<sup>31</sup>

Unfortunately for those who seek such a rapprochement between the biblical emphasis on momentary divine sensitivity and the traditional view of foreknowledge, the latter renders it incoherent. The traditional view of divine foreknowledge collapses any distinction between anticipation and realization. According the classical view, God’s knowledge of the future is exhaustive: God knows the entire future, the future in all its detail. If so, then God not only knows exactly what will occur, God also

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<sup>30</sup>Steven C. Roy, *How Much Does God Foreknow? A Comprehensive Biblical Study* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 125.

<sup>31</sup>Bruce Ware, quoted in Roy, 175.

knows every aspect of God's own response to what will occur, and to know that, in effect, is to have the experience already. If God foreknows all, then God's experience already includes all. Actual occurrences contribute nothing new to God.

### Conclusion

In short, there are good reasons for open theists to eliminate "limit language" from their descriptions of God. Such language suggests that the open view of God is somehow deficient in comparison to the traditional alternatives; it lacks something that they affirm. And in doing so, it obscures the positive value of the perspective. It makes answering critics and solving problems the major agenda that open theism faces. Instead, I propose a different tack. Open theism is attractive not primarily because it is philosophically defensible but because it so nicely expresses the biblical portrait of God, because it is theologically profound and religiously helpful. Or, as Clark Pinnock states almost wistfully in *Most Moved Mover*, he wants to play offence, not defense as an open theist, "because the open view of God offers the church such a treasure. It accentuates, not diminishes, how truly glorious God is."<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>Pinnock, 18.

# SANCTIFICATION AND PURITY

by

H. Ray Dunning

This proposal is part of a larger attempt to formulate a paradigm of holiness theology that avoids the elements of the traditional paradigm stemming from the nineteenth-century holiness revivals that have brought the tradition into difficult times. There is little disagreement among analysts of the holiness movement that it is in the midst of an identity crisis. Mark Quanstrom highlights the central reason for this situation:

As the [20<sup>th</sup>] century wore on, the very optimistic expectations of entire sanctification became less and less credible in the light of the apparently intractable nature of sin. By mid-century, the extravagant promises of the grace of entire sanctification began to be tempered. Theologians . . . began to define the sin that could be eradicated more narrowly and the infirmities that were an inescapable consequence of fallen humanity more expansively. This led to an increasing dissatisfaction with traditional formulations of the doctrine.<sup>1</sup>

While it must be recognized, as John Wesley observed, that a right relation to God may co-exist with faulty theology, it is nevertheless the case that there is a mutual interaction between the two. When theological claims are invalidated by corporate experience, the proper response is a review of those claims. If those claims are supported by appeal to Scripture, this review should take the form of a reappraisal of exegetical issues.

Gordon J. Thomas points in this direction in analyzing why the holiness message has been marginalized within the wider church. The exegesis of holiness proof-texts has generally failed to convince others and the holiness emphasis has been perceived as claiming sinless perfection in this life—mostly an unfair perception. Thomas' suggestion as to how the

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<sup>1</sup> Mark Quanstrom, *A Century of Holiness Theology* (K.C.: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2004), 11.

situation should be addressed is a “rigorous scrutiny” of Scripture, especially those traditional proof texts.<sup>2</sup>

The proposal of this paper is that one crucial point contributing to the perfectionist tendency is the result of a significant shift in emphasis that took place in the transition of Wesley’s theology to the nineteenth-century holiness movement. A group of Nazarene scholars has noted that the whole focus and emphasis of Wesley’s doctrine shifted from holiness understood as *love* to sanctification understood as *cleansing*, from the “what” to the “how” and the “when.”<sup>3</sup> The concept of cleansing, along with its concomitant terms (especially purity), came to be used extensively in a group of writings referred to as the “holiness classics.” In some cases it was used almost exclusively in these works. In a word, this complex of idioms became a dominant conceptuality used by the nineteenth-century holiness movement to embody its central claim concerning the nature of entire sanctification.<sup>4</sup> Albert Outler says that there emerged among some of Wesley’s successors the claim for a “perfected perfection.”

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<sup>2</sup>“The Need,” in *Re-minting Holiness*, a project of the faculty of Nazarene Theological College, Manchester, England.

<sup>3</sup>A case can be made that the formative voice in the theology of the American Holiness Movement was Phoebe Palmer, who has been called the “mother” of the movement. Timothy Smith, in an analysis of her theology, concluded that her “theology of Christian holiness” was largely a theology of means or method. “Clarity with respect to method is her main goal—describing the nature or essence of entire sanctification or holiness is very clearly a minor concern. In fact, it is not at all easy to ‘pin her down’ at the point of definition or description because she so seldom addresses herself to that concern!” From a handwritten lecture shared privately with the author. In “A White Paper on Article X,” Paul Bassett, et. al. make the same analysis of the American holiness emphasis ([www.didache.nts.edu](http://www.didache.nts.edu), summer, 2010)

<sup>4</sup>See for example, J. A. Wood, *Purity and Maturity*, abridged by John Paul (K.C.: Beacon Hill Press, 1944); R. S. Foster, *Christian Purity* (Holiness Data Ministry, NNU website, 1997); Jesse T. Peck, *The Central Idea of Christianity*, abridged D. Shelby Corlett (K.C.: Beacon Hill Press, 1951); Asbury Lowrey, *Possibilities of Grace* (Chicago: The Christian Witness Co., 1884); H. Orton Wiley used the concept of “cleansing” almost exclusively in his discussion of entire sanctification. *Christian Theology*, 3 vols. (K.C.: Beacon Hill Press, 1947), 2:487-517. Representative phrases are found throughout Wiley’s treatment of sanctification: “. . . the first essential element in entire sanctification is the purifying of the believer’s heart from inbred sin or inherited depravity,” (488); “Sanctification is an act of cleansing, and unless inbred sin be removed, there can be no fullness of life, no perfection in love,” (476).

This involved the dubious distinction between “a perfect heart” and “a perfect character,” or between “purity and maturity.”<sup>5</sup>

### Interpretation of “Purity” in the “Holiness Classics”

Scrutiny of the volumes traditionally called “holiness classics,” as well as many more recent ones,<sup>6</sup> reveals a particular understanding of the concept of purity, one which presupposes a substantive understanding of “sin.” In fact, this is true of most traditional sanctificationist language, including but not restricted to the purity word group. Any claim for the elimination of sin from the soul, whether or not eradication terminology is used, logically entails *something* that is removed, thus a substantive understanding. When that which is “removed” is described as “original sin,” the reality of original sin is not taken seriously. If original sin is “something” within the person that can be removed, it does not describe the radical fallenness of human persons that the traditional doctrine of original sin affirms. If the doctrine of original sin is taken seriously the whole person is distorted to the degree that every relational aspect of humanness is affected and not some “quantity of evil” located within the soul. To say that entire sanctification makes us “free from original sin” (a phrase which Wesley himself never used in this precise context) is to leave ourselves open to the interpretation that we believe that entire sanctification brings “Adamic” or “sinless” perfection. A more nuanced statement of the doctrine is necessary in order to make it clear that the entirely sanctified, while being filled with the Spirit and thus delivered from “the mind set on the flesh,” remain fallible creatures in the fallen body while in “this present evil age.”<sup>7</sup>

In contrast to the implication of “removal” of a “unitary evil” from the soul in an instantaneous moment, experience has demonstrated that there is no quick fix to the human condition, but that a full lifetime is involved in God’s gracious activity in restoring one to the image of God from which all are fallen. This does not eliminate the possibility of a

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<sup>5</sup>Albert C. Outler, *Theology in the Wesleyan Spirit* (Nashville: Tidings, 1975), 79-80. Outler assumes the same meaning as the “holiness classics.” When “purity” is rightly understood, a la the thesis of this paper, this formula is a legitimate expression.

<sup>6</sup>J. Kenneth Grider, *Entire Sanctification* (K.C.: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1980, 11) gives this definition: “E.S. is essentially defined as an instantaneous cleansing from Adamic sin.”

<sup>7</sup>“A White Paper on Article X.”

moment of Christian experience (even a second moment), but suggests that, in identifying the nature of that moment, a different paradigm is necessary in the face of biblical theology and widespread experience.

The understanding of the meaning of purity that implies a substantive view of sin is derived in various ways that fail to take into account the cultic concept of purity. It is the thesis of this paper that the cultic context is the basic source for the biblical reference to be used when purity is posited of human persons. One interesting explanation comes from George McLaughlin who illustrates the meaning of a “clean heart” with the metaphor of dirt, defining dirt as “matter out of place.”<sup>8</sup> This way of explaining “impurity” is similar to the way influential anthropologist Mary Douglas explains the concept of purity in the context of the Old Testament cult.<sup>9</sup> But McLaughlin’s analogy interprets it as a substantive or materialistic concept of removing “dirt” from the human “heart.” Douglas’ use is “systemic.”<sup>10</sup> A common method of deriving meaning is illustrated by an extensive discussion found in the work of British writer Thomas Cook in his chapter on “Purity and Maturity.”<sup>11</sup> Cook’s chapter, along with the subsequent one on “The Present Tense of Cleansing,” provides a rather full explanation of the use of the terminology. According to Cook, the primary understanding of the concept of purity is derived from the dictionary definition, a method that is fraught with problems for biblical ways of thinking: “entire separation from all heterogeneous and extraneous matter, clear, free from mixture; as pure water, pure air, pure silver or

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<sup>8</sup>George Asbury McLaughlin, *A Clean Heart* (Holiness Data Ministry, 1995, from NNU website), 2.

<sup>9</sup>Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (London: Routledge, 1966), 35. “When something is out of place, or when it violates the classification system in which it is set, it is dirt.”

<sup>10</sup>Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (London: Routledge, 1992). She says: “No particular set of classifying symbols can be understood in isolation, but there can be hope of making sense of them in relation to the total structure of classifications in the culture in question” (vii).

<sup>11</sup>*New Testament Holiness* (London: The Epworth Press, 1950), 33-39. A brief statement from J. A. Wood reflects the same conception: “A pure heart is one ‘cleansed from all sin,’ hence it is morally ‘clean,’ unmixed, untarnished—free from all pollution” (14). It should be recognized that this statement involves a mixture of idioms from different contexts. It must be granted that at points in his discussion of purity, Cook expresses it in a thoroughly Wesleyan way, especially in using the concept of “a single eye,” which was one of Wesley’s favorite but seldom noticed ways of expressing the substance of “entire sanctification.”

gold.”<sup>12</sup> This definition, with its elaboration by Cook, is materialistic in nature, informed by substantive thinking since “something” is removed. That is clearly the understanding that informs the widespread use of “purity” in the holiness classics.<sup>13</sup>

A potentially sounder method, but with the same outcome, is illustrated in two classical sources that propose a wide ranging survey of “scripture testimony” as justification for heart purity as the essence of entire sanctification.<sup>14</sup> Analysis of these texts and their interpretation yields two preliminary observations: (1) numerous texts are used that make no reference to the purity word group, with the assumption imposed on them that holiness and purity are synonyms. These can be dismissed out of hand in the absence of any exegetical justification. (2) Several texts are appealed to that use the concept of purity to refer to material substances (Hebrews 10:22 [pure water]; Revelation 15:6 [linen]; 21:18 [gold]). This use implies a mixed condition that is corrected by the removal of a foreign substance, but they actually have no reference to the human situation and are therefore misused to apply to “heart purity,” although this meaning is applied to those texts that are relevant to the question at hand (e.g., Matthew 5:8; Psalm 24:3-4; 51:2, 7, 10; Ezekiel 36:25, 29; et. al.). It should be noted that, while the idea of an “unmixed” condition sounds like John Wesley’s description of the distinction between the new birth and entire sanctification found in his sermon “On Patience,” there is a significant difference since Wesley’s description is made in terms of love, not of an ontological substance being removed. As he says in the sermon: “Love is the sum of Christian sanctification; it is the one *kind* of holiness, which is found, only in various *degrees*, in the

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<sup>12</sup>It is true that the term for purity is used in this sense in Scripture (e.g., Job 28:19; Ps. 21:3; Mal. 3:3) but the context is a different “language game” (Wittgenstein). See below for further discussion.

<sup>13</sup>Mildred Bangs Wynkoop emphasizes this substantive implication but mistakenly, in my opinion, claims that “the New Testament borrowed from, and adapted to its specific needs, the classical Greek meaning of the term *clean*. The Greek word referred to physical cleanliness, to substances having nothing which did not belong, such as clean water, wind, sunshine, metals and food which had been refined.” *A Theology of Love* (K.C.: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1972), 252-3. She thus falls victim to her own analysis.

<sup>14</sup>J. A. Wood, *Purity and Maturity*, 11-27; Asbury Lowrey, *Possibilities of Grace*, 35-66.

believers who are distinguished by St. John into “little children, young men and fathers.”<sup>15</sup>

These so-called proof-texts are appealed to without reference to context or other standard exegetical procedures. It is the premise of this paper that the fundamental problem for a sound biblical understanding is that these holiness apologists failed to take into account that this vocabulary is derived from the Old Testament cultic context and appropriated by the New without changing its basic theological significance, but filling it with new theological content by shifting the reference from Israel and the Temple to Jesus and the Church. Brief reference is occasionally made to the cultic context, but always interpreted as a type of a New Testament theme without recognizing the significance of the Old Testament background that informs the text. Hence all passages are interpreted in the light of a particular worldview. Clearly, confusion and misunderstanding arise when the classification system of an interpreter differs from that of the text or culture under interpretation. For example, “a modern interpreter will be familiar with the distinction between fish and birds, but not between clean and unclean animals, except in a hygienic sense. The hygienic classification of clean and unclean may be familiar to us, but is misleading when interpreted in a society that uses purity concepts as part of a sophisticated symbol-system.”<sup>16</sup>

### **An Alternate Proposal**

What I am here exploring is an alternate understanding of the use of “purity” in its relation to “holiness” based on the *biblical* worldview. The hermeneutical premise that informs this analysis is that the New Testament understanding of “impurity,” “cleansing” and “purity” finds its roots in the Old Testament,<sup>17</sup> especially in the priestly writings found primarily

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<sup>15</sup>John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, 14 vols. (K.C.: Nazarene Publishing House, reproduction of 1872 edition), 488-9.

<sup>16</sup>P. P. Jenson, *Graded Holiness* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992), 67.

<sup>17</sup>For a full discussion of this principle see my *Grace, Faith and Holiness* (K.C.: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1988), Appendix 2. Cf. John Bright, *The Authority of the Old Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1967), 110-140. The Petrine Epistles are a canonical illustration of a sustained application of this hermeneutical principle. Cf. H. Ray Dunning, *Partakers of the Divine Nature* (Salem, Ohio: Schmul Pub. Co., 2006). In a nutshell, this principle says that the theology of the OT is fulfilled (filled-full) by NT theology with a Christological content.

in the book of Leviticus.<sup>18</sup> Several important refinements are needed in order to understand how the concepts may be used in New Testament theology.

The first distinction that needs to be made is between “ritual purity” and “moral purity.” “The relationship between these two forms of purity/impurity is of great importance for understanding the emergence of Christianity within its Jewish matrix.”<sup>19</sup> This distinction has been defended persuasively by Jonathan Klawans.<sup>20</sup> “Ritual purity” is primarily described in Leviticus 1-15 and Numbers 19 (the Priestly source) and “moral purity” in Leviticus 16-27 (the holiness code). There is a significant difference in the nature of the defilement that is ascribed to each. In Klawans’ summary, ritual impurity is “natural, more or less unavoidable [someone must bury the dead], generally not sinful and typically impermanent. . . . It is not sinful to be ritually impure, and ritual impurity *does not result from sin*.”<sup>21</sup> It should also be added that this type of impurity generally includes those “impurities” classified as “unintentional” (NRSV) and may be “covered” by the “purification [sin] offering.”<sup>22</sup> This observation must be qualified by the provision that, should one fail to perform the necessary ritual of purification, culpability accrues. For example, “[s]omeone who suffers corpse impurity and refuses to make use of the

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<sup>18</sup>Other passages of this genre are found in Exodus and Numbers. It is important to understand that sanctification, and its concomitant aspects, are probably the only soteriological metaphors drawn from a religious context, and that context is the Old Testament cult. H. Orton Wiley makes the comment that “To convey to the mind of man the riches of this grace, the entire Levitical system of the Old Testament is laid under tribute. . . . All these point to this New Testament standard of piety.” But, oddly, he never makes use of this hermeneutical insight except for borrowing “purity” language without exegetical support or analysis and interpreting “purity” in the substantive sense consistent with western common-sense use.

<sup>19</sup>Eyal Regev, “Moral Impurity and the Temple in Early Christianity in Light of Ancient Greek Practice and

Qumranic Ideology,” *Harvard Theological Review*, 97.4 (2004), 383.

<sup>20</sup>Jonathan Klawans, *Sin and Purity in Ancient Judaism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). See also Christine E. Hayes, *Gentile Impurities and Jewish Identities* (Oxford: University Press, 2002).

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, 41, emphasis added.

<sup>22</sup>Mary Douglas, “Atonement in Leviticus,” *Jewish Studies Quarterly*, vol. 1 (1991-94), 109-130.

proper means, defiles the sanctuary, and is cut off (Num. 9:13, 20).<sup>23</sup> It is instructive how “intentional” and “unintentional” interplay throughout the Levitical purity codes.

Moral impurity “results from committing certain acts so heinous that they are considered defiling. These acts include sexual sins, idolatry and bloodshed, and they bring about an impurity that *morally*—but not *ritually*—defiles the sinner, the land of Israel, and the sanctuary of God.”<sup>24</sup> The distinction between these two forms of “sin” or “impurity” has been used to support John Wesley’s full-orbed understanding of the nature of sin as both intentional and unintentional, i.e., sin “properly so-called” and sin “improperly called.”<sup>25</sup>

An additional factor must also be considered when interpreting the use of the “purity” word-group in the New Testament. Developments in the cultic laws and purity views occurred between the final redaction of the Pentateuch and the time of Jesus, the period known as Second Temple Judaism. These developments seem to have been the significant element in the conflicts between Jesus and the Pharisees. For example, Regev states that “Handwashing was not a traditional Levitical practice but an innovation of the late Second Temple period.”<sup>26</sup> It is worth considering that possibly Jesus’ statement of the sixth beatitude (“Blessed are the pure *in heart*”) is meant to distinguish kingdom life as a “righteousness that exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees,” for whom external ritual impurity was so important. Matthew 23:25-28 (par. Luke 11:38-41; Mk. 7:20-23) can be almost considered a commentary on the beatitude where the relationship between ritual impurity and moral impurity appears to be the focus. Regev notes on these passages that “it seems that the Pharisees did not hold the view that unrighteous behavior produces impurity.”<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>Jenson, *Graded Holiness*, 54.

<sup>24</sup>Klawans, *Sin and Purity*, 41.

<sup>25</sup>Dwight D. Swanson, “Offerings for Sin in Leviticus, and John Wesley’s Definition,” *European Explorations in Holiness*, vol. 1.

<sup>26</sup>Eyal Regev, “Moral Impurity and the Temple in Early Christianity in Light of Ancient Greek Practice and Qumranic Ideology,” *Harvard Theological Review*, 97.4 (2004), 388. So also Roger P. Booth, *Jesus and the Laws of Purity: Tradition, History and Legal History in Mark 7* (JSNTSup 13; Sheffield: JSOT, 1986), 69-71; Klawans, *Impurity and Sin*, 147-148.

<sup>27</sup>“Moral Purity,” 387.

Using a “woe oracle,” Jesus condemns the Pharisees and scribes seven times in chapter 23: “Woe to you, Pharisees, scribes, hypocrites” which “drive home the contrast between inner attitudes and outward behavior, a contrast found also in the Sermon on the Mount.”<sup>28</sup> Saldarini calls attention to the fact that Matthew’s account of Jesus’ deeds and teaching is bracketed with a vision of a new society (cc. 5-7) and an attack on an alternate program (ch. 23) and that “it should be noted that both have succeeded quite well for almost 2,000 years.”<sup>29</sup>

Aside from the issues of “purity” present in the conflicts between Jesus and the Pharisees,<sup>30</sup> St. Paul makes the most extensive use of “purity” themes, primarily related to the Corinthian situation.<sup>31</sup> Hebrews 9 implicitly addresses the subject by way of its reference to the sin offering which was actually a “purification” offering dealing with “ritual defilement,”<sup>32</sup> and contrary to popular interpretation having nothing to do with establishing a relation to God since it functions within the covenant relation. Rather it concerns the maintaining of that covenantal relation previ-

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<sup>28</sup>Anthony J. Saldarini, *Matthew’s Christian-Jewish Community* (Chicago: University Press, 1994), 49. That Saldarini attributes these attacks to a post-70 A.D. community does not invalidate this observation.

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, 237.

<sup>30</sup>These issues have to do with “ritual” defilement and purity. The Pharisees sought to impose the rigid requirements of ritual purity relevant to the priesthood in its function in the temple upon on all Israel (at least in Palestine) and attempted to observe them themselves. Jesus ignored much of this restriction and thus created a conflict with them. While Jesus did not totally reject all cultic regulations (he sent the cured leper to the priest), he subordinated them to moral purity. Paul, on the other hand, apparently rejected the entire concept of ritual purity (or at least radically marginalized it) in favor of an exclusive emphasis on moral purity. This would obviously be important for his Gentile mission.

<sup>31</sup>Cf. Michael Newton, *The Concept of Purity at Qumran and in the Letters of Paul* (Cambridge: University Press, 1985); and Sarah Whittle, “Purity in Paul,” in *Purity in Bible & Theology*, eds. Andrew Brower Latz and Arseny Ermakov (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, forthcoming); Kor Yong Lim, “Paul’s Use of Temple Imagery in the Corinthian Correspondence: The Creation of Christian Identity” in *Reading Paul in Context: Identity Formation* (London: T & T Clark, 2010).

<sup>32</sup>Jacob Milgrom, “Sin-Offering or Purification-Offering?” *Vetus Testamentum*, 21 no 2 Ap 1971, 237-239.

ously established by grace.<sup>33</sup> Paul's thought (and that of Hebrews as well) is informed by the Old Testament (Hebraic).<sup>34</sup>

In the Old Testament, purity is defined in relation to "place," particularly the sanctuary (tabernacle/temple) as the dwelling place of God, but also the entire camp.<sup>35</sup> The New Testament, especially Paul, sees the church as the new temple, now the dwelling place of God through the Holy Spirit.<sup>36</sup> This is most fully spelled out in the Corinthian correspondence (1 Cor. 3:16-17; 6:19; 2 Cor. 6:16). As in the Levitical laws, moral impurity defiles the "sanctuary," (church) which must be "cleansed," and in extreme cases the source expelled from the community to assure the

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<sup>33</sup>Cf. H. Ray Dunning, *Superlative Christ* (K.C.: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2001), 79-85. Dwight D. Swanson, "Offerings for Sin in Leviticus, and John Wesley's Definition," *European Explorations in Holiness*, vol. 1; Victor P. Hamilton, "Recent Studies in Leviticus and Their Contribution to a Further Understanding of Wesleyan Theology," *A Spectrum of Thought*, ed. Michael Peterson (Wilmore, KY: Asbury Pub. Co., 1982)

<sup>34</sup>Kathy Ehrensperger, "Called to be saints'—the Identity-shaping Dimension of Paul's Priestly Discourse in Romans," in *Reading Paul in Context: Explorations in Identity Formation* ed. Kathy Ehrensperger and J. Brian Tucker (N.Y.: T & T Clark International, 2010), 90-112 argues that ritual and cult are not only significant aspects of a Jewish way of life but were key aspects of life for all Mediterranean and Near Eastern cultures in antiquity. This does not seem to invalidate the claim that Paul's thought is primarily shaped by his Jewish heritage even though there were parallels in other cultures. As Eyal Regev says, "... a profound legacy of Jewish thought about moral impurity was inherited by early Christian communities" ("Moral Impurity," 391).

<sup>35</sup>Eyal Regev has argued that not all purity laws relate to the "Temple cult or to holy things in general," to which he ascribes the term "non-priestly purity" ("Moral Impurity," 368ff). I suggest that, while this may be true strictly speaking, it is still the case that Yahweh required that there be purity in the camp as well as in the sanctuary in order to assure the divine presence. If this is true, the principle is the same since it is the presence of God that is at issue in the entire purity system.

<sup>36</sup>Michael Newton, *The Concept of Purity at Qumran and in the Letters of Paul* (Cambridge: University Press, 1985); R. T. McKelvey, *The New Temple* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969); B. Gästner, *The Temple and Community in Qumran and the NT* (Cambridge: University Press), 1965); L. Cerfaux, *The Church in the Theology of Paul* (N.Y.: Herder & Herder, 1959). The Gospels also clearly imply that Jesus himself replaces the temple as the embodiment of the presence of God, thus introducing an additional and significant element to the picture.

purity of the “temple.”<sup>37</sup> We see that “purity” is a corporate concept, as is holiness. This does not deny that there is a personal aspect involved since biblically one’s relation to God is personal but not individualistic. The use of “holy nation” and “holy people” of Israel are intended to emphasize this dual emphasis.<sup>38</sup>

### Relation of Sanctification and Purity

A good place to focus in attempting to understand the relation between sanctification and purity is with Leviticus 10:10 where the Lord says to Aaron: “You are to distinguish between the holy and the common, and between the unclean and the clean” (NRSV). The two pairs to be distinguished are antitheses, the holy the antithesis of the common and the unclean the antithesis of the clean, which basically implies purity. Accordingly: “Everything that is not holy is common. Common things divide into two groups, the clean and the unclean. Clean things become holy, when they are sanctified. But unclean objects cannot be sanctified. Clean things can be made unclean, if they are polluted. Finally, holy items may be defiled and become common, even polluted, and therefore unclean.”<sup>39</sup> The implication of these distinctions may be further clarified by the use of the logic of immediate inference. We may say that “all holy things [or persons] are clean,” but we cannot logically infer that “all clean things [or persons] are holy” by converting the proposition.<sup>40</sup> Only that which is clean can be sanctified or made holy. As Wenham says, “Anyone or anything given to God becomes holy. . . . A person dedicated to the service of God is holy.”<sup>41</sup> In illustrating this point Kathy Ehrensperger notes that “animals that are deemed fit for the purpose of sacrifice are pure, but profane until the moment when they are actually offered as a sacrifice; only then are they considered to be holy.”<sup>42</sup> There are no degrees of “purity”

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<sup>37</sup>Cf. Newton, *Concept of Purity*, 86-97.

<sup>38</sup>Jo Bailey Wells, *God’s Holy People: A Theme in Biblical Theology* (EBSCO Publishing: e-book collection), 39.

<sup>39</sup>Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1979), 29.

<sup>40</sup>To convert a universal affirmative proposition invalidly infers a universal from a particular.

<sup>41</sup>Wenham, *Leviticus*, 22.

<sup>42</sup>“Called To Be Saints,” 101. “Common” and “profane” are synonymous. Profane literally means “outside the temple,” which conforms to the OT source of holiness with its prerequisite of purity. Cf. Richard Bauckham, “The Holiness of

but there are degrees of uncleanness (cf. different cleansing rituals reflecting this distinction) and also degrees of holiness determined by the proximity to the temple, and its heart, the holy of holies.<sup>43</sup>

This further implies that holiness and purity are not synonyms but that purity is the prerequisite for “being sanctified.” The narrative of the divine-human encounter at Sinai in establishing the covenant demonstrates this theological order. The people must prepare themselves by rituals of purification prior to coming into the presence of Yahweh and consecrating (sanctifying) themselves to a covenant relation with him. Based on her exegesis of 1 Cor. 6:9-11, Sarah Whittle concludes: “E. P. Sanders’ claim . . . that ‘in their present life, Christians have been sanctified in the sense of cleansed,’ does not do justice to Paul’s soteriology, conflating these important and distinct aspects. To be washed is to be purified from the defilement acquired by participating in the activities set out in the vice list [moral rather than ritual impurity]; to be sanctified is to [be] brought into the realm of the holy God; to be justified is to be placed into right relationship.”<sup>44</sup>

The bottom line thus appears to be that the use of “purity” as a synonym for “entire sanctification” is exegetically questionable.<sup>45</sup> To employ such a use when the understanding of purity is defined as the absence of a foreign ontological substance (rather than from biblical thought) is to set up the problem of “perfectionism” that has plagued the holiness movement since the eighteenth century. Biblically, it appears exegetically sound to affirm that “purity,” understood in the cultic sense as transformed via the Christ event, is the prerequisite for sanctification,<sup>46</sup> which is the consecration of whatever or whoever is “cleansed” by the establishing of a covenant relation with God (which includes the forgiveness of sins [moral

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Jesus and His Disciples in the Gospel of John,” *Holiness and Ecclesiology in the New Testament*, ed. Kent E. Brower and Andy Johnson (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2007) for a discussion of the antonyms profane/holy and impurity/purity, 95-98.

<sup>43</sup>P. P. Jenson, *Graded Holiness: A Key to the Priestly Conception of the World*.

<sup>44</sup>“Purity in Paul,” forthcoming.

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

<sup>46</sup>Jenson, *Graded Holiness*, says: “Purity is a necessary but not sufficient condition for consecration. For example, potential priests must first of all be legitimate heirs of Aaron.” But this restriction is transcended under the new covenant with the “universal priesthood of all believers.”

impurity]), thus becoming a part of the “community of faith” through “baptism” (viewed as a rite of purification; cf. 1 Cor. 6:11).<sup>47</sup> In this sense of entering into a right relation to God, one may be sanctified and enjoy a *status* of holy (1 Cor. 1:2).<sup>48</sup> This then becomes the condition that qualifies one to “consecrate” herself or himself to God completely, as in Romans 12:1.<sup>49</sup> Thus, Paul’s word that “Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word” (Eph. 5:25-26, RSV) reflects this *ordo*. Therefore, it may be that “entire consecration” is the “substance” of what could be called “entire sanctification,” what Wesley occasionally referred to as “the single eye,” and clearly that to which St. Paul was referring in his commitment to the upward call in Phil. 3:12-16.

If this conclusion is valid, it may be inferred that what has traditionally been called entire sanctification is a “second” aspect of the dynamic of the Christian life and implies support for Mildred Bangs Wynkoop’s assertion that “second” means “depth” rather than a chronological secondness.<sup>50</sup> I have come to believe that one of Wesley’s most significant statements, seldom noticed, is found in his sermon on 1 Corinthians 12:31 referring to “the more excellent way.” This sermon was prepared in 1783, a relatively short time before his death in 1791. Thus, it reflects his mature thinking.

From long experience and observation I am inclined to think, that whoever finds redemption in the blood of Jesus, whoever is justified, has then the choice of walking in the higher or the

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<sup>47</sup>This is not to suggest baptismal regeneration but that baptism symbolizes the cleansing of moral impurity effected by the blood of Christ.

<sup>48</sup>Sarah Whittle (“Purity in Paul”) suggests that Paul’s primary antithesis is *holy/impure* rather than *purity/impurity*. The former is used to describe the means by which Gentiles are brought near to God. Gentiles are impure and in the washing of regeneration they are made holy, a status of relationship characterized as belonging to God. Thus, she concludes: “In Paul’s scheme unbelievers are characterized as impure, and believers characterized as holy.”

<sup>49</sup>Ehrensberger argues that this verse has clear indications of a holiness discourse: “Thus, similar to Israel at Mount Sinai, these, as the called in Christ, are now in the realm of God, the Holy One, who calls them to be holy,” and relates the call to their being addressed in 1:7 as “called to be saints.” *Called To Be Saints*, 102.

<sup>50</sup>Mildred Bangs Wynkoop, *A Theology of Love* (K.C.: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1972), 347.

lower path. I believe the Holy Spirit at that time sets before him the “more excellent way,” and incites him to walk therein; to choose the narrowest path in the narrow way; to aspire after the heights and depths of holiness—after the entire image of God. But if he does not accept this offer, he insensibly declines into the lower order of Christians. He still goes on in what may be called a good way, serving God in his degree, and finds mercy in the close of life, through the blood of the covenant. Let it be well remembered, I do not affirm that all who do not walk in this way are in the high road to hell. But this much I must affirm, they will not have so high a place in heaven as they would have had if they had chosen the better part.<sup>51</sup>

This statement provides the rationale for Wesley’s guidance to his preachers that they should preach perfection in a drawing rather than a driving manner. It also implies how entire sanctification must be understood as a thoroughly ethical experience since the response to the “high road” is a commitment to the pursuit of the image of God as embodied in Jesus Christ.

Entire sanctification then refers to one who has been made holy (a *status* resulting from a relation to the holy God) and pure by the “washing of regeneration,” consecrating to the single-minded pursuit of God’s ideal as embodied in the image of God in which humanity was originally created. Thus, one may refer to this volitional aspect of purity in the terms made popular by Søren Kierkegaard: “purity of heart is to will one thing.” The explanation of Eugene Boring integrates this concept with a major emphasis of both Wesley and Scripture:

“Purity of heart” is not only the avoidance of “impure thoughts” (e.g., sexual fantasies), but refers to the single-minded devotion to God appropriate to a monotheistic faith. Having an “undivided heart” (Ps. 86:11) is the corollary of monotheism, and requires that there be something big enough and good enough to merit one’s whole devotion, rather than the functional polytheism of parceling oneself out to a number of loyalties. Faith in the *one* God requires that one be devoted to God with *all* one’s heart (Deut. 6:4; cf. Matt. 22:37). This corresponds to the “single eye” of 6:22, the one pearl of 13:45-46, to Paul’s “this one

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<sup>51</sup> John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, 14 vols. (K.C.: Nazarene Publishing House, reproduction of 1872 edition), 7:28.

thing I do” (Phil. 3:13), and to Luke’s “one thing is needed” (Luke 10:42, NIV)—not one *more* thing. The opposite of a pure heart is a divided heart (James 4:8), attempting to serve two masters (6:24), the “doubt” (*distazō*, lit. “have two minds”) of 14:31 and 28:17, and the conduct of the Pharisees (23:25).<sup>52</sup>

### A Synergistic Interpretation of Consecration

The nineteenth-century holiness theology, following Phoebe Palmer, made consecration a prerequisite of entire sanctification, but interpreted it as a human action whereas the latter is exclusively the work of God.<sup>53</sup> Properly understood, the nature of the “consecration” or sanctification that sets the cleansed person on a focused pursuit of the image of God is an interplay between divine and human elements. If it is true, as Paul says in 1 Cor. 12:3, that “no one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except by the Holy Spirit,” it is equally true that no one can commit herself or himself to the holy life apart from the enablement of the Spirit. Drawing on the Levitical perspective, Jenson emphasizes this synergism:

... since the normal state of earthly things is purity, it requires a special act of God to make a thing or person holy. God ultimately consecrates or sanctifies, although he may make use of persons and material means. Moses anoints both the sanctuary and the priests with the holy anointing oil but this is in strict accord with the divine instruction, and the infilling by the glory of God at the consecration emphasizes the limitation of the purely human construction. The consecration consists of a double movement, since the initiation of a new relationship with the divine realm entails a corresponding separation from the earthly sphere.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup>Quoted in W. M. Greathouse, *Wholeness in Christ* (K.C.: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1998), 178.

<sup>53</sup>In discussing the terminology of holiness, J. B. Chapman said: “Generally speaking, consecration is human sanctification, while divine sanctification is purification.” *Terminology of Holiness* (K.C.: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1968), 8. See also Thomas Cook, *New Testament Holiness* (London: Epworth Press, 1950), 124f.

<sup>54</sup>Jenson, *Graded Holiness*, 48. In a meaningful note, he adds: “Separateness is often thought to be the basic meaning of holiness, but it is more its necessary consequence. Consecration is a separation to God rather than a separation from the world [ref. Norman Snaith, *Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament* (London:

In commenting on Paul's exhortation to the Corinthians (2 Cor. 7:1) to "cleanse themselves," in order to "perfect holiness," Sarah Whittle's observation is pertinent to this issue:

Paul is not instructing the Corinthians to make themselves holy, but to make themselves pure as a requirement for God to make them holy. Paul's acknowledgement of the sanctifying role of the Spirit along with his acknowledgement that believers must avoid defilement makes it clear that he does not have in view the idea of perfecting holiness as personal achievement. . . Perfecting holiness is contingent on their self-cleansing. But, this avoidance of defilement in and of itself does not result in making one's self holy. Rather, if one is pure or clean, consecration, as a work of the Spirit, is able to take place.<sup>55</sup>

My theological model, based on biblical exegesis and relational in nature rather than being "substance" oriented, maintains the central emphasis on the importance of the holy life, but avoids the tendency toward perfectionism that was indigenous to the nineteenth-century holiness tradition and has been the major factor in the problems which many sensitive Christians have found with the paradigm to which they have been exposed. In a number of sessions with deeply dedicated Christians, I have found that this proposed new paradigm resonates with their experience. Some of these groups were composed chiefly of older folk with long tenure in a holiness church, a group that one would think would be most resistant to a changing paradigm, but the opposite was the case. The frustrations of their early experience were freely expressed and the present proposal gave them a sense of liberation and reality. The same response has been found among candidates for the ministry.

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Epworth Press, 1955), 30: "A person or a thing may be separate, or may come to be separated, because he or it has come to belong to God. When we use the word 'separated' as a rendering of any form of the root *q-od-sh*, we should think of 'separated to' rather than of 'separated from.'" and holiness has a positive content." Wells affirms the same: ". . . it is always God who ultimately consecrates or sanctifies (*piel* or *hiphil* of שָׂרַף), even though the transition may be prescribed through ritual means." *God's Holy People*, 82.

<sup>55</sup>"Purity in Paul, "forthcoming. This explanation implies that one means of dealing with the defilement of moral impurity is to discontinue the defiling practices as well as emphasizing the synergistic character of the process.

# JOSEPH BENSON'S INITIAL LETTER TO JOHN WESLEY CONCERNING SPIRIT BAPTISM AND CHRISTIAN PERFECTION

by

Randy L. Maddox and J. Russell Frazier

John Wesley met in conference with the preachers in his connexion in August, 1770. The publication of the *Minutes* of this conference sparked a vigorous debate between Wesleyan and Calvinist Methodists. In a concluding section of these *Minutes*, Wesley and his associates reiterated the claim (originally made in 1744) that they had leaned too much toward Calvinism. To counter this, they insisted that a believer's faithful response and works (in some sense) are a condition of final salvation.<sup>1</sup> The Calvinist Methodists (particularly those in connection with Lady Huntingdon) charged that these *Minutes* revealed the true colors of the Wesleys—as enemies of grace.<sup>2</sup> Among those who sought to defend Wesley on this point, insisting that he grounded salvation firmly in grace, were Joseph Benson, currently the head master at Lady Huntingdon's college in Trevecca, and John Fletcher, the college's president.<sup>3</sup> Their alignment with Wesley led to Benson's dismissal from the college in early January 1771, and Fletcher's resignation that March.<sup>4</sup>

## The Benson-Fletcher Proposal

Intriguingly, during this same period Benson and Fletcher began to champion a particular theological account of Christian perfection that

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<sup>1</sup>The disputed section of the 1770 Conference *Minutes* is found at the end, in the answer to Question 28; see Richard Heitzenrater (ed.), *The Works of John Wesley*, Vol. 10 (Nashville: Abingdon, 2011), 392–394.

<sup>2</sup>Note the accusation of Lady Huntingdon recorded in Wesley's letter to John Fletcher (March 22, 1771), in John Telford (ed.), *The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley* (London: Epworth, 1931), 5:231.

<sup>3</sup>Benson's stance and the tensions it was creating are evident already in Wesley's letter to him on October 5, 1770 (Telford, *Letters*, 5:202–204). In 1771 John Fletcher published his formal *Vindication of the Rev. Mr. Wesley's Last Minutes* (Bristol: W. Pine).

<sup>4</sup>Alan Harding, *The Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 262–265.

became the focus of some disagreement between them and John Wesley. This account suggested that our initial conversion may be attended by a witness of the Spirit to our gracious justification, but that the newly justified do not receive at that point the full “baptism” or “indwelling” of the Holy Spirit;<sup>5</sup> the full baptism of the Spirit is instead a distinct second work of God’s grace that initiates Christian perfection. One of the factors that drew Benson and Fletcher to this account was that it highlighted God’s initiative and empowerment in sanctification, which they hoped would ease Calvinist worries that Wesleyan emphasis on Christian perfection amounted to works righteousness. It also allowed them to encourage students at Trevecca to seek Christian perfection without appeal to Wesley (which would violate the non-partisan stance of the college) or to disputed biblical texts on perfection, casting it instead in terms of the centrality of the Spirit to the Christian dispensation. Without disputing these possible benefits, Wesley’s initial response to the Benson/Fletcher proposal rejected the separation of regeneration (through the indwelling of the Spirit) from justification. He worried that it either expected obedience from the newly justified *apart from empowering grace*, or left new Christians with little expectation of growing *in grace* until they received the *full* baptism in some subsequent event.<sup>6</sup>

This early dialogue between Wesley and Benson/Fletcher over Spirit baptism and Christian perfection was brought to modern scholarly attention by Donald Dayton in the mid 1980s.<sup>7</sup> Robert Fraser soon provided a more detailed account, including a manuscript that he located in Wesley’s hand providing comments on an apparent extended presentation (around forty pages in length) of the Benson/Fletcher proposal.<sup>8</sup> More recent studies have added a few details to the interchange, while debating at

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<sup>5</sup>For emphasis specifically on the *full* or *complete* baptism, particularly in Fletcher, see J. Russell Frazier, “The Doctrine of Dispensations in the Thought of John William Fletcher (1729–85)” (University of Manchester Ph.D. thesis, 2011), 224, 265.

<sup>6</sup>See Wesley’s letter to Benson on December 28, 1770 (Telford, *Letters*, 5:215).

<sup>7</sup>Donald W. Dayton, *Theological Roots of Pentecostalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Francis Asbury Press, 1987), 48–51 (the published form of his 1983 dissertation by the same title).

<sup>8</sup>M. Robert Fraser, “Strains in the Understandings of Christian Perfection in Early British Methodism” (Vanderbilt University Ph.D. thesis, 1988), 355–69, 490–492.

some length whether Wesley came to endorse the connection of the baptism of the Spirit to the initiation of Christian perfection.<sup>9</sup>

Our present purpose is not to rehearse the recent debate over this topic, but to report on two discoveries that combine to fill in an initial gap in the story. The first clear mention by John Wesley of the suggested linking of baptism of the Spirit with Christian perfection is in a letter that he wrote to Joseph Benson dated December 28, 1770. After describing entire sanctification, Wesley says, "If they like to call this 'receiving the Holy Ghost,' they may; only the phrase in that sense is not scriptural and not quite proper, for they all 'received the Holy Ghost' when they were justified. . . . O Joseph, keep close to the Bible both as to sentiment and expression!"<sup>10</sup>

### Two Recently Located Documents

To what was Wesley responding with this exhortation? Both Dayton and Fraser mention looking for a relevant letter or document from Benson, but failing to locate it.<sup>11</sup> To fill this lacuna, Lawrence Wood suggests that Wesley was responding to a communication from Benson that included the (now lost) extended presentation on which Wesley made critical com-

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<sup>9</sup>The one who has explored this topic most fully, and argued most strongly for Wesley's endorsement of Fletcher's model, is Lawrence W. Wood. See particularly his early essay "Pentecostal Salvation in John Wesley and Early Methodism," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 34.1 (1999): 24–63; and his extended treatment in *The Meaning of Pentecost in Early Methodism* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2002). The first extended reply to Wood was Randy L. Maddox, "Wesley's Understanding of Christian Perfection: In What Sense Pentecostal?" *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 34.2 (1999): 78–110 (followed by Wood's rebuttal, pp. 11–35). These two engaged further in *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 36.1 (2001): 256–259. Wood and Donald Dayton carried on running dialogue in the journal *Pneuma* between 2004 to 2006. And most recently Kenneth J. Collins raised questions about Wood's position in *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 44.2 (2009): 7–39; answered by Wood in 45.1 (2010): 259–267. See also the chart of this debate in Frazier, "Doctrine of Dispensations," 474.

<sup>10</sup>Telford, *Letters*, 5:214–215. Scholars should bear in mind that the original manuscript of this letter has not been located; we know it only in the form that Joseph Benson himself (as editor) included it in the second edition of *The Works of the Rev. John Wesley* (London: Cordeux, 1813), 16:277–279. From other instances where the manuscript does survive, we know that Benson occasionally abridged material without indicating that he had done so.

<sup>11</sup>See Dayton, *Theological Roots*, 59 n72; and Fraser, "Strains," 361 n51.

ments in the manuscript discovered by Fraser.<sup>12</sup> But if this were the case, one must wonder why so few of Wesley's critical comments in the manuscript appear in his December 28 letter to Benson.<sup>13</sup>

Two documents have been located recently that fill in this gap in the earliest stage of the dialogue between Benson and Wesley. Neither of these is the exact letter that Benson sent to Wesley, drawing his December 28 response; but they are very closely related. The first is a letter (located by Randy Maddox) from Joseph Benson to Alexander Mather, dated December 20, 1770, in which Benson includes a lengthy abridgment of the letter he had "lately sent" to Wesley. The content of this abridgment helped identify a second, longer, undated manuscript (located by Russell Frazier) as a draft of material that went into the letter sent to Wesley. Transcriptions of these two documents are given below, following general practices in the Wesley Works project: all contractions are expanded, material that is underlined (to show emphasis) is rendered in *italics*, and modern rules of capitalization and punctuation are adopted.

The transcription of the longer draft includes two significant editorial additions. The first addition reflects the incomplete nature of the manuscript. It was written on loose leaves of paper and comparison makes clear that one leaf (containing potentially two pages of text) is missing. We have inserted (in inset format) the text of the abridged letter that covers these missing pages, noting where the original text breaks off and takes up again. This demonstrates the flow of the remaining pages of the draft, but readers should bear in mind that the draft likely included some additional material. As a second editorial addition, we have underlined sections of the draft that do *not* appear in the abridged form of Benson's letter to Mather (recall that any underlining in the draft itself has been changed to *italics*).

Close comparison of the longer draft with the abridged version not only reveals missing material, but places where alternative words or phrasing have been adopted. We have not tried to annotate these occurrences, but there are enough instances to suggest that Benson did further

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<sup>12</sup>See Wood, "Pentecostal Salvation," 33; *Meaning of Pentecost*, 35–36.

<sup>13</sup>For a transcription of the manuscript, see Maddox, "Wesley's Understanding," 109–110.

polishing of the draft in the formal letter he sent to Wesley. The *draft* nature of the manuscript is also indicated by significant variation in the ink quality between some sections and the presence of open spaces on some pages—to allow potential expansion. Thus, in our judgment the longer document is not Benson’s transcription (for his records) of the actual letter that he sent to John Wesley but an initial draft from which he drew in preparing that letter.

To put an edge on this point, we do not believe that *everything* in the draft letter was included in the letter actually sent to Wesley. Comparison with Benson’s self-described “extract” of the letter he sent Wesley is again revealing. At several points through the extract he includes a long dash, a very common way of indicating elisions in the eighteenth century. Most of the occurrences of such dashes correspond to sections of the longer draft that are not present in the extract. A few seem to indicate only a pause (in both manuscripts). But the crucial point is that there are also sections of the longer draft missing from the extract where Benson gives no indication of elision in his extract. Barring further evidence, it is impossible to tell if these sections were elided already in the form of the letter sent to Wesley.

### **A Clearer Sense of Benson to Wesley**

The preceding qualifications allowed, when these two sources are consulted together, a fairly clear sense can be gained of the letter that Benson sent to Wesley, about December 15, 1770, that drew Wesley’s response of December 28. For example, Benson’s self-disclosing comments in the opening two paragraphs of the longer draft (much abridged in his extract) help explain why Wesley’s response opens: “What a blessing we can speak freely to each other without either disguise or reserve.” Similarly, Benson’s confession in the draft that “it was often suggested to my mind ‘I have not the Spirit!’” and his concluding mention of expecting the experience that “will make me a Christian” cast light on Wesley’s strong assurance, “You are a child of God.” Finally, Benson’s appeal to Wesley’s 1741 sermon *Christian Perfection*, adds significance to Wesley’s recommendation that Benson read the later sermons *On Sin in Believers* and *The Repentance of Believers*, which were written as implicit qualifications of some of the claims in *Christian Perfection*.

**Joseph Benson to Alexander Mather  
(including an abridgment of his letter to John Wesley)<sup>14</sup>**

[Trevecca] College  
December 20, 1770

Dear sir,

I make no apology for troubling you with an hasty extract from<sup>15</sup> a letter I lately sent to Mr. Wesley. The importance of the subject appears to me a sufficient apology. I beg you will give it a candid and attentive perusal and offer it to the consideration of your friends, and let me have your observations as soon as possible.

Reverend and much honored sir,

Ever since I enjoyed a sense of the pardoning love of God, I have been convinced of the *possibility*<sup>16</sup> and indeed *necessity* of experiencing something *vastly superior* to anything I had possessed. This I was led to expect chiefly, I suppose, from a consideration of what you urged respecting the doctrine of Christian Perfection. It appeared clear beyond dispute *such a state* was promised in Scripture. Your arguments in many respects seemed *quite conclusive*. . . .<sup>17</sup> I felt moreover a want in my heart. I had not *rest*. I was not *happy*, unless *now* and *then* when the Lord gave me some manifestations of his love. Under this notion then I have continued *coldly* to seek it. Till of late, from a train of circumstances too tedious to mention,<sup>18</sup> the following propositions appeared with *great evidence to my mind*, and the more I search the Scripture the more I am convinced of them. I

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<sup>14</sup>This manuscript letter is held by the Manuscript and Rare Books Library, Emory University, in Wesleyana Collection, Box 1, Folder 1. The transcription is published with the permission of Emory.

<sup>15</sup>Ori., ‘*copy of*’ changed to “extract from.”

<sup>16</sup>All instances of underlining in the text of the manuscript have been rendered in italics. They are in the same ink as the text, and almost certainly drawn by Benson to show emphasis.

<sup>17</sup>Benson frequently uses a long dash in the manuscript. It is clear in many instances that this marks an elision. The dash has been rendered as an elision mark (. . .) whenever comparison with the longer text, or with original Scripture quotations, makes clear that this is the meaning.

<sup>18</sup>The longer set of draft notes highlight the role played by Benson’s reading of John Wesley’s sermon *Christian Perfection* (1741).

earnestly entreat you to give them an unprejudiced and serious consideration, which their *importance* certainly deserves.

1. A person may believe on Christ for the remission of sins and yet not have received in the *proper sense, the Holy Ghost*.
2. The receiving the Holy Ghost is that *great privilege* of the *new covenant* which *distinguishes it from*, and renders it *vastly superior* to, the *old*.

[1.] The second proposition appears plain from these among a variety of other passages of sacred writ. (Instead of transcribing all I must beg leave to refer you to some which I desire you to turn to.)

Joel 2:28ff, "I will pour out *my Spirit* upon all flesh. . . ." <sup>19</sup> This Peter declares to be the *standing* privilege of the Christian dispensation, though it did not commence till the day of Pentecost (Acts 2). This is plain from the following texts.

John 7:38[-39], "He that believeth on me, as the Scripture saith, out of his belly shall *flow rivers of living water*. This he spake of the Spirit which they who believed on him were *afterwards* to receive (εμελλον λαμβειν). For the Holy Ghost was *not yet given*, because Jesus was *not yet glorified*."

John 14:15ff, "If ye love me, keep my commandments, and I will pray the Father and he shall give you another comforter to *abide with you for ever*, even the Spirit of truth whom the world cannot receive . . . but ye know him, for he *abideth with you* and *shall be in you*. . . . In that day ye shall know that *I am in my Father and you in me and I in you*. . . . If a man love me, he will keep my word, and . . . we will *come* unto him and make *our abode* with him. . . . He shall teach you *all things and bring all things to your remembrance*."

[John] 16:7, "It is expedient for you that *I go away*, if not the *Comforter will not come*. . . . I will send him."

1 Pet. 1:9[ff], ". . . of which salvation the prophets . . . searched diligently, searching what time the Spirit did signify when he testified beforehand of the sufferings of Christ and the *glory which should follow*. To whom it was revealed that not unto themselves, but unto us, they ministered the things

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<sup>19</sup>Benson typically does not insert quotation marks around his direct quotations of Scripture. They have been added for clarity.

declared unto you, by them who preached the gospel unto you which *the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven*.”

Matt. 11:11, “Amongst those born of a woman there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist, yet the *least* in the Kingdom of God is *greater than he*.”

Luke 9:27, “There be some . . . who shall not taste of death till they shall see the Kingdom of God come with power.”

See also Ps. 68:18, 2 Tim. 1:10, Gal. 4:12,<sup>20</sup> Heb. 8:10–11.<sup>21</sup>

2. It will also appear that the first is true from hence. —<sup>22</sup> (I would not be understood as asserting the Holy Spirit does not work repentance, etc.; or that he does not enlighten men’s minds and give manifestations of himself. This he may do without taking up his *residence in the heart*. This we may have, without being *baptized with the Holy Spirit*, without receiving *the Holy Ghost*.)

1) It cannot be denied but that many of the *Jews* had remission of sins, the favour of God, and his love shed abroad in their hearts. See Exod. 34:6, Ps. 32, Isa. 1 and 18. Indeed, almost all the Psalms breathe a spirit of love and joy in a pardoning God. John the Baptist preached repentance and remission of sins (Mark 1:4, Luke 3:3). Luke 1:77, “To prepare the way of the Lord, *by giving the knowledge of salvation by the remission of sins*.” Our Lord while upon earth forgave the sins of many whose diseases he healed (as Matt. 9:2–6, Luke 7:48–49). — But the Holy Ghost was not given till after Christ’s exaltation, it follows the *Holy Ghost given* is different from the *pardon* of sins, etc.; *this* may be where *that* is not.<sup>23</sup>

2) Many texts speak of them as *distinct things*.

As Acts 2:38, “. . . be baptized for the *remission of sins* and *ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit*. . . . The promise is . . . to as many as the Lord shall call.”

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<sup>20</sup>The reference is clear in the manuscript, but does not appear to be on topic.

<sup>21</sup>Orig., ‘Heb. 8:20–21’; a mistake.

<sup>22</sup>This and several following dashes may indicate elisions from Benson’s longer letter to Wesley; this cannot be confirmed because the relevant pages of draft letter are missing.

<sup>23</sup>This distinction and temporal separation of justification from regeneration is at the heart of Benson’s proposal, and specifically rejected by Wesley in his reply; Telford, *Letters*, 5:215.

Acts 8, the Samaritans believed Philip preaching concerning the Kingdom of God, but did not receive the Holy Spirit till Peter and John went and prayed with them.

Acts 19:2, "Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?"

Eph. 1:13–14, "In whom *having believed* (πιστευσαντες) ye were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise which is the earnest of your inheritance."

Acts 3:19ff, "Be converted, *for the blotting out of your sins* (οπως αν ελθωσιν), *that the times of refreshing may come* from the presence of the Lord" (which must mean the Holy Ghost).

Luke 3:3, "John came preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins"; and in the 16<sup>th</sup> verse says, "one mightier than I cometh [. . .] he shall baptize you with the *Holy Spirit and fire*."

See Matt. 3:12; Titus 3:5–6.

3) From experience: (1) negatively, — who of us can with *justness* and *propriety* apply to himself the above mentioned texts of Scripture, taking them in their *plain, obvious, literal* sense, undisguised by the false *glosses of men*? And many more, such as,

John 17:20[–23], "Neither pray I for these alone, but for all that shall believe on me through their word . . . that they all may be one. As thou Father art *in me*, and *I in thee*, that they also may be *one in us*. . . . The glory thou hast given one I have given them that they may be one, as we are one. *I in them and thou in me*, and they may be perfected in *one*. . . ."

Rom. 8, "The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus *hath made me free from the law of sin and death*. . . . As many as are *led* by the Spirit of God are the sons of God. Ye are in the Spirit *if so be* that the Spirit of God dwell in you. . . . The Spirit itself *beareth witness* with our spirit that we are the sons of God. . . . He maketh intercession for us with *unutterable groanings*." See the whole chapter.

"Eye hath not seen . . . the things God hath prepared for them that love him, but he *hath* revealed them to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searcheth all things, the *deep things of God*. . . . The spiritual man *discerneth all things*, yet he himself is discerned of no man" (1 Cor. 2[:9–15]).

2 Tim. 1:14, "The Holy Ghost *dwelleth in us*."

1 John 2:20[–27], “Ye have an *unction* from the Holy One, and ye *know all things*. . . . The unction *abideth in* you.”

2 Cor. 1:22, “Who hath also sealed us, and given us the earnest of the Spirit.”

[Gal. 2:20,] “I *live not*, but Christ liveth *in me*.”

1 John 4:13, “We know *we dwell in him and he in us*, because he has given us of his Spirit.”

Eph. 4:30, Gal. 4:6, 1 Cor. 3:16, Acts 1:4–6, etc.

<sup>24</sup><(2) Pos>itively, you have known many of the children of God who after re<joicing> in <a sen>se of pardon, etc., have been convinced of the *necessity of something m<ore*, which> they earnestly sought, and after *such discoveries of their hearts* as they had not before <had any> idea of, after going through a *dreadful <scene> of temptations of various kinds*, the Lord showed faithful to his word, came *suddenly* to his *temple*. This with one voice they declare to be *very different from* and superior to what they experienced in consequence of pardon.

[3.] This will ascertain the meaning of those scriptures which speak of the kingdom of God. — John the Baptist and our Lord, while upon earth, always declared “the kingdom *is at hand*.” They never speak of it as actually commenced, till at the day of Pentecost. In the meantime people are directed to prepare and wait for the reception of it by repentance and believing the gospel, whereby they received remission of sins and a degree of peace and joy in believing. And is not this all that the generality now look for? Are they any more <than John’s> disciples? What have they which the Jews had not? John had not? [This is] a plain proof they know nothing of the kingdom of God (Matt. 11:11). No wonder persons do not grow in grace. They miss the mark. We cannot grow but by having an *indwelling God*.

[4.] This accounts *scripturally and reasonably* for what you have called the “second gift,” etc. And on *these principles*, the *expediency and necessity* of it may (I will venture for it) be fully *evinced*. . . . This has thrown a *surprising light* upon a variety of

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<sup>24</sup>Small portions of the manuscript have disintegrated starting at this point. The portions shown in <brackets> are reconstructed, drawing on the longer draft version.

passages in Scripture which I could never understand before, so that it appears like a *new book*. I am fully convinced I have hitherto been only one of *John's disciples*. I have hitherto known nothing of the *grand characteristic and distinguishing privilege of the gospel dispensation*. And yet have *spoke as [if] in!* . . . Glory be to God, for the hope to glory <he> hath opened to my view, which I trust to possess.

Adieu. I am, etc.

Will you be so kind as to offer this, with my best wishes, to the consideration of Mr. Charles Wesley, Mr. Jones,<sup>25</sup> Mr. [John] Whitehead, Mr. [William] Hitchens, Mr. [James] Rouquet, Mr. Southcote,<sup>26</sup> and our friends at Kingswood, and anybody else you may think proper. I must own I am fully persuaded of the truth of this doctrine, and that no one is partaker of the kingdom of God till he is born not only of water (baptized for the remission of sins) but *of the Spirit* (baptized with the Holy Ghost and fire). — Then it is true, “if any man is in Christ he is a *new creature*; *old things* are done away, behold *all things* are become *new*.”<sup>27</sup> — And also, he that is thus born of God *sinneth not*, “because his seed remaineth in him, and he *cannot sin*.”<sup>28</sup> — Then is he “kept by the *power of God through faith unto salvation*.”<sup>29</sup>

Write soon, as convenient. I am, dear sir,

Yours very affectionately, J. Benson

[P.S.] Be so kind to acquaint me how they all go on at Kingswood. How do the boys do which came with me? — Are they contented and do they learn well? How many ministers in this our day are like Apollos, “teaching diligently the *things of Jesus*—knowing only the *baptism of John*”!<sup>30</sup>

Addressed: “To Mr. Alex[ander] Mather / At the New-Room, Horse Fare / Bristol”

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<sup>25</sup>Likely John Jones (1711–85).

<sup>26</sup>J. Southcote; see his letter to John Wesley (Jan. 9, 1772), *Arminian Magazine* 8 (1785): 114.

<sup>27</sup>2 Cor. 5:17.

<sup>28</sup>1 John 3:9.

<sup>29</sup>1 Pet. 1:5.

<sup>30</sup>Acts 18:25.

**Joseph Benson's Draft of His Letter to John Wesley<sup>31</sup>**

[Dec. 1770]

Reverend sir,

Ever since I enjoyed a sense of the pardoning love of God, I have been convinced of the possibility and indeed necessity of experiencing something vastly superior to anything I had possessed. This I was led to expect chiefly, I suppose, from a consideration of what you urged respecting the doctrine of Christian Perfection. It appeared clear beyond dispute that such a state was promised in Scripture. Your arguments in many places seemed quite conclusive. I saw I might as well deny the Bible as deny it to be attainable.<sup>32</sup> Besides I felt a want in my heart. I had not rest. I was not happy, unless now and then when I had manifestations of God's love. But I could not in every point adopt your doctrine itself, any more than the means of attaining it. Sanctification appeared in Scripture a gradual work and perfection a point we were exhorted continually to aim at and endeavour after—and that in whatever state of grace we were, and to which none of the scriptural saints profess to have attained (Heb. 6:1; and Phil. 3:10). On the contrary, the instances you introduced received what they had experienced instantaneously. This confounded me. As did your brother's preaching and that of many others who spoke very differently on that point.

About a year ago it was often suggested to my mind "I have not the Spirit!" The reason was my experience did by no means answer the plain texts of Scripture which described the state of those who were possessed of it. I was therefore led frequently to pray "Lord give me thy Spirit." I found my heart particularly drawn out when meditating upon those words, "How much more shall my Father give his Holy Spirit, etc." When I went to Oxford last, I had fully purposed to devote all my time and attention to this and wait for it. But I found employment of another kind prepared for me. I returned to the college [Trevacca] with the same purpose. When I got home I found all things apparently in a strange situation. Mr. Fletcher had been very close with the students and insisted upon

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<sup>31</sup>This manuscript is held in The Methodist Archive and Research Centre, The John Rylands Library, The University of Manchester, PLP 7/12/8. The transcription is published with permission of the University Librarian.

<sup>32</sup>The underlining in this transcription indicates material that is not reproduced in the extract given above.

it [that] neither himself nor they were believers. This had almost disposed some to leave the college. These were hard sayings. Others acknowledged they had only the *drawings* of the Father. My Lady [Huntingdon] asserted no one in the college *knew the Lord*. Most of them had experienced very clearly the pardon of sin. This they stood to. I was distressed what to do. My sentiments (which I told Mr. Fletcher) [were that] there was weak as well as strong faith; that we might have the former, though not the latter. With regard to myself, I said I <had received<sup>33</sup>> a degree of faith, but at the same time was satisfied my faith could by no means bear the test of many passages in Scripture. Thus we continued. I was sometimes even tempted to give up all religion, and inclined to think it was all imagination. I knew however God would hear prayer; here I fixed and cried, “I know nothing, but would not oppose the truth. Lord, teach me!” In this disposition I was till last Saturday morning, when I was considering the subject and took up your sermon on Christian Perfection, and reading that part which respects the privileges of Christians as superior to Jews,<sup>34</sup> when the following truths appeared in great evidence to my mind, and the more I search the Scripture the more I am convinced of them. I earnestly entreat you to give them an unprejudiced and candid consideration, which their importance certainly deserves. For my part, I know nothing in earth or heaven any way comparable to them. I again beseech you, do not hastily decide. Consider them again and again. Every well-disposed soul to whom I have propounded them falls in with them at once.

1. A person may believe on Christ for the remission of sins and yet not have *received in the proper sense, the Holy Ghost*.
2. The receiving the Holy Ghost is that great privilege of the new covenant which distinguishes it from and renders it vastly superior to the old.

[1.] The second proposition appears plain from these among a variety of other scriptures.

Joel 2:28–29, “And it shall come to pass afterwards, I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall proph-

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<sup>33</sup>The top left edge of this page is missing. This is a reconstruction of the likely text.

<sup>34</sup>I.e., John Wesley, Sermon 40, *Christian Perfection* (1741), II.7–8, *Works*, 2:107–8.

esy” (speak to edification) [. . .] “and also upon my servants [. . .] will I pour out my spirit” in those days.<sup>35</sup> This St. Peter declares to be the standing privilege of the gospel dispensation, though it did not commence till the day of Pentecost. This is plain from the following texts.

John 7:38[–39], “He that believeth on me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. This he spake of the Spirit which they who believed on him *εμελλον λαμβνειν οι πιστευσαντες εις αυτον· ουπω γαρ ην πνευμα αγιαν οτι Ιησους ουδεπω εδοξασθη*.”<sup>36</sup>

John 14:15ff, “If ye love me, keep my commandments, and I will pray the Father and he shall give you another comforter, that he may abide with you forever, even the spirit of truth which the world cannot receive because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him, but ye know him, for he *abideth with you*” (*this he did already*) “and shall be in you. I will not leave you orphans. I come unto you. In that day ye shall know that *I am in the Father and you in me and I in you*. He that loveth me shall be loved of my Father. And I will love him and manifest myself to him. If any man love me, he will keep my word, and my father will love him and we will come unto him and make our abode with him. [. . .] He shall teach you all things and bring all things to your remembrance.”

[John] 16:7, “It is expedient for you that I go away, if I go not away the Comforter<sup>37</sup> will not come. . . . I will send him.”

1 Pet. 1:9[ff], “. . . of which salvation the prophets . . . searched diligently, searching what time the Spirit did signify when he testified beforehand of the sufferings of Christ and the *glory which should follow*. To whom it was revealed that not unto themselves, but unto us, they ministered the things declared unto you, by them who preached the gospel unto you which *the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven*.”

Matt. 11:11, “Amongst those born of a woman there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist, yet the *least* in the Kingdom of God is *greater than he*.”

Luke 9:27, “There be some . . . who shall not taste of death till they shall see the Kingdom of God come with power.”

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<sup>35</sup>Benson typically does not insert quotation marks around his direct quotations of Scripture. They have been added here for clarity.

<sup>36</sup>“. . . were afterwards to receive. For the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.”

<sup>37</sup>Page 2 of the draft letter ends here. Page 3 is missing; the abridged form in Benson’s letter to Mather is shown, indented. Italics in the abridged form are retained here, though they certainly would have been less prevalent in the draft.

See also Ps. 68:18, 2 Tim. 1:10, Gal. 4:12, Heb. 8:10–11.

2. It will also appear that the first is true from hence. — (I would not be understood as asserting the Holy Spirit does not work repentance, etc.; or that he does not enlighten men's minds and give manifestations of himself. This he may do without taking up his *residence in the heart*. This we may have, without being *baptized with the Holy Spirit*, without receiving *the Holy Ghost*.)

1) It cannot be denied but that many of the *Jews* had remission of sins, the favour of God, and his love shed abroad in their hearts. See Exod. 34:6, Ps. 32, Isa. 1 and 18. Indeed, almost all the Psalms breathe a spirit of love and joy in a pardoning God. John the Baptist preached repentance and remission of sins (Mark 1:4, Luke 3:3). Luke 1:77, "To prepare the way of the Lord, *by giving the knowledge of salvation by the remission of sins*." Our Lord while upon earth forgave the sins of many whose diseases he healed (as Matt. 9:2–6, Luke 7:48–49). — But the Holy Ghost was not given till after Christ's exaltation, it follows the *Holy Ghost given* is different from the *pardon* of sins, etc.; *this* may be where *that* is not.

2) Many texts speak of them as *distinct things*.

As Acts 2:38, ". . . be baptized for the *remission of sins* and ye shall receive the *gift of the Holy Spirit*. . . . The promise is . . . to as many as the Lord shall call."

Acts 8, the Samaritans believed Philip preaching concerning the Kingdom of God, but did not receive the Holy Spirit till Peter and John went and prayed with them.

Acts 19:2, "Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?"

Eph. 1:13–14, "In whom *having believed* (πιστευσαντες) ye were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise which is the earnest of your inheritance."

Acts 3:19ff, "Be converted, *for the blotting out of your sins* (οπως αν ελθωσιν), *that* the times of refreshing *may come* from the presence of the Lord" (which must mean the Holy Ghost).

Luke 3:3, "John came preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins"; and in the 16<sup>th</sup> verse says, "one mightier than I cometh [. . .] he shall baptize you with the *Holy Spirit and fire*."

See Matt. 3:12; Titus 3:5–6.

3) From experience: (1) negatively, — who of us can with *justness* and *propriety* apply to himself the above mentioned texts of Scripture,

taking them in their *plain, obvious, literal* sense, undisguised by the false glosses of men? And many more, such as<sup>38</sup>

[John 14:20,] “In that day ye shall know that I am in the Father and you in me and I in you.”

John 17:20[–23], “Neither pray I for these alone, but for all that shall believe on me through their word; that they all may be one. [...] I in them and thou in me.”

Rom. 8:2[ff], “For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath freed me from the law of sin and death.” [ver.] 9, “But ye are not in the flesh but in the Spirit; if the Spirit of God dwell in you. And if any have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.” [ver.] 14–16, “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the Spirit of bondage again unto fear, but ye have received the spirit of adoption whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The same Spirit beareth witness with our spirits that we are the children of God.” [ver. 26, “Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities, for we know not [what] we should pray for as we ought; but the Spirit himself maketh intercession for us with groanings that cannot be uttered.”

1 Cor. 2:9–10, and to the end of the chapter.<sup>39</sup>

1 Tim. 1:14, “And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.”

1 John 2:20[–27], “Ye have an anointing from the Holy One, and know all things.”

1 Cor. 3:16, “Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and the Spirit of God dwelleth in you.”

2 Cor. 1:22, “Who hath sealed us, and given us the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts.”

Eph. 4:30.

The whole of St. John’s first epistle, especially the fifth chapter.

(2) Positively, some of the children of God whom I have known and many you have known, after having long rejoicing in the privilege of remission of sins, were convinced of the necessity and of receiving some-

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<sup>38</sup>The surviving leaves of the draft letter pick up again at this point.

<sup>39</sup>Quoted in abridged form: “Eye hath not seen . . . the things God hath prepared for them that love him, but he *hath* revealed them to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searcheth all things, the *deep things of God*. . . . The spiritual man *discerneth all things*, yet he himself is discerned of no man.”

thing more, promised as they conceived in Scripture. This they earnestly sought, and after such discoveries of their own hearts as they never had before any idea of, after going through a dreadful scene of trials of various kinds and temptations from the power of darkness, trouble, and distress, the Lord who is faithful to his promises, came suddenly to their hearts and made them the temple of [the] indwelling God. This with one voice they declare as very different from and vastly superior to what they experienced in consequence of the remission of sins, while they had what was called the first love.

[3.] This will ascertain the meaning of those passages of Scripture which speak of the kingdom of God. — John the Baptist, our Lord's disciples, and himself always declared "the kingdom of God is at hand." They never mention it as actually commenced, till at the day of Pentecost. In the meantime people are directed to prepare for it by repenting and believing the gospel, whereby they received remission of sins, their hearts drawn out in love to God, and a degree of peace and joy in believing. And is not this all that the generality now look for or experience? Is not this all that those called gospel ministers know anything at all about or point out to others? Are they any more than John's disciples? Like Apollos who taught diligently of thing of Jesus, knowing only the baptism of John."<sup>40</sup> They indeed exhort people to a conformity to the will of God, but how? Not by declaring and maintaining they must receive the Holy Ghost to dwell in their hearts or they can never attain to such a conformity, and that in a very different manner from what they have hither to experienced. I could ask who do actually grow in grace in consequence of such directions? Where is the man who, after twenty years experience, is one whit nearer the mark, supposing they have not received this power. Nay, it is well if they are not in general ten time more carnally minded. And no wonder. They have missed the mark. They are not directed in that only way it is <possible, the way<sup>41</sup>> the infinitely wise God hath pointed in his Word.

[4.] This accounts scripturally and reasonably for what you have called the "second gift," etc. And on these principles, the expediency and necessity may (I will venture for it) be fully evinced. This I am persuaded

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<sup>40</sup>Cf. Acts 18:25.

<sup>41</sup>A two-inch section of the first line at the top of the page is missing. The general sense is clear but exact wording is uncertain.

is a key to the whole Scripture, and renders them consistent with themselves. It hath, I assure you, opened such a scene of things to my view as I never beheld. Oh how much more fully to possess them! I cannot look into the New Testament without discovering continually confirmations of my sentiments and seeing it as a new book. Oh my dear sir, I am convinced I am only one of John's disciples. I have hitherto known nothing of the grand characteristic and distinguishing privilege of Christians. And yet I have pretended to preach the gospel, without the Spirit of Christ! And in some degree God may have been with me and blessed his own word, as far as it was truly set forth. What might we expect if he was in us? Glory be to his name, I <now<sup>42</sup>> feel an expectation of knowing by happy experience that everyone that asketh receiveth. I know, I feel, I want that <gift> he hath promised will make me a Christian, happy and useful.

Adieu, honoured sir, and believe me to be  
Your obedient servant

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<sup>42</sup>There are two small tears on the edge of the page, but this and the following missing words can be reconstructed with sufficient certainty.

# GOD OUR TEACHER: A WESLEYAN VISION OF THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

by

**Michael Pasquarello III**

In a recently published collection of essays on the pastoral use of Scripture, the practice of John (and Charles) Wesley is described in the following manner:

While preaching remained central to their project, Sacraments and a high view of the church office fell by the wayside; and for all of the education of the leadership; the incipient experiential pragmatism of the movement raised obvious questions about the need for education over against the ability to produce the desired effect. It was, one might say, at root an anti-intellectual and therefore anti-doctrinal movement. The exegetical and theological skills . . . crucial for any kind of pastoral ministry was ultimately to prove unnecessary within a Christianity conceived of in terms of revivalism.<sup>1</sup>

While I do not think this assessment does justice to the wisdom of John Wesley's practice, I would agree that it offers a valid description of how he is often perceived within the tradition bearing his name.

What has evolved into a kind of conventional wisdom does pose significant challenges for how we envision and practice *theological* education in the Wesleyan tradition. Complicating matters is the fact that Wesley's "practical divinity" may be identified with the modern paradigm of theological education which divides theory and practice, or knowing and loving God, into discrete, academic disciplines oriented more to their

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<sup>1</sup>Carl Trueman, "The impact of the Reformation and emerging modernism," *The Bible in Pastoral Practice: Readings in the Place and Function of Scripture in the Church*, ed. Paul Ballard and Stephen R. Holmes (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 93. For an insightful narrative that traces the development of Protestant theology and theological education, including that of Pietism, see Thomas Albert Howard, *Protestant Theology and the Making of the Modern German University* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

respective guilds than the fullness of Christian worship, doctrine, and life. Yet, as Thomas Langford notes, "Theology, for John Wesley, was intended to transform life. . . . Theology is important as it serves the interest of Christian formation. Theology is never an end, but is always a means for understanding and building transformed life. Theology, in [Wesley's] understanding, was to be preached, sung, and lived."<sup>2</sup>

Attending to Wesley in this manner will involve us in a conversation beginning with the early church and extending through the sixteenth-century for which theology-*theologia*-was a practical habit, an aptitude of the intellect, heart, and will having the primary characteristic of knowledge seeking wisdom in love. In earlier times some saw this as a gift infused directly by God which was intimately tied to faith, prayer, virtue, and desire for God. Later, with the advent of formal theological investigation, others saw it as a form of wisdom which could be promoted, deepened, and extended by human study and argument. However, the meaning of theology did not displace the more primary sense of the term, theology as a practical *habitus*, a habitual attentiveness to and awareness of God's saving wisdom in Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit in the worship, teaching, and life of the church.<sup>3</sup> As Mark McIntosh comments, "For many Christians across the centuries, this [the knowledge of God] has meant that theology is really a form of prayer or communion with God in which, ultimately, the thinking of the theologian about God comes to life as God's presence within the life of the theologian."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Thomas Langford, *Practical Divinity: Theology in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1983), vol. 1, 22-23. See also the recent study by Edgardo A. Colon-Emeric, *Wesley, Aquinas & Christian Perfection: An Ecumenical Dialogue* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2009). Colon-Emeric describes Wesley's practical divinity as a "practically practical science" (or existential) in comparison with Aquinas, whose work he describes as a "speculatively practical science" (contemplative). In the end, these are both necessary and complementary. D. Stephen Long provides an extensive discussion of Wesley's union and integration of knowledge and love, or theology and ethics, in *John Wesley's Moral Theology: The Quest for God and Goodness* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2005).

<sup>3</sup>Edward Farley, *Theologia: The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983) 33-39. See also the discussion of theology in Aidan Nichols, O.P., *The Shape of Catholic Theology: An Introduction to its Sources, Principles, and History* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press).

<sup>4</sup>Mark A. McIntosh, *Divine Teaching: An Introduction to Christian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008) 13.

Rather than a specialized academic discipline which is limited to a few courses in the curriculum, theology is for all Christians as content and aptitude that orient the mind and heart to loving communion with God and others as the goal of all human knowing, desiring, and acting. Wesley's practical divinity resonates well with contemporary reflection on theology in context, which focuses on practical theology as a larger framework within which all the disciplines converse and work: biblical studies, history, systematics, and church practices.<sup>5</sup>

The integration of theological and pastoral wisdom unites Wesley, the Oxford Don, and Wesley, the pastor; two images that, when divided, betray a pervasive theory/practice split which in our time continues to generate concern over the irrelevance of theological education for the church and the anti-theological practice of pastoral ministry. In addition, the emphasis of modern seminary education on professional training—the acquisition of information and mastery of skills—has also served to reinforce this separation of theology and ministry.<sup>6</sup> However, a major challenge to defining ministry as a profession is that it “. . . may easily be described and maintained apart from any convictions about God, any commitment to a distinctive community patterned in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, any awareness of responsibility to serve the laity in their vocations, or any directedness toward the coming kingdom of God.”<sup>7</sup>

### Theology as the Practice of Holy Love

The modern paradigm of theological education may still benefit from the vision of Wesley's “practical divinity” in which learning and ministry are pervaded by theology as the practice of holy love. As Robert Cushman observes, Wesley's practical divinity maps a way of salvation in which “doctrine comes to life, the creed is made incarnate, and humanity participates in the divine nature.”<sup>8</sup> In other words, while professional training

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<sup>5</sup>Craig Van Gelder, “Theological Education and Missional Leadership Formation: Can Seminaries Prepare Missional Leaders for Congregations?” *The Missional Church & Leadership Formation*, ed. Craig Van Gelder (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 44.

<sup>6</sup>See the discussion and extensive bibliography in Daniel Treier, *Virtue and the Voice of God: Towards Theology as Wisdom* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006).

<sup>7</sup>L. Gregory Jones and Kevin R. Armstrong, *Resurrecting Excellence: Shaping Faithful Christian Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 85.

<sup>8</sup>Robert E. Cushman, *John Wesley's Experimental Divinity: Studies in Methodist Doctrinal Standards* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1989), 10.

for ministry may be necessary, it is not sufficient for engendering and sustaining the practice of faithful ministry that serves the Spirit's work of calling, forming and building up the church as a sign and witness to God's reign and mission in the world.

Fundamental for Wesley was a conviction that faith and holy living are the fruit of God's self-giving in the Word through the Spirit indwelling the church. Recognizing that a world without saints will not know how to praise, know, and glorify God as its source and end, Wesley expected Methodist preachers to spend significant time in prayer and study for "transcribing" the knowledge of Christ into life and ministry according to the beliefs, affections and practices of true religion, or love of God and neighbor.<sup>9</sup> This was not merely a matter of either the intellect or will but involved the affections as motivating dispositions that integrate the rational and emotional dimensions of life into a holistic orientation in which grace may become habitual. Christian tempers will issue in a flow of holy words and actions.<sup>10</sup>

Wesley directs our attention to a "family style" of learning and ministry which reorients the classical disciplines—biblical, theological, and historical—as means to the church's vocation of worshiping God and participating in God's life and mission.<sup>11</sup> And while this may not be acceptable by standards established by the modern theological curriculum and its division into discrete academic disciplines, it may be precisely what we need to reunite academy and church within a common vision of God's saving wisdom shining forth in the world. Wesley describes a life of holiness and happiness in God which is irreducible to either knowing or doing but rather, "this happy knowledge of the true God is only another name for religion; I mean Christian religion, which indeed is the only one that deserves the name. Religion, as to the nature or essence of it, does not lie in this or that set of notions, vulgarly called 'faith'; nor in a round of duties, however carefully 'reformed' from error and superstition. It does not consist in any number of outward actions. No; it properly and directly consists in the knowledge and love of God, as manifested in the

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<sup>9</sup>Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 113.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, 113.

<sup>11</sup>Here I am indebted to the work of William M. Thompson, *The Struggle for Theology's Soul: Contesting Scripture in Christology* (New York: Crossroad, 1996), 15-21.

Son of his love, through the eternal Spirit. And this naturally leads to every heavenly temper, and to every good word and work.”<sup>12</sup>

Shaped by an evangelical message and way of life that drew from the catholicity of the whole church, Wesley’s public witness—as preacher, evangelist, pastor, and spiritual director—was at home within the church’s calling to mature love for God and neighbor, or holiness of heart and life. It is not surprising, then, that Wesley’s theological wisdom was expressed in preaching, praying, reading, writing, teaching, conversing, debating, communing, presiding, singing, organizing, visiting the sick, serving the poor, and ministering to prisoners. In all these activities, Wesley sought to perceive the reality of God’s love ruling over, in, and through all things. Seen from this perspective, the intelligibility of both theological education and the ministry of the church are dependent upon the existence of a holy people whose desire is to know, love, and enjoy the truth, goodness, and beauty of God in Christ, the gospel becoming a people.

Emphasizing faith that works through love, Wesley’s practical divinity exceeds the “information + skill = practical application” paradigm of modern theological education which has contributed to an understanding of the church’s ministry as external, as a form of technology, rather than internal, as an expression of faith manifested in Christian wisdom and goodness. As William Abraham comments on Wesley’s vision, “The link between [ministry] and doctrine is clear. It is in encounter with this gracious and deeply mysterious reality mediated in Word, sacrament, liturgy, and holiness that the church rediscovers the truths which lie buried in its doctrinal heritage.”<sup>13</sup> It is God’s generous self-communication, as mediated by the crucified and risen Christ through the Spirit’s witness in Scripture that engenders forms of faithful ministry informed by God’s knowledge and infused by God’s love.<sup>14</sup> Thus, by the power of the Holy Spirit, the self-giving love of God in Christ becomes the very structure of a new kind of talking, thinking, and being with one another.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>*The Bicentennial Works of John Wesley*, ed. Albert C. Outler (Nashville: Abingdon, 1984 - ), 2: 99. Hereafter referred to as *Works*.

<sup>13</sup>William J. Abraham, “The Revitalization of United Methodist Doctrine and the Renewal of Evangelism,” *Theology and Evangelism in the Wesleyan Heritage*, ed. James C. Logan (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 49.

<sup>14</sup>Nicholas Lash, *Voices of Authority*, reprint ed. (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2005), 11-12.

<sup>15</sup>Mark McIntosh, “Faith, Reason, and the Mind of Christ,” in *Reason and the Reasons of Faith* ed. Paul J. Griffiths and Reinhard Hutter (New York and London: T&T Clark, 2005), 139.

As a priest of the Church of England who was the reluctant leader of a movement which sought evangelical reform, Wesley was “traditioned” into the life of the church within a context constituted by Scripture, the confession of doctrine, the liturgy and sacraments, and works of piety and mercy, all means of grace through which the Spirit creates and sustains a holy people across time.<sup>16</sup> In many ways, Methodism was a consequence of reform which began in England at the turn of the sixteenth century, serving as a renewing force in parishes, working with common pastoral aims, and participating in an educational *and* missional endeavor which underwrote the dissemination and transmission of evangelical faith and life.<sup>17</sup>

It is significant, moreover, that the English reformers maintained a robust commitment to a doctrine of the Trinity which affirmed the Apostles’ Nicene, and Athanasian Creeds. In addition, the *Book of Common Prayer* is itself pervaded by Trinitarian discourse for use in liturgical settings for the purpose of conveying a vision of God’s saving activity that leads to joyful contemplation and loving obedience in communion with God.<sup>18</sup> In other words, by coming to know, love, and enjoy God within the economy of grace worshippers are made participants in the Triune mystery and mission. Equally significant is that the Anglican thirty-nine *Articles of Religion* speak of Scripture only after confessing faith in the Trinity, the incarnate Word, the descent of Christ into hell, Christ’s resurrection from the dead, and the economy of the Spirit.

The existence of the church’s being and life within the Triune relations is primary for arriving at a view of Scripture as a sufficient rule and instrument of salvation which affects living faith that bears fruit in love and good works. Rather than beginning with the apologetic arguments of Protestant scholasticism surrounding the Bible, Wesley affirmed that Holy Scripture speaks through the Spirit’s testimony to nurture communion with the Trinitarian God. In other words, Scripture functions “sacramentally” as a means of grace, mediating Christ and his saving work

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<sup>16</sup>Paul L. Holmer, *The Grammar of Faith* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1978), 203-204.

<sup>17</sup>“The Making of a Protestant Nation: ‘Success’ and ‘Failure’ in England’s Long Reformation,” in ed. Nicholas Tyacke, *England’s Long Reformation: 1500-1800* (London: UCL Press, 1998).

<sup>18</sup>Jason E. Vickers, *Invocation and Assent: The Making and Remaking of Trinitarian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008) 37-38.

through the “oracles of God.”<sup>19</sup> Thus, the primary aim of both theological education *and* pastoral ministry is to assist the Spirit’s work of teaching, forming, and building up Christian communities through attentiveness to the Word of God in the words of Scripture.

Jason Vickers argues persuasively that post-reformation theology in England was marked by increasing distance between the Trinity, scriptural interpretation, and the Christian life due to an academic separation of theological reflection on the being of God from consideration of the work of God. His discussion points toward recovery of a traditional understanding of the Trinity as the personal name of God, the “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,” and its accompanying identifying descriptions of God’s economy of creation and salvation. Of particular importance is Vickers’ documentation of the shift in English Protestantism by which the church’s rule of faith increasingly referred to Scripture rather than personal trust in and appropriate response to God and God’s saving activity in Christ and the Spirit. In other words, for much of the church’s history, salvation was not limited to intellectual assent to doctrinal propositions contained in Scripture as an epistemological concern with how we know and with proving what can be known. Salvation was constituted by coming to know, trust, and love the Triune God in the sacramental practices of the church, or the means of grace, in an ontological and doxological way of knowing which is participatory and transformative.

Vickers calls attention to the role Wesley played in recovering the Trinitarian name in hymns, prayers, and sermons, a vital reminder of the rightful home of Trinitarian discourse in the liturgical life of the church for the end of knowing, loving, and enjoying God. In other words, the Trinity, Scripture, the rule of faith, and salvation were integrally related in the church’s work of worship, preaching, evangelism, catechesis, and service.<sup>20</sup> As Wesley affirms, “. . . to worship God in spirit and in truth means to love him, to delight in him, to desire him, with all our heart and mind and soul and strength, to imitate him we love by purifying ourselves, even as he is pure; and to obey him whom we love, and in whom we believe, both in thought and word and work.”<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>Gary Dorrien, *The Remaking of Evangelical Theology* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1998) 165-167.

<sup>20</sup>Vickers, 169-190. Vickers devotes most of his work to Charles rather than John Wesley. My point is that John’s work also displays a Trinitarian rule.

<sup>21</sup>*Works*, 1:544.

### **The Practice of Exemplary Wisdom and Virtue**

In *An Address to the Clergy*, John Wesley calls attention to the character of pastoral ministry and the kind of exemplary wisdom and virtue that serve as fitting instruments of Christ's truth and goodness. Wesley reconciles theology and life as an expression of practical wisdom involving pastors and those whom they serve. The combination is a way of being, desiring, and acting that springs from devotion of the intellect and will to God.

What is a Minister of Christ, a shepherd of souls, unless he is devoted to God? Unless he abstain, with the utmost care and diligence, from every evil word and work; from all appearance of evil; yea, from the most innocent things, whereby any might be offended or made weak? Is he not called, above others, to be an example to the flock, in his private as well as public character; an example of all holy and heavenly tempers, filling the heart so as to shine through the life? . . . Do I understand my own office? Have I deeply considered before God the character which I bear? What is it to be an Ambassador of Christ, and Envoy from the King of heaven? And do I know and feel what is implied in "watching over the souls" of men "as he that must give an account?"<sup>22</sup>

Appropriating in one's life and ministry the knowledge of God mediated by Scripture requires and leads to practical wisdom, fitting expressions of "doctrine coming to life" in faith that works through love. Such "knowing in action" is dependent upon the presence of the Spirit who cleanses the eyes of the heart and understanding and enables perception of God's Word in Scripture in relation to God's work in the lives of people.

Consequently, "is not a minister's whole life, if walking worthy of the calling, one incessant labor of love, one continued tract of praising God and helping others, one of thankfulness and beneficence? Is he not always humble, always serious, though rejoicing evermore; mild, gentle, patient, and abstinent? . . . Is he not one sent forth from God, to stand between God and man, to guard and assist the poor, helpless children of men, to supply them both with light and strength to guide them through a thousand known and unknown dangers, till at the appointed time he returns, with those committed to his charge, to his and their Father who is in heaven?"<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>"An Address to the Clergy," *The Works of John Wesley, M.A.*, ed. Thomas Jackson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1958-59), 10:487-488, 491.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, 488-489.

Wesley encouraged pastors to immerse themselves in prayerful study of Scripture to receive its saving wisdom and to speak its truth in love. This way of reading nurtures the formation of a particular people endued with the disposition of holy love—to God and the neighbor in God—which attunes the heart’s deep affections that are the wellspring of desire and action in responding to God’s presence in the particular circumstances of life.

Am I . . . such as I ought to be, with regard to my affections? I am taken from among, and ordained for, men, in things pertaining to God. I stand between God and man, by the authority of the great Mediator, in the nearest and most endearing relation both to my Creator and to my fellow creatures. Have I accordingly given my heart to God, and to my brethren for his sake? And my neighbor, every man, as myself? Does this love swallow me up, possess me whole, all my passions and tempers, and regulate all my faculties and powers? Is it the spring which gives rise to all my thoughts, and governs all my words and actions?<sup>24</sup>

Articulating a theologically sound and spiritually rich understanding of pastoral life and ministry, Wesley affirmed the union of learning and devotion which illumines the mind and heart in nurturing acquaintance with the “treasuries of sacred knowledge.” In pursuing the way of holiness the affections are purified and reoriented to God through a transformation that irradiates in one’s thoughts, words, and actions, or whole “conversation.” This theologically formative study of Scripture induces love for God and personal knowledge of God’s saving wisdom in Christ, the end intrinsic to perceiving and assessing all aspects related to the practice of Christian life and ministry.

Pastoral ministry is an expression of faith that works through love, which is the fruit of theological study and devotion to God. From this perspective, pastoral work is seen best as the exemplary expression of the true and good in action, an integrated way of thinking, speaking, and living engendered by grace and conformed to the wisdom of God in Christ over time. Wesley urged members of the clergy to examine their devotion to and desire for God according to the divine/human theo-logic of the Incarnation.

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<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, 498.

Am I . . . such as I ought to be, with regard to my affections? I am taken from among and ordained for men, in things pertaining to God. I stand between God and man, by the authority of the great Mediator, in the nearest and most endearing relation both to my Creator and fellow creatures. Have I accordingly given my heart to God, and to my brethren for his sake? Do I love God with all my soul and strength, and my neighbor, every man, as myself? Does this love swallow me up, possess me whole, constitute my supreme happiness? Does it animate my tempers and passions, and regulate all my powers and faculties? Is it the spring which gives rise to all my thoughts, and governs all my words and actions<sup>25</sup>

Wesley described mere assent to theological opinions as “dead” orthodoxy, as the antithesis of “living faith” which is awakened by the Spirit through the scriptural witness to the Father’s self-communication in Christ. Wesley also held that “the ever blessed Trinity” is one of the essential doctrines contained in the “oracles of God”—Holy Scripture—and interwoven with “living faith” which God bestows in order to be known and loved by human creatures.<sup>26</sup> For Wesley, then, reading Scripture is guided by the conviction that the truth and goodness of the Triune God is mediated by the Spirit’s testimony to Christ through the whole biblical canon. There should be a participatory and transformative way of reading which includes but also exceeds historical, cultural, and linguistic methods of study related to the biblical text. In other words, Wesley did not exclude the importance of historical and human dimensions of study but rather sought their source and completion in the knowledge and love of God.<sup>27</sup>

### **God Our Teacher**

In *An Address to the Clergy*, Wesley counsels ministers to become persons of sound learning, piety, and virtue. He identifies the need for acquiring capacities of understanding, apprehension, judgment, and reason in relation to a number of subjects: knowledge of the world and of human

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 498.

<sup>26</sup>For Wesley’s discussion of the text’s authenticity, see John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes on the New Testament* 2 vols. (Peabody: MA, Hendrickson, 1986).

<sup>27</sup>Here I would recommend the essays contained in *Reading the Bible in Wesleyan Ways*, eds. Barry Callen and Richard Thompson.

nature, character, dispositions and tempers; knowledge of the sciences, natural history, metaphysics, and philosophy; competence in thinking logically and speaking clearly; and the virtue of courage for speaking the truth in love. Wesley also advises reading key theological figures in the Christian tradition, giving serious attention to the Fathers of the church, especially their interpretation of Scripture. Wesley places emphasis on the study of Scripture which entails critical mastery of its original languages, its grammar and genres, as well as a grasp of its parts in relation to its whole—the analogy of faith—as the key for unfolding the literal and spiritual senses as informed by the order of salvation. At the same time, he affirms that acknowledging God as Teacher is required for the completion of these educational and formative tasks.

They [ministers] are assured of being assisted in all their labour by Him who teacheth man knowledge. And who teacheth like Him? Who, like Him, giveth wisdom to the simple? How easy is it for Him, (if we desire it, and believe that he is both able and willing to do this) by the powerful, though secret, influences of the Spirit, to open and enlarge our understanding; to strengthen all our faculties; to bring to our remembrance whatsoever things are needful, and to fix and sharpen our attention to them; so that we may profit above all who wholly depend upon themselves, in whatever may qualify us for our Master's work.<sup>28</sup>

Prayerful study, faithful obedience, and the wisdom of holy love—education, formation, and vocation—were means by which Wesley sought to understand the way to God and find the way to God: “I lift up my heart to the Father of lights,” intending to obey what God speaks. “If any be willing to do thy will, he shall know.” Open to the prompting of the Spirit, Wesley immersed himself in Scripture, “with all the attention and earnestness of which my mind is capable.” Pursuing a truth which exceeds human understanding and desire, he conversed with “those experienced in the things of God, and then the writings thereby, being dead, they yet speak.” Attentive to the teaching of Scripture, the wisdom of the Christian past, and the illuminating work of the Spirit, Wesley prepared for proclaiming the “way to heaven” by and for “faith that works through love.”<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>“An Address to the Clergy,” 485-486.

<sup>29</sup>*Works*, 1:106.

The distance between Scripture and the present is not merely historical or cultural and thus overcome by making the Bible “relevant” through translating its message into contemporary idioms. There is spiritual and moral distance which must be overcome by the Spirit’s gifts of repentance, conversion, and transformation of life through faith in Christ. In the classical tradition, this vision includes an assumption that the appropriate context of theological study is not only the church’s Scripture, creeds, and doctrine but also its worship, preaching, sacraments, catechesis, and the life of discipleship in the Spirit’s grace.<sup>30</sup>

The importance of practical wisdom sheds light on Wesley’s commitment to “plain truth for plain folk.” This commitment was reinforced by the minutes of the 1746 Methodist conference in a series of questions devoted to “trying” those who believed they had been moved by the Spirit and called to preach.

Do they know in whom they have believed?; Have they the love of God in their hearts?; Do they desire and seek nothing but God?; And are they holy in all manner of conversation?; Have they a clear understanding?; Have they a right judgment in the things of God?; Have they a just conception of the salvation by faith?; . . . Do they not only speak as generally either to convince or affect the hearts—but have any received remission of sins by their preaching—a clear and lasting sense of the love of God?<sup>31</sup>

William Abraham points to the way in which Wesley’s sermons provide an illuminating example of such spiritual and moral wisdom in practice. Among the whole corpus there is an initial set that deals with issues in conceptual and practical ways relevant to coming to faith for the first time; salvation, justification, repentance, the witness of the Spirit, new birth, and victory over evil. A second group describes what it is to be Christian through Wesley’s use of the Sermon on the Mount. These discourses aim to share the nature of the Christian life on the way to a life of holiness. A final set of sermons addresses particular problems and challenges to the Christian life by means of the church’s confession of faith as

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<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, 14-36.

<sup>31</sup>*John Wesley*, ed. Albert C. Outler, “Doctrines and Discipline in the Minutes of the Annual Conferences, 1744-47” (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980) 160-161.

illuminated by the scriptural way of salvation.<sup>32</sup> Abraham writes of Wesley, "In an inimitable and wonderful way he helped people find God in conversion, became a model for them of the spiritual life, and provided a network of resources to nourish genuine holiness."<sup>33</sup>

Robert Wall makes a similar observation, describing Wesley's sermons as "Christian midrash" or a "contemporizing hermeneutic suitable for a sacramental view of Scripture, which supposes that interpreters mediate between God's Word and their own worlds." Wesley's sermons were not so much a commentary on Scripture as a scriptural commentary on life, a way of preaching that displays a discernment grounded in one's knowledge and insightful understanding of both the biblical text and preaching context.<sup>34</sup> Wall notes that Wesley's perceptive, reverent use of Scripture turned his sermons into sacraments, means of grace that nourished and strengthened the Methodist people with the Word through the presence of the Spirit. This form of preaching was situated within a life of prayerful study and diligent interpretation of the truths of Scripture which were communicated in a plain style characterized by clarity of thought and simplicity of devotion. Moreover, the elevation of the Word was accompanied by a deep hunger for the church's sacramental life and a desire for the rehabilitation of its doctrinal substance to the end of spiritual and moral renewal.<sup>35</sup>

Theological education which is truly *theological* will be attentive to the truth and reality of Christ who constitutes the whole church as his Body by the work of the Holy Spirit. The practical wisdom of Christian life and ministry is engendered by the work of divine grace through the virtues of faith, hope, and love which bear fruit in the transformation of knowledge and desire into fitting action and speech "to the right person, to the right extent, at the right time, with the right aim, and in the right

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<sup>32</sup>William J. Abraham, "Wesley as Preacher," *The Cambridge Companion to John Wesley*, ed. Randy L. Maddox and Jason E. Vickers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 110-111.

<sup>33</sup>William J. Abraham, "The End of Wesleyan Theology," *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 40:1 (Spring, 2005), 22.

<sup>34</sup>Robert W. Wall, "Toward a Wesleyan Hermeneutic of Scripture" in *Reading the Bible in Wesleyan Ways: Some Constructive Proposals*, eds. Barry L. Callen and Richard P. Thompson (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 2004), 52-53.

<sup>35</sup>Horton Davies, *Worship and Theology in England: From Watts and Wesley to Martineau, 1690-1900* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 143-183.

way.” Or, as Wesley writes: “. . . the love of God and man not only filling my heart, but shining through my whole conversation.”<sup>36</sup> This entails participation in Christ’s human righteousness, having the “mind that was in Christ” by which the Spirit guides one’s thinking, feeling, and acting through the law of the Gospel ruling in the mind and heart.<sup>37</sup> As Wesley notes,

Prudence (or practical wisdom), properly so called, is not that offspring of hell which the world calls prudence, which is mere craft, cunning dissimulation; but . . . that “wisdom from above” which our Lord peculiarly recommends to all who would promote his kingdom upon earth. . . . This wisdom will instruct you how to suit your words and whole behavior to the persons with whom you have to do, to the time, place, and all other circumstances.<sup>38</sup>

Following the wisdom of Scripture and the Christian tradition, Wesley believed the completion of our human capacities requires the gifts, virtues, and fruits of divine grace which are received through the presence of Christ and the Spirit in the worship, doctrine, and common life of the church. Springing from God’s truth and goodness, this form of life entails restoration to the divine image in Christ as the definitive shape of human receptivity to the Word which bears fruit in the beauty of holy love. For this reason, theological education which is truly *theological* will seek to assist the Spirit’s work of forming habits of the heart and mind that enables pastors and congregations to think, perceive, and act in ways that show forth the brightness of Christ’s glory.<sup>39</sup>

Empowered by the Spirit, theology as a practice and way of knowing is dependent upon several factors: loving attentiveness to the glory of God’s presence in creation, Scripture, and the church’s confession of doctrine; the wisdom of experience gained by patient decision making and practice in fellowship with others; the cultivation of holy love in all of life as modeled by the saints within the communion of the church.<sup>40</sup> This

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<sup>36</sup>“An Address to the Clergy,” 485, 499.

<sup>37</sup>Long, *John Wesley’s Moral Theology*, 171–202.

<sup>38</sup>*Works*, 2:318.

<sup>39</sup>Eugene H. Peterson, *Under the Unpredictable Plant: An Exploration in Vocational Holiness* (Grand Rapids/Leicester: Eerdmans/Gracewing, 1992).

<sup>40</sup>Romanus Cessario, O.P., *The Virtues, Or the Examined Life* (London/New York: Continuum, 2002), 99–121.

form of life engenders a way of perceiving that requires the restoration of the spiritual senses through participation in the manifold wisdom and means of grace. Rather than including a course or two in our curricula that bear Wesley's name, recovering the wisdom of practical divinity may assist us to see that theological education is both a practice *and* way of knowing that ultimately has God as the *subject* of study and as the *acting subject*; *God our Teacher who is the source and end of all things*. As Wesley writes,

The one perfect good shall be your ultimate end. One thing shall ye desire for its own sake—the fruition of him that is all in all. One happiness shall you propose to your souls, even a union with him that made them, the having fellowship with the Father and the Son, the being joined to the “Lord in one Spirit.” One design ye are to pursue to the end of time, the enjoyment of God in time and eternity—desire other things so far as they tend to this.... Let every affection, and thought, and word, and work be subordinate to this. Whatever ye desire or fear, whatever ye seek or shun, whatever ye think, speak, or do, be it in order to your happiness in God, the sole end as well as the source of your being.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> *Works*, 1:408.

# HORACE BUSHNELL: GUIDED BY HIS WESLEYAN HERITAGE

by

Darius and Edyta Jankiewicz

Until the dawn of the twentieth century, the spiritual nurture of children was not a high priority for the Christian church. In fact, for most of Christian history, reflection on the nature of children and their spiritual formation was often considered “beneath” the work of theologians and Christian ethicists, and thus relegated “as a fitting area of inquiry” only for those directly involved with children.<sup>1</sup> One nineteenth-century American Christian writer, Horace Bushnell (1802-1876), stands in contrast to theology’s neglect of children’s spirituality. He was a prominent New England Congregational pastor. Today, he is recognized as “the quintessential American theologian of childhood”<sup>2</sup> who made a unique contribution to the Christian church’s understanding of the spiritual nurture of children. What is less recognized is that he was strongly influenced by nineteenth-century American Wesleyan thought.

While deemed “America’s greatest nineteenth-century theologian,”<sup>3</sup> Bushnell’s theology is controversial. Many historians label him the father of modern America liberalism,<sup>4</sup> and a smorgasbord of modern liberal

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<sup>1</sup>Marcia J. Bunge, “The Dignity and Complexity of Children: Constructing Christian Theologies of Childhood,” in *Nurturing Child and Adolescent Spirituality: Perspectives from the World’s Religious Traditions*, ed. Karen Marie Yust (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2006), 53.

<sup>2</sup>Margaret Bendroth, “Horace Bushnell’s Christian Nurture,” in *The Child in Christian Thought*, ed. Marcia J. Bunge (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2001), 350; cf. Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *Theology in America: The Major Protestant Voices from Puritanism to Neo-Orthodoxy* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2003), 317.

<sup>3</sup>Gary Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology: Imagining Progressive Religion, 1805-1900* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 111.

<sup>4</sup>Richard Lischer, *The Company of Preachers: Wisdom on Preaching, Augustine to the Present* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2002), 83; Bruce Demarest and John S. Feinberg, *The Cross and Salvation: The Doctrine of Salvation* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1997), 154.

theologies claim him as their own.<sup>5</sup> However, Bushnell's thought is complex and defies precise classification.<sup>6</sup> This is perhaps because Bushnell functioned in a theological "no-man's land" between the warring factions of Calvinist, Arminian, and Unitarian theologies of nineteenth-century America.<sup>7</sup> A simpler explanation could be that, although Bushnell did not appear to articulate this, his views were strongly influenced by his family's

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<sup>5</sup>Thomas Jenkins rightly chides this trend when he writes: "In the late nineteenth century, they [the liberal theologians] interpreted Bushnell in ways that made him suit their own theological agenda. Foremost among them was Theodore Munger. What Munger and his generation of liberals did to Bushnell was analogous to what Park and his generation had done to Jonathan Edwards. They fashioned these past theologians in their own image." Thomas E. Jenkins, *The Character of God: Recovering the Lost Literary Power of American Protestantism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 114. Theodore Munger's (1830-1910) biography of Bushnell is still considered one of the more important works dealing with the latter's thought and life. *Horace Bushnell: Preacher and Theologian* (Cambridge: the Riverside Press, 1899).

<sup>6</sup>Modern historians and theologians struggle to classify Bushnell's theology. See, for example Dorrien who writes, "His [Bushnell's] approach to theology offended virtually the entire field, from left to right, of American religious thinkers." Idem, 143. Similarly, Glen Hewitt, a Bushnell scholar, states that the latter's thought "escape[s] classification in any single theological camp. He is neither an orthodox Calvinist nor a Unitarian, neither a revivalist nor a 'high church' theologian." Glen A. Hewitt, *Regeneration and Morality: A Study of Charles Finney, Charles Hodge, John W. Nevin and Horace Bushnell* (Brooklyn, NY: Carlson Publishing, 1991), 125.

<sup>7</sup>Bushnell's theological views emerged during the latter years of what has become known in theological circles as the Unitarian Controversy or Schism in America. Unitarianism is a Christian theological movement which rejected the doctrines of the Trinity and the divinity of Christ, teaching instead a uni-personality of God. For a brief summary of the emergence of Unitarianism in America, see Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 388-402. For an in-depth treatment of American Unitarianism, see a recent re-print of George E. Ellis's classic *Unitarian Controversy* (Charleston: Nabu Press, 2012).

Arminianism traces its roots to Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609), a Theodore Beza trained theologian who, while affirming the traditional reformational teaching of total depravity, rejected Calvinistic predestination with its deterministic understanding of salvation. Instead, he taught that "prevenient grace" restores human free will to the point that humans are able to respond to God's gracious offer of salvation. For an excellent overview of Arminius' theology, see Roger Olsen, *Arminian Theology* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2006).

Wesleyan emphasis on sanctification and practical Christianity, rather than on theological correctness.<sup>8</sup>

The purpose here is to explore Bushnell's thought on Christian nurture within the context of his life and theology of human nature. We begin with a short spiritual and educational biography, which shaped his theology and influenced his seminal views on the spiritual nurture of children.

### A Brief Spiritual and Theological Biography

Horace Bushnell was born in a farming community in Litchfield County, Connecticut. Bushnell's mother was Episcopalian, whereas his father was a Methodist. Having no other choice, the Bushnell family attended the established Congregational Church, a center of authority in Litchfield that was strictly Calvinist.<sup>9</sup> Thus, in one of the most "religiously homogenous" parts of Connecticut,<sup>10</sup> the Bushnell family was considered to be "outsiders."<sup>11</sup> Bushnell's father frequently opposed the preaching which emphasized, in his words, "tough predestination" and "over-total depravity";<sup>12</sup> his wife, although in agreement with him, curbed her husband's comments "for the sake of the children."<sup>13</sup> The influences of his mother's Episcopalian faith, his father's Methodism, and the Calvinism of the church of his youth would ultimately shape Bushnell's theological thinking.

Bushnell's parents differed not only in their religion, but also in their temperaments. His father was "characterized by eminent evenness, fairness, and conscientiousness,"<sup>14</sup> and Bushnell associated a serious flogging from

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<sup>8</sup>For a study on John Wesley and his emphasis on practical theology, see Donald A. D. Thorsen, "Experimental Method in the Practical Theology of John Wesley," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 24 (1989): 117-141; cf. Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1994).

<sup>9</sup>Theodore Thornton Munger, *Horace Bushnell: Preacher and Theologian* (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1899), 8.

<sup>10</sup>Robert Bruce Mullin, *The Puritan as Yankee: A Life of Horace Bushnell* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 18.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>12</sup>Munger, 8.

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

<sup>14</sup>The words of Horace Bushnell's brother, the Rev. Dr. George Bushnell, cited in Munger, 7.

his father with God's judgement."<sup>15</sup> In contrast, Bushnell's mother was "utterly unselfish and untiring in [her] devotion, yet thoughtful, sagacious, and wise, always stimulating and ennobling."<sup>16</sup> As a young toddler, Horace's mother had saved him from drowning; thus, Bushnell remembered his mother as "his savior."<sup>17</sup> Despite these differences in both religious backgrounds and temperaments, Bushnell's parents created a home where "religion was no occasional and nominal thing, no irksome restraint nor unwelcome visitor, but a constant atmosphere, a commanding but genial presence. . . . If ever there was a child of Christian nurture, [Horace] was one."<sup>18</sup> Robert Mullin, Bushnell's biographer, notes that it was not doctrine that was central to the religious life of the Bushnell family, but rather the practical principles of Christianity and their role in character formation.<sup>19</sup>

In contrast with the spiritual nurture of his home, the church did not figure as a prominent source of religious reflection in Bushnell's recollections of his early years. Although he recalled his first schoolteacher of but one year with fondness, he never mentioned his childhood minister. Furthermore, although he had no memory of praying while in church, he did recall being moved to prayer while in nature. In fact, he found in the world of nature "a sense of divine beauty and majesty," whereby he experienced God.<sup>20</sup> Ultimately, Bushnell's understanding of the principles of faith and character, flowing out of his experiences at home and in nature, became increasingly at odds with the orthodox Calvinism of the wider community in which he was raised.<sup>21</sup>

Calvinist orthodox theology in nineteenth-century New England embraced the doctrine of double predestination, which claimed that humanity is made up of two groups, the elect and the damned. One's status

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<sup>15</sup>Mullin, 19.

<sup>16</sup>The words of George Bushnell, cited in Munger, 7-8.

<sup>17</sup>Mullin, 20.

<sup>18</sup>The words of George Bushnell, cited in Munger, 7-8.

<sup>19</sup>Mullin, 24. Mullin notes that the religious upbringing Bushnell received at home "bore few parallels with [his] picture of sturdy farmers feeding on a diet of rigorous theology—'Free will, fixed fate, absolute foreknowledge, trinity, redemption, special grace, eternity—give them anything high enough, and the tough muscle of their inward man will be climbing sturdily into it.'" Idem.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

<sup>21</sup>Dorrien, 112; Mullin, 25.

is determined by God before birth and cannot be changed.<sup>22</sup> As with their Puritan predecessors,<sup>23</sup> determining one's status became the great preoccupation of New England Calvinists, and their solution was to look "within one's inner life." Evidence that one was a member of the elect, and thus eligible for membership within the church, was determined by one's ability to determine the presence of saving grace or "signs of grace" within.<sup>24</sup> One of the signs of election was a conversion experience, defined as a sudden "overwhelming experience of grace." Subsequently, recounting this conversion experience became a signpost of one's Christianity.<sup>25</sup>

Despite his misgivings about Calvinism, in 1821, at the age of nineteen, Bushnell appears to have experienced what would become the first of four conversion events,<sup>26</sup> following which he made a public profession of his faith, which was evidently considered adequate by his minister since he was accepted into membership of the Congregational Church.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>For a work written from a Calvinist perspective during Bushnell's times that describes the early nineteenth-century controversy between orthodox Calvinism and any attempt to soften it, see Bennet Tyler, *Letters on the Origin and Progress of the New Haven Theology* (New York: R. Carter and Collier, 1837); cf. Lee J. Makowski, *Horace Bushnell on Christian Character Development* (Lanham: New York; Oxford: University Press of America, 1999), 7-8.

<sup>23</sup>Roger Olson, *The Story of Christian Theology* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 1999), 499.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*; Mullin, 30.

<sup>25</sup>Harry Alfred Long, *Calvinism Popularised* (Glasgow: Morison Brothers, 1885), 45; cf. Benedict Groschel, *I Am With You Always: A Study of the History and Meaning of Personal Devotion to Jesus Christ* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2010), 308.

<sup>26</sup>Tzu-Lun Tsai, "Preaching as 'Testimony, Publication and Prophesying': A Study of Horace Bushnell's Christological Preaching In Light of His Religious Experience, 1833-1876" (Ph.D. dissertation, Drew Theological School, 2008), 2.

<sup>27</sup>Mullin, 26; Dorrien, 112. A testimony of this experience reads as follows: "A year since, the Lord, in his tender mercy, led me to Jesus. Four months since, in the presence of God and angels and men, I vowed to be the Lord's, in an everlasting covenant never to be broken. But alas, alas, O my God! how often in the past year, or even in the last four months, have I dishonoured thy cause and lost sight of my Redeemer! . . . What can I do? . . . Lord, here I am, a sinner. Take me. Take all that I have and shall have; all that I am and shall be; and do with me as seemeth good. If thou hast anything for me to do; if thou hast anything for me to suffer in the cause of that Saviour on whom I shall rest my all, I am ready to labor, to suffer, or to die. I am ready to do anything or be anything for thee." See Mary Bushnell Cheney, *Life and Letters of Horace Bushnell* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1905), 21.

Two years later, however, upon entry to Yale, Bushnell's fragile Christianity was assailed by intellectual doubts regarding his religious convictions, and his involvement in religious activities declined.<sup>28</sup> His religious struggles were likely a result of both the more complex theology he encountered at Yale and the challenge of adjusting socially to a broader, more sophisticated world.<sup>29</sup>

When revival came to Yale in 1831, however, Bushnell was once again confronted with the question of his religious state. While studying law, he was employed as a tutor of young men, and it was in the context of his spiritual responsibility to his students that he confronted his own unbelief. He confessed:

What shall I do with these arrant doubts I have been nursing for years? When the preacher touches the Trinity and when logic shatters it all to pieces, I am all at the four winds. But I am glad I have a heart as well as a head. My heart wants the Father; my heart wants the Son; my heart wants the Holy Ghost—and one just as much as the other. My heart says the Bible has a Trinity for me, and I mean to hold by my heart. I am glad a man can do it when there is no other mooring, and so I answer my own question—what shall I do? But that is all I can do yet.<sup>30</sup>

Bushnell determined that, despite his intellectual doubts, he would hold on to faith with his heart. Furthermore, he asked himself the following moral question:

Have I ever consented to be, and am I really now, in the right, as in principle and supreme law; to live for it; to make any sacrifice it will cost me; to believe everything that it will bring me to see; to be a confessor of Christ . . . to go on a mission to the world's end if due conviction sends me; to change my occupa-

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<sup>28</sup>The Rev. Dr. Robert McEwin, a classmate of Bushnell's, recalled the following: "Though he came to college a church member, he never had, through the whole four years, nor for two years after, anything positively or distinctively Christian about him, save his observance of communion services. My impression is that his consuming love of study and his high ambition, aided by a growing spirit of doubt and difficulty as to religious doctrine, was the secret here." Quoted in Cheney, 38.

<sup>29</sup>Mullin, 41.

<sup>30</sup>Cheney, 56.

tion for good conscience' [sic] sake; to repair whatever wrong I have done to another; to be humbled, if I should, before my worst enemy; to do complete justice to God, and, if I could, to all worlds—in a word, to be in wholly right intent, and have no mind but this forever?<sup>31</sup>

Ultimately, Bushnell's "desire to be and do right" became more important than his doubts, and he determined to make every effort to find God.<sup>32</sup> While this "turning-about," or "second conversion" of his life, was somewhat "irregular" by the standards of New England theological tradition,<sup>33</sup> it changed the direction of his life. He gave up law school and in 1831 he embarked on theological studies at Yale, in preparation for Christian ministry.<sup>34</sup>

Two years later, Bushnell was called to the pulpit of North Church in Hartford, Connecticut, where two theological controversies influenced his thinking.<sup>35</sup> The first was the Unitarian controversy. For the decade prior to his appointment to North Church, Hartford had been "a crucial battleground" between orthodox Calvinism and Unitarianism.<sup>36</sup> While the most familiar aspect of Unitarianism was its rejection of Trinitarianism, the movement also denied original sin, total depravity, and predestination. Instead, it propagated an optimistic anthropology which asserted that humans were unaffected by original sin and endowed with free will from birth, and thus have a natural ability to resist evil. Thus, through increased knowledge of the truth provided by Jesus Christ, humans can resist evil and overcome sin. Of course, such an anthropology negated the orthodox understanding of justification and the atonement, reducing grace to "the exemplary influence of the exclusively human Jesus." The

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 57-58.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 58.

<sup>33</sup>Bushnell himself describes his conversion in terms of coming to know the "truth" rather than being overwhelmed with the power of the Gospel. He writes: "Now, this conversion, calling it by that name, as we properly should, may seem, in the apprehension of some, to be a conversion *for* the Gospel, and not *in* it or *by* it—a conversion by the want of truth more than by the power of truth." Bushnell, "On the Dissolving of Doubts," Sermon delivered in Yale College Chapel, quoted in Cheney, 59 (emphasis his).

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., 61-62.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., 67-69.

<sup>36</sup>Mullin, 53; Makowski, 10.

example of the human Christ was to be the inspiration for faith in God and faithful living.<sup>37</sup>

Following the lead of Theodore Munger, Bushnell's first biographer, many scholars tend to align Bushnell's views with Unitarianism.<sup>38</sup> Bushnell, however, considered himself firmly within the boundaries of traditional Protestantism. When challenged on this in the public forum he firmly stated: "Let me say, for your comfort, that I have not the slightest tendency that way."<sup>39</sup> He was aware, however, that his views were highly nuanced. Thus he also admitted: "I consider myself to be an orthodox man, and yet I think I can state my orthodox faith in such a way that no serious Unitarian will conflict with me, or feel that I am beyond the terms of reason."<sup>40</sup>

During the same speech cited above, he also addressed the issue of his anthropology, affirming that his views fell firmly within the boundaries of classical Protestantism. He thus continued: "I hold the fall and

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<sup>37</sup>Makowski, 15; Mullin writes that the debate initially centered on "the degree to which original sin hindered natural virtue and the extent to which human beings were culpable for the sin of Adam. Then arose the question of the freedom of the will: Does the human will have moral freedom? Can it choose the good, or is it locked into always choosing evil until enlightened by grace? Then came the question of justification: was the spiritual transformation (that all affirmed) an external, supernatural act of God in which the pious soul was passive, or was it a process in which human participation played an important role? Finally, there arose the question, who was the Christ and what had he accomplished? For those in the liberal movement, the image of God as an autocratic king exacting retribution from his Son to pay the debt of human sin could not be tolerated. "By the early nineteenth century, then, there existed two distinct New England religious cultures: a liberal or Unitarian world emphasizing reason, culture, and morality, and an 'orthodox' or evangelical world emphasizing Calvinism and conversion." Mullin, 32-33.

<sup>38</sup>Unfortunately, according to Bushnell researcher Frederick Kirschenmann, Theodore Munger, the first major interpreter of Bushnell's thought, "read back into Bushnell" his own naturalistic theology, resulting in a misinterpretation of Bushnell's theology and, ultimately, allegations that he was Unitarian. Other interpreters simply followed Munger's lead. See Frederick Kirschenmann, "Horace Bushnell: Cells or Crustacea," in *Reinterpretation in American Church History*, ed. by Jerald C. Brauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), 67.

<sup>39</sup>Horace Bushnell, quoted in R. D. Dickinson, "Life and Letters of Horace Bushnell," *The London Quarterly Review* 49 (London: T. Woolmer, 1883), 71; cf. Cheney, 111, 214, 236.

<sup>40</sup>Cheney, 184.

depravity of man with a deeper meaning probably than most of you, and believe as much the absolute necessity of his renewal by the Holy Spirit. The Atonement and the Trinity are as dear to me as they are to any.”<sup>41</sup> In agreement with these statements, in his *Nature and Supernatural* (first published in 1858) he wrote of “the force of evil here among men”<sup>42</sup> that is the cause of the “organic depravation of humanity or human society,”<sup>43</sup> “which nothing but a supernatural agency of redemption can ever effectually repair.”<sup>44</sup> “The natural pravity of man,” he asserted, “is plainly asserted in the Scriptures.”<sup>45</sup>

Given his views on human depravity, the next logical and necessary question is: How is sin transferred? Most historians believe that Bushnell, in agreement with Unitarian thinking, opted for the generational or social transmission of sin rather than it being an inborn characteristic of humanity.<sup>46</sup> This view, however, appears not to be based on a careful reading of his writings, and especially on his exposition of sin in *Nature and the Supernatural*, but rather on the trend that began with Theodore Munger. Bushnell appears to be much more nuanced. It is true that he often wrote of “moral connections between individuals, by which one becomes a corrupter of others.”<sup>47</sup> Being created as social beings, he believed, humans are powerfully affected by the corruption of others. This corruption is so powerful that sin could not possibly be avoided.<sup>48</sup> He saw a confirmation of this view in the Scriptural pronouncement that God “visit[ed] the iniquities of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation” (Exodus 34:7), which he saw as evidence that parental sin “propagate[d] itself in the character and condition of their

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<sup>41</sup>Bushnell quoted in R. D. Dickinson, 71.

<sup>42</sup>Horace Bushnell, *Nature and the Supernatural: As Together Constituting the One System of God* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1903), 124.

<sup>43</sup>Bushnell, *Nature and the Supernatural*, 165.

<sup>44</sup>*Ibid.*, 131.

<sup>45</sup>Bushnell, *Christian Nurture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1888), 15.

<sup>46</sup>See David Wayne Haddorff, *Dependence and Freedom: The Moral Thought of Horace Bushnell* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1994), 65; cf. David Torbett, *Theology and Slavery: Charles Hodge and Horace Bushnell* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2006), 182.

<sup>47</sup>Bushnell, *Christian Nurture*, 83;

<sup>48</sup>Bendroth, 361.

children,” usually requiring “three or four generations to ripen the sad harvest of misery and debasement.”<sup>49</sup>

However, while writing much about the social or intergenerational transmission of sin, Bushnell was careful not to distance himself from the traditional view. Thus he wrote: “Under the old doctrines of original sin, federal headship, and the like, cast away by many, ridiculed by not a few, there yet lies a great momentous truth, announced by reason as clearly as by Scripture—that in Adam all die.”<sup>50</sup> Even more plainly, he also asserted this in his *Christian Nurture*:

I am well aware that those who have advocated, in former times, the church dogma of original sin, as well as those who adhere to it now, speak only of a taint derived by natural or physical propagation, and do not include the taint derived afterwards, under the law of family infection. It certainly can be no heresy to include the latter; and, since it is manifest that both fall within the same general category of organic connection, it is equally manifest that both ought to be included, and, in all systematic reasonings, must be.<sup>51</sup>

On the basis of statements such as these, it appears that, rather than following a Unitarian anthropology, Bushnell was highly nuanced in his views on human nature. It was perhaps statements like these that made Howard A. Barnes conclude that, taken in its entirety, Bushnell’s theology could only be seen as “qualified liberalism.”<sup>52</sup> Certainly, no liberal theolo-

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<sup>49</sup>Bushnell, *Christian Nurture*, 29.

<sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*, 83-84.

<sup>51</sup>*Ibid.*, 84. To this may be added another, more practical rather than theological statement: “We are physiologically connected and set forth in our beginnings, and it is a matter of immense consequence to our character, what the connection is. In our birth, we not only begin to breathe and circulate blood, but it is a question hugely significant whose the blood may be. For in this we have whole rivers of predispositions, good and bad, set running in us—as much more powerful to shape our future than all tuitional and regulative influences that come after.” *Ibid.*, 195.

<sup>52</sup>Barnes, 129. It should now be obvious that the oft-quoted passage used to prove Bushnell’s liberal credentials, i.e., that “the sin of no person can be transmitted as a sin, or charged to the account of another” (*Christian Nurture*, 83), *must* be interpreted in the light of the above passages, since they are found within the immediate context of what are considered his “liberal” statements. Perhaps Bushnell uttered this infamous statement in an attempt to counterbalance the rampant individualism that pervaded nineteenth-century Protestantism *rather than making a precise doctrinal point*.

gian reading the above words would find an easy alignment with Bushnell's position on sin and its transmission; however, liberal theologians who do take Bushnell's pessimistic anthropology seriously tend to conclude that his views on sin are simply "a morbid hangover from Puritanism."<sup>53</sup> At the same time, a review of the literature did not reveal anyone who has suggested that Bushnell's anthropology might be aligned with that of John Wesley.<sup>54</sup> Thus, just like Wesley before him, far from being labeled a liberal, Bushnell could, at best, be guilty of overemphasizing certain points of Scriptural teaching. His emphasis on the social transmission of sin would result in his understanding of the Christian nurture of children.

The second controversy that Bushnell became involved with was the battle between the "Old and New Schools" of Calvinist theology. While the "Old School" represented traditional, scholastic Dortian Calvinism,<sup>55</sup> "New School" Calvinism traced its roots to Jonathan Edwards' (1703-1758) and his student Samuel Hopkins' (1721-1803), known as "New Divinity." "New Divinity" attempted to modify traditional Calvinism on issues such as original sin and election, the nature of the atonement, and humanity's ability to reject sin. The main reason for the rise of this school of thinking was an attempt to rescue God's reputation as the one who ordains evil. It was also an attempt to harmonize traditional Calvinism with the more "rational religion" of the eighteenth-century.<sup>56</sup> Familiar with the controversy from his Yale years, where one of his professors, Nathaniel W. Taylor (1786-1858), was an avid proponent of the "New School," Bushnell as a pastor was not impressed with either "Old" or "New School" Calvinism. Already during his university years, he was

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<sup>53</sup>Dorrien, 178.

<sup>54</sup>For an overview of Wesley's anthropology see excellent works by Kenneth J. Collins, *The Scripture Way of Salvation: The Heart of John Wesley's Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), 19-45, and Randy Maddox, 65-93.

<sup>55</sup>Modern orthodox Calvinism traces its roots to the teachings of the Synod of Dort (1618-1819), where classical Calvinism was enshrined in the well-known acronym TULIP (total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, and perseverance of the saints). Peter J. Thuesen, *Predestination: The American Career of a Contentious Doctrine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 39-40.

<sup>56</sup>For an excellent review of the controversy between these two schools, see Leo P. Hirrell, *Children of Wrath: New School Calvinism and Antebellum Reform* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1998), 1-40.

uncomfortable with any form of Calvinistic discourse on God, believing that its scholastic speculations provided a dry, “mechanical” explanation of God’s saving relationship with humanity. The theological tinkering of the “New School” also did not satisfy Bushnell. He doubted that Calvinist scholasticism was worth saving.<sup>57</sup>

What Bushnell particularly disliked about “New School” Calvinism was its use of revivalist methodology, which insisted on a “dramatic, instantaneous conversion experience,”<sup>58</sup> something he had never experienced. Peter Thuesen writes: “in the opinion of many revival promoters, a strong predestinarian theology was simply the logical working-out of the conversion experience. Persons who had been overwhelmed with a sense of being chosen by God’s grace would naturally reach the conclusion that election was absolutely unconditional, unmerited, irresistible and irrevocable.”<sup>59</sup> In one of his earliest articles, “Spiritual Economy of Revivals in Religion” (published 1838), Bushnell began to form his thinking on the question of revival and conversion. He clearly held that conversion did not necessitate an emotional experience, but could also occur almost imperceptibly: “There is a common mistake of supposing that the Spirit of God is present in times only of religious exaltation, or if it be true, that such need be the case. It is conceivable that He may be doing as glorious a work in the soul when there is but a very gentle, or almost no excitement of feeling.”<sup>60</sup>

Furthermore, conversion was just the beginning of what God wanted to do in the life of the Christian; once unbelievers were converted, they needed to be “formed.” Thus Bushnell wrote:

The great business of the gospel is to form men to God. Conversion, if it be any thing which it ought to be, is the beginning of the work, and the convert is a disciple, a scholar, just beginning to learn. If all the attention of the church then be drawn to

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<sup>57</sup>Dorrien, 121; cf., Cheney, 62-63.

<sup>58</sup>Hewitt, 129.

<sup>59</sup>Peter J. Thuesen, *Predestination: The American Career of a Contentious Doctrine*, 90-91.

<sup>60</sup>Horace Bushnell, “Spiritual Economy of Revivals of Religion,” *Quarterly Christian Spectator* 10 (February 1838), no page numbers given in the original article, republished in Horace Bushnell, *Views of Christian Nurture, and of Subjects Adjacent Thereto* (1847) (Delmar, N.Y.: Scholar’s Facsimiles and Reprints, 1975), 137.

the single point of securing conversions, without any regard to the ripening of them; if it be supposed, that nothing is of course doing when there are no conversions; if there is no thought of cultivation, no valuation of knowledge and character, no conviction of the truth, that one Christian well formed and taken care of is worth a hundred mere beginners, who are in danger perhaps of proving, that they never begun at all.<sup>61</sup>

While Bushnell had serious misgivings about the “New School” emphasis on an emotional conversion, he did not throw out the baby with the bath water. Rather, within an environment that favored the emotional experience of conversion, Bushnell emphasized nurture and character development as another way of becoming Christian. This echoes John Wesley’s emphasis on practical Christianity, with the exception that Wesley spoke primarily of adult sanctification while Bushnell specifically addressed the nurture of children.

Notwithstanding his doubts regarding Calvinism, being erudite and eloquent, Bushnell was able to thrive within the North Church congregation, which was equally composed of “Old” and “New School” proponents.<sup>62</sup> In his preaching, he was apparently able to combine aspects of both in a way that was “acceptable” to the theologically diverse members of his congregation.<sup>63</sup>

It was within the context of these two controversies that Bushnell’s unique understanding of the spiritual formation of children began to develop.

### The Spiritual Nurture of Children

Bushnell’s interest in the spiritual nurture of children evolved within the context of revivalist methodology.<sup>64</sup> Revivalism, at least in Bushnell’s

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<sup>61</sup>Ibid., 141-142.

<sup>62</sup>Cheney, 66; Mullin 55.

<sup>63</sup>Mullin, 56.

<sup>64</sup>Philip B. Eppard, “Introduction,” in Horace Bushnell, *Views of Christian Nurture*, ii. Bushnell’s interest in children may also have been spawned by his enjoyment of his own children. In her *Life and Letters of Horace Bushnell*, one of Bushnell’s daughters, Mary, recounts a happy childhood, due in part to her father’s personality. She wrote: “First among my recollections of my father are the daily, after-dinner romps, not lasting long, but most vigorous and hearty at the moment.” Her father’s “frolics” became part of her memory of a rich and stimulating childhood, in which life was made “a paradise of nature, the recollection of which behind us might image to us the paradise of grace before us.” Cheney, 452-453.

understanding, meant that children were to be brought up “outside of all possible acceptance with God” until the time of their conversion. Thus, parents indoctrinated their children “in respect to their need of a new heart,” taught them “what conversion is, and how it comes to pass with grown people,” and prayed that “God [would] arrest them when they [were] old enough to be converted.”<sup>65</sup> In the meantime, parents “drill[ed]” their children “into all the constraints” of religion, while separating them from its “hopes and liberties; turning all their little misdoings and bad tempers into evidences of their need of regeneration, and assuring them that all such signs must be upon them” until they had experienced conversion.<sup>66</sup> This practice, asserted Bushnell, was a nurture “of despair,” which made “the loving gospel of Jesus a most galling chain upon the neck of childhood!”<sup>67</sup> Bushnell likened this type of nurture to that of the female ostrich, “nature’s type of unmotherhood,” who lays eggs in the sand and then leaves them to hatch alone.<sup>68</sup> Claiming, in Margaret Bendroth’s words, that this practice “spiritually disenfranchised children from the start,”<sup>69</sup> Bushnell instead came to envision that children could be gradually guided toward faith by their parents.

In his classic text, *Christian Nurture*, Bushnell stated: “the child is to grow up a Christian, and never know himself as being otherwise.”<sup>70</sup> While not suggesting that all children could be nurtured into faith, Bushnell’s vision was that everyday life, within the context of the home, could spiritually form children, “so that no conversion experience [was] necessary, but only the development of a new life already begun,”<sup>71</sup> a “gradual awak-

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<sup>65</sup>Bushnell, *Christian Nurture*, 59.

<sup>66</sup>*Ibid.*, 60

<sup>67</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup>*Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>69</sup>Bendroth, 352. Bushnell wrote: “there is supposed to be a kind of necessity that children, up to that period of advancement and personal maturity when they are able to choose and believe for themselves, and become the subjects of a genuine Christian experience, should be excluded from the church. . . . The result of such arguments and inferences is that children have no place given them in the church, however modified, to suit the conditions of their age. Their parents are called to live within and they themselves are left without.” Bushnell, *Christian Nurture*, 66-67.

<sup>70</sup>Bushnell, *Christian Nurture*, 4.

<sup>71</sup>Bushnell, *Christian Nurture*, 321.

ening of the soul to God,”<sup>72</sup> which flowed out of the relationship between the parent and the child, and which began at a very early age. Thus, he wrote:

The operative truth necessary to a new life, may possibly be communicated through and from the parent, being revealed in his looks, manners and ways of life, before they are of an age to understand the teaching of words; for the Christian scheme, the gospel, is really wrapped up in the life of every Christian parent and beams out from him as a living epistle, before it escapes from the lips, or is taught in words. . . . Never is it too early for good to be communicated.<sup>73</sup>

Thus, Bushnell understood, in at least a rudimentary way, that the process of faith development was influenced by much more than propositional teaching, and began prior to the acquisition of language. Expanding on this concept, he suggested that many people never “brought their minds down close enough to an infant child” to recognize that an infant could learn much before “it has come to language and become a subject thus of *instruction*.”<sup>74</sup> Furthermore, he recognized that children were developing beings with unique needs. Thus, as children matured, “the matter of religious instruction” should be adjusted to the “the age and capacity” of the individual child.<sup>75</sup> Rather than emphasizing their children’s sinfulness and need for regeneration, as proponents of New England’s Calvinism did, parents should teach their children about the love of God through the example of their own lives, providing instruction only as appropriate:

[T]hey should rather seek to teach a feeling of doctrine; to bathe the child in their own feeling of love to God, and dependence on him, and contrition for wrong before him, bearing up their child’s heart in their own, not fearing to encourage every good motion they can call into exercise; to make what is good,

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<sup>72</sup>Bendroth, 353.

<sup>73</sup>Bushnell, *Views of Christian Nurture*, 14-15; cf. Bushnell, *Christian Nurture*, 198: “where and how early does the work of nurture begin? . . . The true, and only true answer is, that the nurture of the soul and character is to begin just when the nurture of the body begins.”

<sup>74</sup>Bushnell, *Views of Christian Nurture*, 105. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>75</sup>*Ibid.*, 75.

happy and attractive, what is wrong, odious and hateful; then as the understanding advances, to give it food suited to its capacity, opening upon it, gradually the more difficult views of Christian doctrine and experience.<sup>76</sup>

Thus, according to Bushnell, “infantile nurture” should gradually progress to “a child’s nurture,” and then “a youth’s nurture—advancing by imperceptible gradations, if possible, according to the gradations and stages of the growth, or progress toward maturity.”<sup>77</sup>

Furthermore, Bushnell emphasized that Christian nurture should consist of more than parental instruction or influence; rather, it was the “powerful unseen bonds”<sup>78</sup> between family members, which Bushnell designated “the organic unity of the family,” that most powerfully contributed to the spiritual formation of children. This concept challenged the extreme individualism into which nineteenth-century Protestantism had fallen, and “recalled them to those organic relations between parents and children.”<sup>79</sup> To describe this “organic unity,” Bushnell referred to an Old Testament passage that portrayed an idolatrous family: “The children gather wood, the fathers kindle the fire, and the women knead the dough, to make cakes to the queen of heaven. They pour out drink offerings to other gods to provoke me to anger” (Jer. 7:18 NIV).

For Bushnell, this picture illustrated the organic unity of the family. All of the family was involved in the worship of the queen of heaven, who received their worship as the “joint product” of the entire family. Similarly, all families took “a common character, accept[ed] the same delusions, [and] practice[d] the same sins.”<sup>80</sup> The “manners, personal views, prejudices, practical motives, and spirit of the house” created a certain “atmosphere which passe[d] into all and pervade[d] all, as naturally as the air [children] breathe[d].”<sup>81</sup> Even in adulthood, “the motherly and fatherly word” would continue its work in them, and be the “core of all

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<sup>76</sup>Ibid., 39.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid., 198. Bushnell also considered “ante-natal nurture” as having an influence on “the religious preparations or inductive mercies of childhood.” Ibid., 195.

<sup>78</sup>Bendroth, 354.

<sup>79</sup>Munger, 67.

<sup>80</sup>Bushnell, *Christian Nurture*, 74.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid., 77.

spiritual understanding in their character.”<sup>82</sup> In fact, Bushnell’s faith in the influence of the home environment, particularly the near salvific power of the “godly mother,” led him to believe that careful Christian nurture would most certainly lead children to become faithful Christians.<sup>83</sup>

It is ideas like these that earned Bushnell the label of being a liberal and leading some scholars to the conclusion that he believed sin and salvation were “intergenerational process[es], taught and transmitted” through family interactions alone rather than inborn qualities.<sup>84</sup> As shown above, however, this is a matter of overemphasis. Bushnell made no radical departure from the traditional Christian emphasis on sin and its transmission, as he never outright denied the doctrine of original sin, but rather appears to have embraced both, i.e., inborn as well as transmissional aspects of human sin.<sup>85</sup>

### Summary and Conclusions

In summary, Bushnell viewed the family as an instrument of God’s grace to children.<sup>86</sup> Thus, he envisioned that, through the many interactions between parent and child, children could gradually be guided toward faith. However, despite his “intuitive solution” to the challenge of children’s faith formation, Bushnell’s anthropology was more “implicit than explicit,”<sup>87</sup> and he did not explain his ideas within the “wider context of the New England theological tradition.”<sup>88</sup> As a result, his views were widely misunderstood by his contemporaries.<sup>89</sup> Some of Bushnell’s theological peers were critical of what they saw as a scaled down and overly optimistic understanding of conversion and faith formation, suggesting that Bushnell had essentially discarded the notion that children were born with a sinful

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<sup>82</sup>Bushnell, *Christian Nurture*, 316.

<sup>83</sup>Ibid, 315-316; Bendroth, 358; cf. Bushnell, who wrote that the mother “gives them [the children] a great mark of honor, and sets them in a way of great hope and preferment, as regards all highest character.” Bushnell, *Christian Nurture*, 248.

<sup>84</sup>Bendroth, 362; Barnes, 128.

<sup>85</sup>Bushnell, *Christian Nurture*, 84.

<sup>86</sup>Bendroth, 363.

<sup>87</sup>Rachel Henderlite, “The Theological Basis of Horace Bushnell’s *Christian Nurture*” (Ph.D. Dissertation, Yale University, 1947), 2.

<sup>88</sup>Mullin, 119.

<sup>89</sup>Bendroth, 359-363.

nature, thus encouraging them to underestimate their need for regeneration and to “believe in the ‘delusion’ of their own righteousness.”<sup>90</sup>

Furthermore, due to his emphasis on the natural influence of the family over against the need for supernatural grace for the purpose of regeneration, some of Bushnell’s critics accused him of naturalism.<sup>91</sup> These criticisms were at least partly due to the fact that, in *Christian Nurture*, Bushnell did not clearly address the theological questions of original sin and human free will debated by his contemporaries.<sup>92</sup> Although he responded to both of these criticisms, he was “not always systematic or clear in his explanation[s]” of either human depravity or the need for supernatural grace in the process of conversion.<sup>93</sup> As a result of this lack of clarity, together with his “novel definitions of these terms,” he failed to convince his theologically conservative peers of his orthodoxy. The broader context of Bushnell’s work, however, was a society influenced by Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s views on the innate goodness of children.<sup>94</sup> Thus, despite the opposition from his critics, Bushnell’s views soon dominated mainline Protestant understandings of children and childhood.<sup>95</sup>

Finally, we may now return to our original question. Can a case be made that, rather than harbouring a liberal agenda, Bushnell’s views were strongly influenced by his early upbringing and his family’s Wesleyan emphasis on sanctification and practical Christianity rather than on theological correctness? While Bushnell scholar Glen Hewitt suggests that the latter’s theology “escape[s] classification in any single theological camp,” we conclude that he may have been an adventurous Wesleyan theologian. Like Wesley, Bushnell was more interested in the practical side of theology and, although it brought him much grief, he was not overly concerned with doctrinal correctness. In the words of Philip B. Eppard, “Bushnell was pre-eminently a pastor and not a systematic theologian.

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<sup>90</sup>Ibid., 360.

<sup>91</sup>Hewitt, 157.

<sup>92</sup>Mullin, 119.

<sup>93</sup>Bendroth, 361.

<sup>94</sup>Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) was a French philosopher and writer. His novel *Émile* became a groundbreaking work on children’s education during the Enlightenment era. For a careful study of Rousseau’s views regarding human nature, see James Delaney, *Rousseau and the Ethics of Virtue* (New York: Continuum, 2006).

<sup>95</sup>Bendroth, 350.

His theological concerns sprang from his pastoral concerns. In the case of his theories on Christian nurture, he was grappling with some fundamental pastoral concerns.”<sup>96</sup> Like Wesley, he believed in the moral depravity of the human race, “which nothing but a supernatural agency of redemption [could] ever effectually repair.”<sup>97</sup>

Like Wesley, Bushnell emphasized sanctification and character perfection, while making children his primary focus. He thus can, and should be, considered a Wesleyan. As Christians, we owe a debt of gratitude to Bushnell, who, in an age where children were considered second-rate citizens, utilized his Wesleyan theological upbringing to bring attention to this neglected part of God’s kingdom. For these reasons, rather than being known as the “father of modern liberalism,” Bushnell should be duly recognized as an orthodox Christian pastor-scholar with a penchant for troubling the theological waters of human anthropology for the sake of advancing his own agenda.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>96</sup>Eppard, ii.

<sup>97</sup>Bushnell, *Nature and the Supernatural*, 131.

<sup>98</sup>We strongly suspect that the same might be the case with Bushnell’s other teachings, such as justification by faith and atonement, where he was also accused of being less than orthodox. This, however, must be left for further exploration.

## **“LET US NOT SPEND OUR TIME IN TRIFLING”: SUSANNA WESLEY, A MOTHER TO HER SONS**

by

**Patrick Oden**

In late spring of 1725, Susanna Wesley wrote a letter to her second oldest son, whom she called Jacky. After noting some particular frustrations experienced by his brother Charles on a recent journey, frustrations that involved his sister Hester, Susanna turns to more theological musings. John, it seems, included some quotes from Thomas à Kempis in a previous letter, and Susanna shared her opinion that à Kempis was “extremely wrong” to suggest that God “by an irreversible decree hath determined any man to be miserable in this world.”<sup>1</sup> She observes:

Our blessed Lord, who came from heaven to save us from our sins . . . did not intend by commanding us to “take up the cross” that we should bid adieu to all joy and satisfaction, but he opens and extends our views beyond time to eternity. He directs us to place our joy that it may be durable as our being; not in gratifying but in retrenching our sensual appetites; not in obeying but correcting our irregular passions, bringing every appetite of the body and power of the soul under subjection to his laws.<sup>2</sup>

We are to take up our cross, she writes to John, as a contrast to “our corrupt animality” in order to fight under “his banner against the flesh.” This fight is not an empty one, because “when by the divine grace we are so far conquerors as that we never willingly offend, but still press after greater degrees of Christian perfection. . . . We shall then experience the truth of Solomon’s assertion, ‘The ways of virtue are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.’”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Charles Wallace, Jr., ed. *Susanna Wesley: The Complete Writings* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 107.

<sup>2</sup>Wallace, *Susanna Wesley*, 108.

<sup>3</sup>Wallace, *Susanna Wesley*, 108.

After sharing her theological insights, Susanna returns to the topic of à Kempis, noting that she takes "Kempis to have been an honest, weak man, that had more zeal than knowledge, by his condemning all mirth or pleasure as sinful." Misery is seen as misery to Susanna, who acknowledges how it can be used by God, but is not itself the place God leads us. "We may and ought to rejoice that God has assured us he will never leave or forsake us; but if we continue faithful to him, he will take care to conduct us safely through all the changes and chances of this mortal life to those blessed regions of joy and immortality where sorrow and sin can never enter!" John received this letter when he was nearing his twenty-first birthday, a student at Oxford, and not too long before he was ordained as a deacon in the Church of England.

I open with these extended quotes to illustrate the sometimes radical influence a parent has on a child. We sometimes analyze the writings of John Wesley to formulate a systematic picture of his overall theology. Doing this, however, often results in an ahistorical study that pulls the figure out of his context and, in doing this, robs his contributions of vitally important tools of interpretation. People live and respond to specific contexts, not a generalized reality, and it is only in seeing a figure, a movement, or a mission within specific contexts that we can hope to develop a more accurate and helpful understanding of the person. It is with this in mind that I now consider John Wesley, seeing him not as a figure who suddenly erupted into this world great and wholly unique. Rather, he was a man whose significant influence was partly a testimony of his own great passion and work ethic, but also very much in keeping with the tradition in which he was born, and in which he was raised.

In what follows, I consider Wesley's mother, a mother who has been often used to explain Wesley's later development, yet has generally been misused and misunderstood, leading to sometimes wrong conceptions of John Wesley as a man and as a Methodist. I will first share a brief introduction to her life, followed by an overview of some of the psychological interpretations that have developed from earlier studies. I then will suggest that these earlier studies are inadequate because they do not include the scope of Susanna's interactions with her children. The bulk of this essay, then, will be to help remedy future interpretations by providing examples from her letters to her three sons: Samuel, Charles, and John. In doing this I hope to show that, far from being a restrictive or domineering mother, misogynistic interpretations from the past have wrongly denigrated her intelligence, learning, and wisdom. It is true that John and Charles Wesley were vitally

shaped by their mother. This was, however, a predominantly positive influence that helped give them both a creative genius and intrepid spirit that led to the founding and thriving of the Methodist movement.

### **The Life and Influence of Susanna Wesley**

There's nothing plainer than that a free-thinker as a free-thinker, an atheist as an atheist, is worse in that respect than a believer as a believer. But if that believer's practice does not correspond with his faith . . . he is worse than an infidel.<sup>4</sup>

Although it cannot be said that Susanna Wesley has been forgotten to history—either in its popular or its more formal forms—there is a curious emphasis which seems to dominate any mention of John Wesley's mother. This emphasis no doubt derives in large part less from an interest in Susanna for her own self and more from seeking a way to better understand the social, spiritual, and psychological quandary which John Wesley has caused for those attempting to understand his motives and issues. This is especially the case if one dismisses outright the religious truth of John Wesley's claims, leaving him a shell to be filled up with all manner of psychoanalytical theories. Indeed, for this purpose, Susanna Wesley appears to offer a very fruitful source—both in how John Wesley related to himself and how he related to other women.

Many biographers have seen Susanna's form of child raising as being *the* shaping force in John's psychological development. Especially in considering Wesley's later development and his own religious philosophy, it can be said that he was consumed with doubt and feelings of inadequacy. Robert Moore says that his "personal style as a 'Methodist,' compulsive, over-organized, perfectionistic in his attempts to obey authorities which he believed to be legitimate, just, and consistent was determined at this early age."<sup>5</sup> From the time of his earliest youth, Wesley sought internal spiritual order through increasing patterns of discipline and "methods" which would help him towards the perfection that he thought was the goal of the true Christian life. At the root of this interpretation is the statement of Susanna about her method of raising children and her

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<sup>4</sup>Wallace, *Susanna Wesley*, 112.

<sup>5</sup>Robert L. Moore, "Justification Without Joy: Psychohistorical Reflections on John Wesley's Childhood and Conversion," *History of Childhood Quarterly: the Journal of Psychohistory* 2(1), 1974: 36.

"bylaws" which formed the foundation of her approach with each of her children. "Whatever pains it cost, conquer their stubbornness," she writes, "break the will if you would not damn the child."<sup>6</sup>

It appears that the shame induced by Susanna's breaking of the will results in John's later feeling that "he had fallen short of the mark, that he had not reached his spiritual ideal."<sup>7</sup> Thus, in this perspective, it was an underlying sense of doubt and shame which led to his later strivings for full acceptance both before his parents and before God. Yet, this interpretation runs into numerous difficulties when pressed by a desire to explain John Wesley's apparent neuroses.<sup>8</sup> It would be more efficient to understand Susanna, not from her approaches to her children, but rather as an educated, thoughtful, highly spiritual, strong-willed woman in her own right.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Wallace, *Susanna Wesley*, 370.

<sup>7</sup>Moore, 36. Cf. James Fowler, "John Wesley's Development in Faith" in *The Future of the Methodist Theological Traditions*, M. Douglas Meeks, ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985), and Claire E. Wolfteich, "A Difficult Love : Mother as Spiritual Guide in the Writing of Susanna Wesley," *Methodist History* 38, no. 1 (1999), 58ff. James Fowler, 183, in fact attributes Wesley's later identity crisis to powerfully repressed infantile anger and a personality which was organized out of his superego.

<sup>8</sup>For another interesting perspective on John Wesley's family life, including both his childhood and his own relationships and marriage, see Anthony J. Headley, *Family Crucible: The Influence of Family Dynamics in the Life and Ministry of John Wesley* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2010). Headley seeks to assess Wesley's relational dynamics through the lenses of Murray Bowen's extended family systems theory and Alfred Adler's concept of family constellation. Although not a trained historian, Headley offers a worthwhile exploration of Wesley's intimate interactions. However, while he does interact with primary sources throughout, he does not utilize Susanna Wesley's collected works, relying instead on only about six letters written by her, and a similar number written by other members of the family. This quite narrow perspective unfortunately sharply limits Headley's overall analysis.

<sup>9</sup>For more thorough studies on Susanna's method of child-raising and education, see Martha F. Bowden, "Susanna Wesley's Educational Method," *Journal of the Canadian Church Historical Society* 44, no. 1 (2002); David Butler, "Look for the Mother to Find the Son": The Influence of Susanna Wesley on Her Son John," *Epworth Review* 25, no. 4 (1998): 90-100; Frank Baker, "Susanna Wesley: Puritan, Parent, Pastor, Protagonist, Pattern," in *Women in New Worlds* (Nashville, Tenn: Abingdon, 1982): 112-131; Henry D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast: John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism*, 3rd ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 54ff.; Wallace, *Susanna Wesley*, 367ff.; Kenneth J. Collins, *A Real Christian: The Life of John Wesley* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999), 11ff.; John A. Newton, *Susanna Wesley and the Puritan Tradition in Methodism*, 106ff.

In approaching Susanna from this direction we find that John Wesley was not a stereotypical conglomeration of the more obvious Freudian psychoses, but rather the son of a very strong Christian woman who taught him from his earliest age the reality of an active relationship with God, and the priority of pursuing this relationship in the midst of a complicated world.

### **Strong and Highly Committed**

Susanna exhibited early the independence of thought and action which characterized her throughout her life. Despite the dedicated and sacrificial commitment to the Dissenting tradition shown by her father, Susanna made the decision at the age of thirteen to step away from her family's identification and return, on her own, to communion with the Church of England. The specific reasons for this precocious step are not known, yet another sad result of the Epworth fire in 1709. Susanna wrote to her son Samuel in 1709 and told him that she had written a substantial explanation of her reasoning for her return to the Church of England, but this and so many of her own and her father's writings were destroyed in the fire.<sup>10</sup> She did not, it seems, pen another version of this testimony, so we are left to surmise the reasons for her change.

Many researchers make note of the highly influential apologetic preaching of such Anglicans as John Tillotson, Thomas Tenison, and William Beveridge who were calling Dissenters back into the national church.<sup>11</sup> An interesting comment was also made by Susanna's husband, Samuel Wesley, who likewise left his family's Dissenting roots for a return to the Church of England, though later in life than did Susanna. He was educated in a Dissenting academy where a nascent distaste for Dissent seemed to take shape. He noted that he was turned off by the "crude political and religious extremism" of some of his fellow students.<sup>12</sup> Whatever the particular reason that Susanna left her family's religious tradition, it does not seem that she forsook her father or his spiritual wisdom. Indeed, she was quite close to him throughout his life. This no doubt led to her continuing to read deeply of spiritual writings.

This reading and the spiritual emphasis that permeates her collected writings places her well-known statements on education within a broader

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<sup>10</sup>Wallace, *Susanna Wesley*, 71.

<sup>11</sup>Newton, *Susanna Wesley*, 59ff.

<sup>12</sup>Newton, *Susanna Wesley*, 65ff.

context—a context which shows Susanna to be, above all, interested in serving God in her life, a life in which she was given significant responsibility for raising a brood of likewise very intelligent children.<sup>13</sup> We find in her letters, journals, and other writings that she was a serious, highly intellectual woman with strong, developed opinions which played a profound role in an age in which women were not given an equal voice with men.<sup>14</sup> She had, as Charles Wallace puts it, "a deeply formed sense of self; a Puritan self-understanding that ultimately values the individual and empowers her when in conflict with 'the world,' however that might be construed."<sup>15</sup> Her occasional conflicts, however, were not public battles in which she sought to recreate society. Rather, she was her own self within the confines of her context, a conventional woman of the early eighteenth century. Yet, within these conventions, she revealed a great sense of independence of thought and very well-formed theological insights. That sense of self allowed her "not only to love and support her family but also to advise, teach, argue with, and sometimes stubbornly resist even her husband, brother, and sons."<sup>16</sup> Given the strong identity of each of her sons, it is not surprising that different aspects of her personality are revealed in her various interactions with them.

### The Perspective From Her Letters

Susanna's relationship with her husband, Samuel, is well-known. She once wrote to John about his thoughts on considering ordination, noting, "I was much pleased with it and liked the proposal well, but 'tis an unhappiness almost peculiar to our family that your father and I seldom think alike."<sup>17</sup> She continued, "Mr. Wesley differs from me, would engage you, I believe in critical learning." She then adds, "I earnestly pray to God to aver that great evil from you of engaging in trifling studies to the neglect

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<sup>13</sup>In 1731, she wrote to John: "No one can, without renouncing the world in the most literal sense, observe my method, and there's few (if any) that would entirely devote above twenty years of the prime of life in hope to save the souls of their children (which they think may be saved without so much ado); for that was my principal intention, however unskillfully or unsuccessfully managed." Wallace, *Susanna Wesley*, 150.

<sup>14</sup>See Charles Wallace, Jr., "Susanna Wesley's Spirituality: The Freedom of a Christian Woman," *Methodist History* 22, no. 3 (1984): 158-173.

<sup>15</sup>Wallace, *Susanna Wesley*, 33.

<sup>16</sup>Wallace, *Susanna Wesley*, 33.

<sup>17</sup>Wallace, *Susanna Wesley*, 106.

of such as are absolutely necessary.”<sup>18</sup> What is absolutely necessary is not to listen to his father, but for young John to pursue that which leads to the fullest relationship with God. John did, of course, pursue ordination and upon doing so finally did have the support of his father, who apparently had changed his mind about career choices.

Yet, in their disagreements about all manner of issues, Susanna remained loyal to Samuel in public and in private. This loyalty is most evident in a letter she wrote to her brother, Samuel Annesley, Jr., who had been successful in business in India, and who had some unfortunate financial dealings with Samuel Wesley. She admits that her husband was not a wise man of business, but adds:

And did I not know that almighty Wisdom hath views and ends in fixing the bounds of our habitation which are out of our ken, I should think it a thousand pities that a man of his brightness and rare endowments of learning and useful knowledge in relation to the church of God should be confined to an obscure corner of the Country, where his talents are buried and he is determined to a way of life for which he is not so well qualified as I could wish.

While noting his lack of business acumen—which caused the family suffering—Susanna continued to admire and respect his learning and spirituality, which was for her a more important reality. No doubt this was a factor in their early relationship. After her return to the Church of England, she notes that she was for a time tempted to the position of the Socinians, but a wise man helped her better understand and appreciate the orthodox teaching on the Trinity.<sup>19</sup> Susanna, with her defined priorities, ended up marrying this man. It seems that having spiritual insight and wisdom was something Susanna respected in her father, in her husband, and in her sons and daughters.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>Wallace, *Susanna Wesley*, 107.

<sup>19</sup>Newton, *Susanna Wesley*, 66.

<sup>20</sup>We have significantly more evidence of her interaction with her sons than with any of the Wesley daughters. Unfortunately, society at that time did not give ample space for educated women to find their own place in this world, and the Wesley daughters, for the most part, were victims of this reality. See esp. Rack, 51ff., and also Samuel J. Rogal, “The Epworth Women: Susanna Wesley and Her Daughters,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 18, no. 2 (1983): 80–89.

We see in her letters to each of her sons a slightly different expression of Susanna. Indeed, the very distinctions in her response and in the personalities of her children—all who continued strong in the faith—argue as much as anything against her being identified as a psycho-social oppressor. In her letters to her eldest son Samuel, we find a spiritual and emotional counselor sharing insights apparently in response to questions he had sent.<sup>21</sup> Her comments during his school days are not merely emotional encouragement meant to bolster his attitude during his education, and go well beyond reminders for him to attend church and his studies. In a letter written in March, 1704, Susanna reveals an intellectual and insightful theology and hopes to remind her eldest of his spiritual responsibilities by means of what is, in effect, a short philosophical treatise on the nature of religion. "We may," she writes as she gets into the heart of the letter, "distinguish the propositions of natural religion into theoretical and practical. I've already said enough of the first. I proceed to the second and shall divide the propositions of a practical natural religion into two parts: first the internal, second the external worship of God."<sup>22</sup>

At the end of this long letter, she notes that young "Sammy" should seek God continually in his own devotions. "That you may more perfectly know and obey the law of God, be sure you constantly pray for the assistance of the Holy Spirit." She continues, "Observe that assistance implies a joint concurrence of the person assisted; nor can you possibly be assisted if you do nothing. Therefore, use your utmost care and diligence to do your duty and rely upon the veracity of God, who will not fail to perform what he has promised."<sup>23</sup> In later letters, she specifies more of what this diligence involves, including watching how much he drinks and taking note of his specific temptations.

A summary of Susanna's approach might be found in a letter she wrote to Samuel in August of 1704:

The mind of a Christian should always be composed, temperate, free from all extremes of mirth or sadness, and always dis-

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<sup>21</sup>See Wallace, *Susanna Wesley*, 41-75. Wallace, *Susanna Wesley*, 41, writes, "That the letters survived at all is a tribute to the young man's heedful discipline. They are preserved not in original form but in response to his mother's request as part of a letter book, into which he laboriously copied them nearly word for word."

<sup>22</sup>Wallace, *Susanna Wesley*, 42.

<sup>23</sup>Wallace, *Susanna Wesley*, 48.

posed to hear the still small voice of God's Holy Spirit, which will direct him what and how to act in all the occurrences of life, if in all his ways he acknowledge him and depend on his assistance. I cannot now stay to speak of your particular duties. I hope I shall in a short time send you what I designed.<sup>24</sup>

These early letters to Samuel are important as an indication of her theological and intellectual life in John Wesley's earliest years, showing that the atmosphere in which he was raised was filled with very engaged theological thought. To be sure, the letters sent to a young man in school were not the complete picture of the relationship Susanna had with her eldest son. Indeed, after his untimely death in 1739, Susanna wrote Charles with her expressions of grief. "Your brother was exceedingly dear to me in his life, and perhaps I've erred in loving him too well. I once thought it impossible for me to bear his loss, but none knows what they can bear till they are tried."<sup>25</sup>

She then adds an honest expression of her spiritual need in her grief. "As your good old grandfather often used to say, 'That's an affliction, that God makes an affliction.' For surely the manifestation of his presence and favour is more than an adequate support under any suffering whatever. But if he withhold his consolations and hide his face from us the least suffering is intolerable." After her husband's death, Susanna had lived with her eldest son and was dependent on him for her own needs. But she writes she had not even thought about this, as she had indeed felt God's provision, felt called to "a firmer dependence" on him. Although her son was good, "he was not my God—and that now our heavenly father seemed to have taken my cause more immediately into his own hand; and therefore even against hope, I believed in hope that I should never suffer more."<sup>26</sup>

In her letters to her youngest son, we find Susanna showing the same interest in spiritual guidance, acting as a sought-after spiritual counselor, giving practical and theological advice. Yet, there are other aspects shown as well, especially later in her life when Charles has gained a fair amount

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<sup>24</sup>Wallace, *Susanna Wesley*, 50.

<sup>25</sup>Wallace, *Susanna Wesley*, 179.

<sup>26</sup>Wallace, *Susanna Wesley*, 180. Indeed, her lifelong poverty and experiences with the death of almost half of her children, as well as frequent ill health, suggest a near continual experience of suffering which underlies all her spiritual writings.

of his own spiritual confidence. After the Wesley brothers had their enlightening experiences of renewed faith, Charles was eager to share the fruits of their discovery with his mother, and may have been a bit zealous in his own attempts to convince her that his own faith was lacking prior to his new experience, apparently implying that her understanding was deficient as well. After quoting a long passage from the French-born Anglican priest Pierre du Moulin, she writes, "I think you are fallen into an odd way of thinking. You say that till within a few months you had no spiritual life nor any justifying faith. Now this is as if a man should affirm he was not alive in his infancy, because, when an infant he did not know he was alive. A strange way of arguing, this!"<sup>27</sup> At the top of the letter which he also had copied over, is a note in Charles Wesley's hand: "My mother (not clear) of faith Dec. 6, 1738."<sup>28</sup>

Despite this clear disagreement, with both holding their ground, the letters as a whole reflect a continued interest in worthwhile conversation.

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<sup>27</sup>Wallace, *Susanna Wesley*, 176. She goes on to write, "Do you not consider that there's some analogy in spiritual to natural life? A man must first be born and then pass through the several stages of infancy, childhood, and youth, before he attain to maturity. So Christians are first born of water and the spirit and then go through many degrees of grace, be first infants, or babes in Christ, as St. Paul calls them, before they become strong Christians. For spiritual strength is the work of time, as well as of God's Holy Spirit. All then that I can gather from your letter is that till a little while ago you were not so well satisfied of your being a Christian as you are now. I heartily rejoice that you have now attained to a strong and lively hope in God's mercy through Christ. Not that I can think you were totally without saving faith before, but then 'tis one thing to have faith and another thing to be sensible we have it. Faith is the fruit of the Spirit and is the gift of God, but to feel or be inwardly sensible that we have true faith requires a further operation of God's Holy Spirit. You say you have peace but not joy in believing. Blessed be God for peace. May his peace rest within you. Joy will follow, perhaps not very close, but it will follow faith and love. God's promises are sealed but not dated. Therefore patiently attend his pleasure. He will give you joy in believing. Amen." Her understanding of a further and continual work of the Holy Spirit in the life a maturing Christian is something that John Wesley, and later John Fletcher, continued to consider and hone, as this further work is increasingly not seen in sudden stages, but in gradual transformation.

<sup>28</sup>It has been suggested that, as John was reflective of his mother's personality, Charles was much more like his father in thought, temperament, and interests. Samuel liked to think of himself as a poet—even as he seems to have gained more approval as a theologian—while Charles, of course, is best known now for his hymnody.

In 1735, Susanna writes, “. . . that as pleases God, but if while I have life and any remains of health, it may be useful or pleasing to you, that we hold a correspondence together by letters, I shall gladly do it. But then, dear Charles, let us not spend our time in trifling, in talking of impertinent matters that will turn to no account.” Indeed, while her letters do contain the occasional tidbit of personal information, there was a frank spiritual conversation that Susanna continued to pursue. In one of her last letters, when she was seventy-two, she finishes her brief comments to Charles by expressing her confidence in God’s work in John’s life and also in his, saying, “my fears are at an end.” She saw her life’s work taking not only shape but also exhibiting great fruit. She sought to teach both her sons the ways of God, and they were incomparably active in teaching this to others. She finishes with an exhortation to continue in service to God. “Proclaim his universal love and free grace to all men. And that ye may go on in [the power of the Lord and in] the strength of his might and be preserved from yielding place to those bold blasphemers so much as for an hour is the hearty prayer of your loving mother. I send thee my love and blessing.”<sup>29</sup>

### **Affectionate Interaction with John**

It is not surprising that Susanna’s letters to John are the most numerous of all that have been preserved. Throughout these letters she shows the same quality of affection and deep interaction that she reveals in her letters to Charles and Samuel. Indeed, Susanna was willing to engage in theological musings with her son, interacting with him about readings in spirituality and theology. John was curious about his mother’s opinions on topics, knowing that she was well-read.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>Wallace, *Susanna Wesley*, 190.

<sup>30</sup>While her letters indicate some of her reading, it is in her journals that we learn much more about the extent and depth with which she read. She reads both intellectually and devotionally, assessing what she reads with a critical eye. Among her dialogue partners in her journals are Aristotle, Plato, Beveridge and, of course, Scripture. She especially seemed to value the works of Richard Lucas, George Herbert, John Locke, Pascal, and Richard Baxter, with each of these providing, it seems, profound influence in her expressions, her spirituality, and in her overall philosophy of life. See Charles Wallace, Jr., “‘Some Stated Employment of Your Mind’: Reading, Writing, and Religion in the Life of Susanna Wesley,” *Church History* 58, no. 3 (1989): 354-366.

Throughout the letters to John, mutual respect is shown. In March of 1734, she responds to a letter from John by addressing a particularly troublesome interaction John had experienced, and then replies to his apparent questions about his own devotions. She writes, "You want no direction from me on how to employ your time. I thank God for his inspiring you with a resolution of being faithful in improving that important talent committed to your trust."<sup>31</sup> She admits her own haphazard devotions, adding that because of her circumstances, likely related to her health, "I can't observe order, or think consistently, as formerly. When I have a lucid interval, I aim at improving it, but alas, it is but aiming."<sup>32</sup>

However, she always does seem to have an opinion or a suggestion, adding that while she sees nothing of his use of time "but what I approve, unless it be that you do not assign enough of it to meditation, which is (I conceive) incomparably the best means to spiritualize our affections, confirm our judgments, and add strength to our pious resolutions of any exercise whatsoever."<sup>33</sup> Susanna then proceeds with a passionate meditation on God. "And what is so proper for this end as deep and serious consideration of that pure, unaccountable love which is demonstrated to us in our redemption by God Incarnate! Verily, the simplicity of divine love is wonderful! It transcends all thought, it passeth our sublimest apprehensions! Perfect love indeed!"<sup>34</sup> She continues on, "And yet this great, incomprehensible, ineffable all-glorious God deigns to regard us! Declares he loves us!" She presses on with her passionate reminder, proceeding back to her counsel, reminding John of how God reaches out to his people. "How oft doth he call upon us to return and live! By his ministers, his providence, by the still, small voice of his Holy Spirit! By conscience, his viceregent within us and by his merciful corrections and the innumerable blessings we daily enjoy!" She notes that we cannot truly contemplate God as he is in himself, but she gives hope. "But when we consider him under the character of a Savior we revive, and the greatness of that majesty which before astonished and confounded our weak faculties now enhances the value of his condescension towards us and melts our tempers into tenderness and love."

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<sup>31</sup>Wallace, *Susanna Wesley*, 165.

<sup>32</sup>Wallace, *Susanna Wesley*, 165.

<sup>33</sup>Wallace, *Susanna Wesley*, 165.

<sup>34</sup>Wallace, *Susanna Wesley*, 166.

Susanna realizes that she is running out of paper, so tries to conclude, steering the note back to his state of life, and adding encouragements. "Therefore you must not judge of your interior state by your not feeling great fervours of spirit and extraordinary agitations, as plentiful weeping, etc., but rather by the firm adherence of your will to God."<sup>35</sup> She then adds, "follow Mr. Baxter's advice, and you will be easy."<sup>36</sup> Given the course of these middle years of the 1730s, it seems John was not quick to take Baxter's or Susanna's advice, and he was not easy. Susanna ended her note, written four years prior to John's Aldersgate experience, with these words: "Dear Jacky, God Almighty bless thee!" It seems God answered Susanna's prayers.

### Conclusion

Susanna Wesley was a woman of her age. She is known as a wife and mother, a wife to an oft-tempestuous pastor and a mother to significantly more children than is common in our era. She handled both of these roles with patience and perseverance. In this, she was conventional. In light of her seemingly rigid ideals about parenting, it would seem fitting to interpret her, and thus her children, in light of conventional approaches to developmental psychology. Her goal to break the will of her children would lead to anxiety about guilt and lead to forms of religious interactions that were defined by performance, proving one's worth in order to gain approval and love. Such a picture of Susanna would be useful in explaining John Wesley's particular trouble with women, caught as he was between an intense interest in them and a persistent awkwardness in developing close relationships with them.

This impression of Susanna then leads to interpretations of John Wesley's theology and later Methodism that fit this developmental narrative. In this way, Susanna has served as a decisive if not always prominent

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<sup>35</sup>Wallace, *Susanna Wesley*, 166.

<sup>36</sup>She here refers to Richard Baxter, a Puritan preacher from the 17<sup>th</sup> century and one of both Susanna's and John's favorite guides. Here is the quote: "Put your souls, with all their sins and dangers, and all their interests, into the hand of Jesus Christ your Saviour; and trust them wholly with him by a resolved faith. It is he that hath purchased them, and therefore loveth them. It is he that is the owner of them by right of redemption. And it is now become his own interest, even for the success and honour of his redemption, to save them." Charles Wallace, *Susanna Wesley*, 170 n. 42, where he notes that he cannot "find the exact passage amid Baxter's voluminous works."

part of Wesley studies. It is for this reason that Susanna should be furthered studied for who she actually was and how she thought, as a real person, not as a caricature. She was, in many ways, a conventional woman of her age but, in many other ways, she was an extraordinary woman unique to her age. She was extremely well read and showed continued evidence of intellectual engagement with the key thinkers of her era, whether in philosophy or religion. She expressed from her earliest days a strong will of her own, an independence of thought and judgment that led her to independently leave the Dissenting tradition of her father and return to the Church of England. Her letters show both the evidence of her learning and her tendency toward intellectual sparring, not for its own sake but as a way of better determining the truth about God and life.

Susanna Wesley was, it seems, characterized by a persistent intellectual and spiritual curiosity, one that became expressed in her relationships with her sons, leading her to give counsel and seek counsel, to discuss what she read and respond to the issues her sons were worried about. She was not an overbearing mother but an involved mother who was dedicated to her children. It is her lasting legacy that she helped instill in her sons their own intellectual curiosity and independent drive, a drive oriented around a quest for the Living God and what it means to live with God in this present life and into eternity.

# BREATHING THE SPIRIT: A WESLEYAN THEOLOGY OF HYMN SINGING

by

**Mark Christopher Gorman**

We Methodists like to call ourselves a singing people, regularly pointing to the significance of hymns for our history, our worship, and even our theology—and this despite the fact that our congregational singing is often, at best, muted. Nor is the importance of singing a recent development in Methodist church history, although, if historical records are to be believed, early Methodist gatherings could hardly have been described as muted.

The Wesleys themselves relied heavily on hymn singing as a mark of identity and as a tool for evangelism. Nicholas Temperley reports that the Wesleys “encouraged the singing of hymns at family prayers and private gatherings, and at their own public meetings and preaching services,” so much so that “outdoor hymn singing became a badge of the Methodists.”<sup>1</sup> Where the Methodists sang, what they sang, and how they sang were parts of a distinctive identity as they were known among other Christians in the eighteenth century.

I will consider the significance of hymn singing for Methodists as a theological issue.<sup>2</sup> Because singing is so essential to Methodist identity, is there something about singing itself—and not just what is sung, either the words or the music—that discloses truth about who God is and how God operates in the world? In other words, is singing hymns itself a theological act? I answer with a “yes” and present an approach to Wesleyan theol-

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<sup>1</sup>Nicholas Temperley, “John Wesley and Music,” in *Music and the Wesleys*, ed. Nicholas Temperley and Stephen Banfield (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 5.

<sup>2</sup>I focus on hymn singing, but not to the exclusion of other singing, but because that is what John and Charles Wesley did, singing (as well as writing and editing) hymns. Non-hymn singing is a category too broad to consider here because it involves other issues. For example, in the case of choral singing, the questions “Who is singing?” and “Who is not singing?” must be considered.

ogy that helps us understand how and why this is the case. I will address the justly renowned practice of singing in connection with two other early Methodist emphases that have fared less well since the deaths of Charles and John Wesley. They are affective moral psychology and the Holy Spirit.<sup>3</sup> As part of their concern for the holistic salvation offered by God in Jesus Christ, both John and Charles adopted specific emphases concerning moral psychology, or the reshaping and reformation of Christian desire and passions. God's grace not only rectified the soul's relationship with God but also was active in restoring and healing the whole person in a process of sanctification leading to Christian perfection and glorification. Furthermore, the Holy Spirit was essential to the conveyance and reception of God's grace. Indeed, although not always with the greatest clarity, the Wesleys understood that, at its heart, grace is nothing less than the Holy Spirit himself.<sup>4</sup> To receive God's grace is to receive the Holy Spirit.

For the Wesleys, of course, grace was not just about what is received from God but also what is done in response to God's grace. It is, in Randy Maddox's terms, "responsible grace." Or, as John Wesley says in language ripe with meaning for our purpose here, the person who has been reborn in God's grace "continually receives into [the] soul the breath of life from God, the gracious influence of his Spirit, and continually renders it back. . . . [Such a person] by faith perceives the continual actings of God upon his spirit, and by a kind of spiritual re-action returns the grace he receives in unceasing love, and praise, and prayer."<sup>5</sup> Taking this idea of spiritual action/re-action as a cue, I will argue that singing hymns is a healing exercise in "breathing" the Holy Spirit, an act of reception and response. Inhaling the "good air" of the Spirit helps restore healthy passions, which are then expressed in singing, exhaled as love and praise.

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<sup>3</sup>See Randy L. Maddox, "A Change in Affections: The Development, Dynamics, and Dethronement of John Wesley's 'Heart Religion,'" in *Heart Religion: In the Methodist Tradition and Related Movements*, ed. Richard Steele (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 2001): 3-33, for an account of Wesley's moral psychology and of its decline both in Methodism and in other Wesleyan denominations.

<sup>4</sup>Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1994), 119-120.

<sup>5</sup>John Wesley, Sermon 18, "The Great Privilege of those that are Born of God," II.1, in *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley* [henceforth *Works*], ed. Frank Baker, et al (Nashville: Abingdon, 1984-), 1:435-436.

While this exercise has immediate benefits, attentiveness to the practice fosters a habit of spiritual breathing in which the singing community participates with increasing continuity in the reception of the Spirit, and with greater passion in the response appropriate to that reception: the return of the gift (grace) of the Holy Spirit in the exhalation of love and praise. This exercise, therefore, constitutes a form of human participation in the divine life. Singing is recognition *par excellence* of the gift of the Holy Spirit in God's economy of salvation and in the very life of the Holy Trinity.

This essay is neither an exercise in historical investigation nor even of historical theology but of systematic theology in the Wesleyan tradition.<sup>6</sup> I make no claims about the ability of my thesis to clarify what either John or Charles Wesley thought, nor even to describe the (somehow unconscious) deeper connections within their extant works. And I do not intend to suggest that singing replaces or stands apart from the other means of grace central to Wesleyan theology. Rather, I am suggesting that certain key words of the Wesleys (breath, health, passions, praise, Spirit, etc.) invite us to imagine new connections, and I believe my thesis gives a creative way to conceive of those connections, a way that is faithful to John and Charles as well as to the broader Christian tradition. I offer a Wesleyan theology of hymn singing.

I begin with the Wesleys' holistic vision of salvation. Their concern for salvation as healing/health covers a variety of areas, and their deep belief in God's saving work in those areas is foundational for understanding that the Holy Spirit restores Christian passions. Second, I will consider more briefly the resonance of Spirit and breath in the Wesleys' writings. Finally, in three consecutive sections, the connection between health, breath, the Spirit, and singing will be established. In the first section, drawing heavily on Charles's hymns, I will discuss the immediate

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<sup>6</sup>By "systematic" I do not mean the imposition of an ordering system upon the supposedly unordered data of Christian thought. Instead, I mean a process of making visible, or increasing the visibility of, connections within Christian thought, connections that are actually bound up in the very nature of Christian confession and Christian theology. In so doing, I owe a great deal to the recent work of A. N. Williams, though whatever shortcomings the reader may find with my approach are entirely my own. See A. N. Williams, "What is Systematic Theology?" in *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 11:1 (January 2009): 40-55; and *The Architecture of Theology: Structure, System, and Ratio* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

benefits of hymn singing. To sing a hymn in praise of God is to participate in the respiration of the Holy Spirit. Then I will show how immediacy is an insufficient concept for a *Wesleyan* theology. John Wesley helps us include the necessary corrective language of virtue and habituation. Finally, I will draw connections between the spiritual singing of hymns and the divine breathing of the Holy Spirit, both in the economy of salvation and in the divine life. To breathe the Holy Spirit in singing hymns is to inhale and exhale the breath of love.

### **Holistic Salvation**

Throughout their lives the Wesleys had a strong belief in the holistic nature of God's salvation. While many Christian traditions have understood that God has concern for more than just a forensic declaration of the forgiveness of sinners, to the Wesleys this concern is not peripheral. Sin has infected all facets of human life and of the broader creation, so God's work of salvation must address these facets in order for sin to be fully defeated.<sup>7</sup> This had significant ramifications for the development of what we now consider characteristic Wesleyan emphases on matters such as new creation, the means of grace, and Christian perfection.

One other such matter was the issue of health. On the one hand, for the Wesleys health suggested ideas similar to what is often meant by the word today, the medical condition of the body, or of the mind and body. Thus, Randy Maddox can argue that John "Wesley's interest in health and healing was a central dimension of his ministry and of the mission of early Methodism."<sup>8</sup> Basic medical training was a part of clergy training in eighteenth-century England. John offered medical advice to Methodist clergy and, for a time, dispensed medicines through free apothecary shops in Bristol and London. He also collected what he considered the best medical advice of his time into his *Primitive Physic*, a work about which I will have more to say shortly.

On the other hand, the Wesleys had an understanding of health that was much broader than typical medical conditions and advice of the day. Health and related vocabulary formed a key metaphor for salvation.<sup>9</sup> In an Irenaean mode, the Wesleys understood salvation to involve the

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<sup>7</sup>See, e.g., John Wesley, Sermon 141, "The Image of God" II, *Works*, 4:295ff.

<sup>8</sup>Randy L. Maddox, "John Wesley on Holistic Health and Healing," *Methodist History*, 46:1 (October 2007), 4.

<sup>9</sup>See Randy Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 144-147 (citation in *Ibid.*, 7).

restoration, or healing, of the divine image in human beings.<sup>10</sup> Growth in the Christian life was the increase of healthy living—understood as living rightly by God’s empowering grace.

The Wesleyan recognition of a broader definition of health meant that sickness was multi-dimensional. To be sure, there was the purely medical dimension of health. For this John offered specific remedies to cure specific diseases. If someone is found to have measles, he urges that the person “[i]mmediately consult an honest Physician,” that he or she “[d]rink only thin *water-gruel*, or *milk* and *water*, the more the better; or *toast* and *water*,” and that the patient “take frequently a spoonful of *barley-water* sweetened with *oil of sweet almonds* newly drawn, mixed with syrup of *maiden-hair*.”<sup>11</sup>

Disease also had a spiritual dimension. This was not seen to be in conflict with the medical dimension, but rather a complement to it. So, in his *Hymns for the Use of Families*, Charles Wesley writes of the recovery from smallpox:

’Twas prayer alone that turn’d the scale,  
(The prayer which doth with God prevail),  
And brought him from the sky;  
The friend of Lazarus was here,  
And dropt again the pitying tear,  
And would not let me die.<sup>12</sup>

Faith, not medicine, is the path for this cure. Prayer invokes the God who became “[t]he friend of Lazarus.” It was God’s pity and mercy that pre-

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<sup>10</sup>Similarly, see John Wesley, Sermon 62, “The End of Christ’s Coming” III.1, *Works*, 2:480-481, in which John employs the early Christian insight that the cure must fit the illness.

<sup>11</sup> John Wesley *Primitive Physic* (London: the Epworth Press, 1960), 88; emphasis original.

<sup>12</sup> Charles Wesley, “Thanksgiving after recovery from the small-pox,” in *Hymns for the Use of Families* (1767), st. 3, pp. 83-84. All Wesley hymns cited in this paper are accessed from The Center for Studies in the Wesleyan Tradition, Duke Divinity School. Website: <http://divinity.duke.edu/initiatives-centers/cswt/wesley-texts/charles-wesley>. I recognize the difficulties, noted by Joanna Cruickshank, *Pain, Passion and Faith: Revisiting the Place of Charles Wesley In Early Methodism* (Lanham: The Scarecrow Press, 2009), 21ff, of establishing genuine authorship, especially in the early published hymns. Since, however, I do not intend to press the issue of differences between John and Charles Wesley, it is not crucial to decide which hymns really are by Charles, nor to take John’s editorial decisions into account.

vented death. As Joanna Cruickshank says, Charles Wesley “clearly saw the diagnosis and treatment of physical illness as spiritually significant,”<sup>13</sup> but she also notes that Charles wrote a hymn for Christian physicians and that “he was happy to make use of doctors and medicine in [his wife’s] treatment” when she had smallpox.<sup>14</sup>

There was yet a third dimension to health for the Wesleys. This was the health of the passions. I use this word heuristically to stand in for a host of words that especially John Wesley used to describe the affective side of Christian salvation, or what scholars have called “heart religion.”<sup>15</sup> These terms also included affections, tempers, dispositions, and the conscience; they refer to what many people today would call emotions,<sup>16</sup> as well as what classical and contemporary literature speak of as desire and will.<sup>17</sup> The passions were essential to a person’s health. John writes that they “have a greater influence on health than most people are aware of” and that “[t]ill the passion, which caused the disease, is calmed, medicine is applied in vain.”<sup>18</sup> As this passage shows, even though the passions were inextricable from health, curing passions was not wholly a medical process.

In fact, the passions point toward the holistic nature of health as well as to the holistic nature of salvation. John argues that what ultimately cures the passions is “[t]he love of God . . . [which] effectually prevents all the bodily disorders the passions introduce, by keeping the passions themselves within due bounds.”<sup>19</sup> In order to have healthy passions, one needs to have the love of God. And in order to cure certain diseases, one needs healthy passions. Thus, even if there is not a direct link, the love of

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<sup>13</sup>Cruickshank, 116.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, 115.

<sup>15</sup>E.g., Gregory S. Clapper, *The Renewal of the Heart Is The Mission of the Church: Wesley’s Heart Religion in the Twenty-First Century* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2010); Kenneth J. Collins, “John Wesley’s Topography,” *Methodist History* 36, no. 3 (Apr 1998): 162-175; Maddox, “A Change of Affections.”

<sup>16</sup>Thomas Dixon has shown the insufficiency of that word for the Wesleys’ era. See Thomas Dixon, *From Passions to Emotions: The Creation of a Secular Psychological Category* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

<sup>17</sup>Dixon, 75, does note that John Wesley distinguished between affections and passions, but such a distinction may be difficult to trace throughout his various writings.

<sup>18</sup>John Wesley, *Primitive Physic*, 31-32.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, 32.

God is inseparable from human health. A healthy soul (one that loves God) is less likely to be sick because one whose soul is healthy will exhibit healthy passions. We can see this playing out in later stanzas of the Charles Wesley hymn on smallpox quoted above. Having given thanks to God for the recovery, Charles pleads with God: "Oh for thy own compassion sake, / Cast all my sins behind thy back, / And now restore my soul."<sup>20</sup> The God who saves physically is asked to save spiritually through the forgiveness of sins.

One way to speak about the healing of the passions as part of Wesleyan soteriology is in terms of the senses. Mark T. Mealey and Joseph William Cunningham have both recently completed dissertations on "perceptible inspiration," which they see as John Wesley's way of speaking of a spiritual sense that complements the five empirical senses.<sup>21</sup> Mealey says that "Wesley understands the operation of this faculty by an analogy from his understanding of natural sensation," but also that Wesley "does deny that spiritual sensation can be identified with the activity of any natural capacity."<sup>22</sup> Cunningham, however, argues that "Wesley understood Christian perfection as love's unwavering guidance of the human spirit, or charity's tempering of the fruits of righteous[ness], peace, and joy."<sup>23</sup> The sense that the Spirit is present has an effect on the Christian's passions.

What I propose is that the Wesleyan language of spiritual sense, health, and passions points us toward yet another sense, a seventh sense. This might be called a sense of well-being or wholeness,<sup>24</sup> or "bodily

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<sup>20</sup>Charles Wesley, "Thanksgiving after recovery," st. 4, 84.

<sup>21</sup>See Mark T. Mealey, "Taste and See That the Lord is Good: John Wesley in the Christian Tradition of Spiritual Sensation" (Ph.D. diss., Wycliffe College/Toronto School of Theology/University of St. Michael's College, 2006); and Joseph William Cunningham, "Perceptible Inspiration: A Model for John Wesley's Pneumatology" (Ph.D. diss., Manchester, Nazarene Theological College, 2010). See also Mark T. Mealey, "John Wesley" in *Spiritual Senses: Perceiving God in Western Christianity*, ed. Paul Gavrilyuk and Sarah Coakley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 241-256.

<sup>22</sup>Mealey, "John Wesley," 246.

<sup>23</sup>Cunningham, 240.

<sup>24</sup>See John Wesley's description of human existence prior to the fall in Sermon 60, "The General Deliverance," I.1, *Works*, 2:439. Wesley links happiness and holiness, a relationship we could characterize as similar to the ancient Greek *eudaimonia* and the Old Testament term *shalom*. *Shalom* might also capture something of what I mean by "bodily sense," but perhaps with less precision than is due.

sense.” Many pre-modern sources speak extensively of the passions and desire primarily in intellectual terms, and they often considered them obstacles to overcome.<sup>25</sup> In addition to intellectual aspects, the Wesleys, however, recognized the importance of a felt experience of the emotions, etc., that constitute the passions, and they saw in them the potential for a positive contribution to the well-being and (salvific) health of the human being.<sup>26</sup> Since the passions themselves are connected to the general health of the human being, “bodily sense” captures the awareness that human beings have of what their bodies are undergoing: the pains, for example, of physical illness as well as the distress of psychological ailments.

### **Breathing the Holy Spirit**

To speak of bodily sense leads naturally into a discussion of *breath*. Breathing is a felt bodily exercise. It can stimulate at least two of the five empirical senses (smell and taste), but it also points toward this bodily sense. When we say that we need a breath of fresh air, we do not mean that we only want air that smells good. We might mean, speaking metaphorically, that we need general refreshment. On a more literal level, we might also mean that we need air that we sense (perhaps intuitively) is good for our health. And, on the other side, we recognize the ill effects of “bad air.”

John Wesley recognized the connection between air and health. The first of the “plain, easy Rules” he borrows from George Cheyne concerns air, which “is of great consequence to our health.”<sup>27</sup> Physical health depends on the quality of the air breathed, but, as Charles recognized, so too does spiritual health. In a hymn from an early collection, he writes of his desire to escape his life of sin:

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<sup>25</sup>See Richard Sorabji, *Emotion and Peace of Mind: From Stoic Agitation to Christian Temptation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); and Simo Knuutila, *Emotions in Ancient and Medieval Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

<sup>26</sup>See Dixon, 76ff, for the Cartesian roots of the perceptibility of the passions. Even in the earlier Christian tradition, the body was a secondary consideration with respect to the passions (see Dixon, 56ff).

<sup>27</sup>John Wesley, *Primitive Physic*, 30. See Deborah Madden’s helpful discussion of this section of the *Physic* in *A Cheap, Safe and Natural Medicine: Religion, Medicine and Culture in John Wesley’s Primitive Physic* (New York: Editions Rodopi B. V., 2007), 161ff.

The foul reproach I groan to bear,  
 And vainly struggle to get free,  
 Yet still I breathe a tainted air,  
 Tainted, alas! By sin and me.<sup>28</sup>

“Tainted air” prevents the sinner from escaping God’s “foul reproach,” the just condemnation of the very sin that infects the air.

Breathing, then, captures the Wesleys’ holistic conception of salvation, allowing both literal and metaphorical suggestions of the importance of good air for good health, and of the consequences of bad air for bad health. Of course, breathing is also essential to singing. Choral conductors often speak of singing “on the breath” (in which the sound is full and supported by the body’s breathing) and “off the breath” (in which the sound is weak and ill-supported by the body). There are also easily conceived conditions under which, because of the quality of air, singing would be difficult. To construct a Wesleyan theology of hymn singing demands accounting for the breathing on which singing depends. Moreover, breathing, like singing, has a spiritual dynamic.

There is an immediate linguistic connection between Spirit and breath, a connection at the literal and metaphorical levels. Breathing is *respiration*, and the end of our life is an *expiration*, but we also *aspire* to greater proficiency in a task, and we confess that the Spirit himself has *inspired* Scripture. Many Christians have recognized this connection. Charles Wesley’s hymns include hundreds of instances of “breath” and its cognates, dozens referring directly to the Holy Spirit. Here is a small sample:

The fulness of thy Spirit breathe,  
 And bring thy nature in.<sup>29</sup>  
 Jesu! My life, thyself apply,  
 Thy Holy Spirit breathe,  
 My vile affections crucify,  
 Conform me to thy death.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>John and Charles Wesley, “Another [on Psalm 55:6],” in *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1742), st. 4, p. 34.

<sup>29</sup>John and Charles Wesley, “Another [For a Sick Friend in Darkness],” *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1749), st. 3, p. 67.

<sup>30</sup>*Idem*, “Christ Our Sanctification,” *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1740), st. 1, p. 97.

Father, if thou my Father art,  
Send forth the Spirit of thy Son,  
Breathe him into my panting heart.<sup>31</sup>

Thy Spirit breathe into my heart:  
Ah, give me now the chaste desire.<sup>32</sup>

Breathe the Spirit of thy grace,  
Breathe thyself into my heart.<sup>33</sup>

These extracts suggest a persistent connection for Charles Wesley between breathing the Spirit, the reception of grace, and the renewal of the passions. Both God and human beings breathe the Spirit, proactively in the case of God, and receptively in the human case. When the Spirit is breathed into a person, it is tantamount to the breathing of grace, a grace that changes nature, renews hearts, and gives chaste desires. The Spirit also crucifies “vile affections.” New life itself, in all its resurrection fullness, is a life of breathing the Holy Spirit.

John Wesley makes the Spirit-breath connection as consistently as his brother. In “The Great Privilege of those that are Born of God,” John uses the Spirit-breath theme with stunning effect. In this sermon John speaks of the return of the Holy Spirit through breath. He seeks to show that new birth requires real and substantial change in the believer. Like a newborn child, the Christian who has been born again enters a new manner of existence: “[h]e now *feels* the air with which he is surrounded, and which pours into him from every side, as fast as he alternately breathes it back, to sustain the flame of life” (I.5).<sup>34</sup> The believer becomes sensible to this new air and grows in awareness of God. This awareness is through the Spirit: “The Spirit or breath of God is immediately inspired, breathed into the new-born soul; and the same breath which comes from, returns to God” (I.8). Respiration is now divinely inspired, a breathing in and out of nothing less than the Holy Spirit. John continues by explaining that the breath “is continually received by faith . . . [and] continually rendered

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<sup>31</sup>*Idem*, “Groaning For Adoption,” *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1740), st. 1, p. 131.

<sup>32</sup>*Idem*, “John xx.22” (no. 488), *Scripture Hymns*, vol. 2:265.

<sup>33</sup>*Idem*, XLIX, *Family Hymns*, st. 5, p. 50.

<sup>34</sup>Note that the air is felt, a confirmation of the earlier proposal of a bodily sense. Similarly, see John Wesley, Sermon 77, “Spiritual Worship,” III.9, *Works* 3:102.

back by love, by prayer, and praise, and thanksgiving . . . [which are] the breath of every soul which is truly born of God" (I.8). Faith inhales; love exhales.

In the second major section of the sermon, John calls the exhalation "a kind of spiritual re-action" (II.1). This way of putting the matter makes clear that human action, while secondary and responsive to divine action, is required in this process. In the next section, John calls it "the absolute necessity of this re-action of the soul . . . in order to the continuance of the divine life therein" (III.3). Without human action, there can be no respiration of the Spirit. John's focus turns to the possibility of sin in the life of the one born of God. The language of breath recedes until the third section, but the work of the Spirit does not. Although John does not say so, we may suggest at this point that sin is a pulmonary disease,<sup>35</sup> a failure to inhale fully the breath of the Spirit in faith, or a failure to exhale completely the breath of love.

Note how thoroughly singing hymns mimics this process. Breath is inhaled in preparation for an act of faith and of love. Like the Holy Spirit, the air breathed is received as a gift; breathing may necessitate human action, but no exertion of the body can produce an atmosphere of breathable air. Then, as the words and music are sung, the breath is exhaled, or returned, in the form of praise and prayer, thanksgiving and love to God. And this is the foundation for a Wesleyan theology of hymns. It is in the context of this action/re-action, or of gift and return, that we can begin to think about how the practice of singing hymns might work to heal human passions.

### **Singing I: Immediate Benefits**

In the singing of hymns, the gift of the Spirit is inhaled through faith and exhaled in love, praise, and thanksgiving. This exercise has a healing effect on the singer and, specifically, on the singer's passions. Passions that had been sinful are purified by the Spirit in this process, and holy passions (of love and praise) are exhaled in their place.

We find this logic at work in John Wesley's sermons and in many of Charles Wesley's hymns. Often it is in bits and pieces, but occasionally it is spelled out more completely. I turn now to an examination of Charles's published hymnody, focused on his use of the word "breath" and its cog-

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<sup>35</sup>See John Wesley's thoughts on the cardiovascular effects of sin, Sermon 141, "The Image of God," II.1, *Works* 4:296-297.

nates. Charles places a strong emphasis on the immediate benefits of the singing/breathing exercise. The singer finds the need of singing again and again, and may ultimately only really respire the Spirit at the moment of death.

I take seriously Joanna Cruickshank's insistence that "[w]hen reading one of Wesley's hymns, it is necessary to ask, not just 'What does it say?' but also 'What does it do?'"<sup>36</sup> Oddly, she limits "what does it do" to the text itself; her analysis is really just a more sophisticated version of "what does it say?" But surely J. R. Watson is right when, noting the inherent musicality of Wesley's poetry, he says that "[w]hether sung or read, the hymns of Charles Wesley 'sing' in the mind's ear in ways that are instantly recognizable."<sup>37</sup> I am concerned with what Charles's hymns say only insofar as what they say has to do with what they *do as hymns*: they lead one to sing.

I have found at least 349 instances of the word "breath" and its cognates in Charles' published hymns. Doubtless more references exist that imply breathing (examining "panting" would likely be fruitful, for example). In addition to the many cases where breath coincides with the Holy Spirit, there are also connections between breath and salvation, breath and health, breath and worship/singing/prayer, and, crucially, breath and the passions. This reflects the Wesleyan commitment to a holistic soteriology. I will turn to three themes: first, that Charles teaches us to take seriously singing as an expression of holy or sinful passions; second, that for him singing itself is involved in the healing of those passions; and, third, that he shows that singing can have immediate benefits.

Perhaps no hymn exemplifies Charles' belief in the importance of singing with respect to the passions as well as "Innocent Diversions," a hymn he included in the 1750 collection *Hymns for the Watch-Night*.<sup>38</sup> The hymn sets out a stark contrast between the "Christian delight" to be found in the watch-night service and worldly pleasures. Those who participate in worldly pleasures are called "slaves of excess" (st. 2). They participate in a diverse range of activities, from drunken rioting to theatre-going. What unites them is their song. The more base: "The drunkards

<sup>36</sup>Cruickshank, 35.

<sup>37</sup>J. R. Watson, "Charles Wesley and the Music of Poetry," in *Music and the Wesleys*, 26.

<sup>38</sup>Charles Wesley, "Innocent Diversions," *Hymns for the Watch-Night* (London: Strahan, 1750), Hymn IX (also in *Hymns and Sacred Poems* [1759]), 9-10.

proclaim / At midnight their shame, / Their sacrifice bring, / And loud to the praise of *their* master they sing: / The hellish desires / which Satan inspires, / In sonnets they breath" (st. 3). Likewise, the more sophisticated: "In theatres proud, / Acknowledge his power, / And Satan in nightly assemblies adore: / To the masque and the ball / They fly at his call; / Or in pleasures excel, / And chaunt in a grove to the harpers of hell" (st. 4). Low and high society, in their sinful revelry, unite in Satanic song. Their singing reveals their sinful passions ("hellish desires"), and their exhalations ("In sonnets") are inspired by Satan himself. Singing thusly marks them as those who live in and respire a sinful, unhealthy air.

Christians, therefore, are called to a different revelry which discovers that "Jesus' love is far better than wine" (st. 6). The invitation is revealing: "And shall we not sing / *Our* Master and king. . . . With Jesus admitted at midnight to feast?" (st. 5; emphasis original). Song reveals allegiance. Whereas the sinful singing exalted Satan, "[o]ur concert of praise / To Jesus we raise" (st. 7). This singing characterizes true Christian pleasure; we are to delight in Jesus, and our delight leads to the bursting forth of song, even at hours when most of the world sleeps. Our song is marked by "joy" and "delight," and even dancing. It is ecstatic speech, a free employment of the passions for their proper end, the love and praise of God. And singing even transports us into a new environment: "Thus, thus we bestow / Our moments below, / And singing remove, / With all the redeem'd to the Sion above" (st. 8). Singing anticipates the eternal celebrations of the new creation—a new creation in which the passions are forever healed.

Because the Holy Spirit is not mentioned in "Innocent Diversions," it would be a stretch to say that the hymn allows us to think in terms of a spiritual singing that heals the passions.<sup>39</sup> But that line of thought is permitted by other examples from Charles' extensive publications. In the first volume of *Scripture Hymns*, we find a hymn whose parallelism suggests that breathing the Spirit means being released from sinful passions. Charles writes:

Jesus, the power belongs to thee,  
Set my imprison'd spirit free  
From pride and passion's chain;

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<sup>39</sup> But note that John Wesley, Sermon 10, "The Witness of the Spirit I," I.11, *Works* 1:275-276, does commend delight in God as a sign of the Spirit bearing witness of the new birth.

Thy Spirit breathe into my heart,  
Then, then I shall be as thou art,  
And never sin again.<sup>40</sup>

Sinful “pride and passion” restrain the singer, forming the very bonds of imprisonment. The singer implores Jesus to be released from these bonds. In the second half, the supplication is repeated, now in terms of the Spirit. It is clear that when Jesus breathes the Spirit into the singer’s heart, the sin-free result will be release “from pride and passion’s chain.”

I suggest that it would be fruitful to relate this salvation-as-breathing-the-Spirit with hymns in which the breath of salvation leads to singing. In an earlier hymn, Charles writes:

Come then, and loose, my stammering tongue,  
Teach me the new, the joyful song,  
And perfect in a babe thy praise:  
I want a thousand lives t’ employ  
In publishing the sounds of joy!  
The gospel of thy general grace.<sup>41</sup>

Does “Come then, and loose, my stammering tongue” suggest that perfection in love is found in a tongue loosened for the praise of God? Surely that is the implication here and in another hymn:

By the Holy Ghost we wait  
To say thou art the Lord,  
Sav’d, and to our first estate  
In perfect love restor’d,  
Then we shall in every breath  
Testify the power we prove,  
Publish thee in life and death  
The God of truth and love.<sup>42</sup>

An economy of singing begins to emerge from the hymns studied in the present section. In this economy the penitent singer awaits the breath of the Holy Spirit, which is the breath of salvation. That breath is able to

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<sup>40</sup>Charles Wesley, “The Lord looseth men out of prison,” *Scripture Hymns* no. 895, vol. 1:282.

<sup>41</sup>Charles Wesley, “Preserved From Evil Every Hour,” *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1742), stzs. 16-17, 171.

<sup>42</sup>Charles Wesley, Hymn XIV, *Hymns for Whitsunday*, st. 4, 17.

purge sinful passions, releasing the singer from enslavement to sin. The tongue which was engaged in the praise of the singer's Satanic master is now free to sing the praises of the joyful master, Jesus Christ. The breath is restored to its rightful purpose, expressing the holy passions that have been renewed by the Holy Spirit, who, as in 1 Corinthians 12:3, enables the confessing song.<sup>43</sup>

As Cruickshank argues, it is not just what these hymns say, but also what they do. And "what they do" is that they are sung. The text is performed in its singing, so that in the very instant of song the economy of singing launches. The singer confesses, recognizes the inability to escape sin, asks for the Holy Spirit, and gives the very praise to God that is evidence of the restorative work of the Spirit. The performance of hymns is the performance of the economy of singing, and of salvation. To the extent that a hymn is an offering of praise, love, and thanksgiving to God, the economy is at work, even if not all parts are explicit. Moreover, the benefits (participation in the economy) are immediate, if discrete. Participation in the economy happens during the act of singing. There is very little in the hymns to suggest a deep continuity from one event of singing to the next. This, however, does not mean that the singer necessarily reprises the entire economy every time she sings (although the concept of backsliding means we cannot preclude that possibility), but it does suggest that the passions are healed, if only in fits and starts.<sup>44</sup>

One way of highlighting the immediacy of the benefits of hymn singing is to draw attention to the significance of the dying breath in Charles' hymns. D. Bruce Hindmarsh has written of the importance of a good death in early Methodism,<sup>45</sup> and Joanna Cruickshank reminds us that "[w]hile Charles shared John's belief in the possibility of entire sanctification, [because] he...maintained an unqualified view of this gift . . . [h]e concluded . . . that it was only given . . . to those on the point of

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<sup>43</sup>Cp. John Wesley, Sermon 77, "Spiritual Worship," II.5, *Works* 3:96.

<sup>44</sup>S. T. Kimbrough, Jr., however, has argued that Charles Wesley "moved toward a position of gradual growth in holiness" later in life. See S. T. Kimbrough, "Charles Wesley and the Journey of Sanctification," *Evangelical Journal* 16:2 (Fall 1998): 49-75 (quote on 49).

<sup>45</sup>D. Bruce Hindmarsh, *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative: Spiritual Autobiography in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 255ff.

death.”<sup>46</sup> This is borne out in his hymns, in which we can find many references to the “latest breath” or the “last breath,” which is to be breathed in love, or prayer, or praise. One example is sufficient:

Be it a vale of tears  
Where’er I live below,  
Throughout my evil days, or years,  
Still let mine eyes o’erflow.  
But e’er I end my race,  
Bid me thy mercy prove,  
And let my latest breath be praise,  
My latest passion love.<sup>47</sup>

It is only at the end, when no other (sinful) air can be breathed, that the singer’s passions are revealed as fully healed and fully expressed in love.

## **Singing II: Formation and Habits**

In order to have a truly *Wesleyan* theology of hymn singing, it will not do to end with the immediate benefits of the practice. Charles’ hymns give permission for speaking of this immediacy, but John invites us to balance this aspect with the language of formation, habits, and virtue.<sup>48</sup> John’s corpus allows us to consider how we can be cured of our sinful passions over time, not just in discrete events, but in a long, continuous path of discipleship that leads toward a more perfect reception of and response to the work of the Holy Spirit. By speaking of virtue and discipleship, we can also transcend the more individualistic characterizations of breathing.

Randy Maddox has worked extensively to underscore the role of virtue in Wesley’s moral psychology, having related virtue to Wesley’s pneumatology and having shown the development and maturation of

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<sup>46</sup>Cruickshank, 84. Cruickshank also notices (121) the importance of last-minute conversions. This point is also reinforced by Kimbrough, esp. 51 and 71. The possibility of full sanctification *only* at death does seem to be in tension with Kimbrough’s claim that Charles Wesley saw sanctification as a *process* that was life-long.

<sup>47</sup>Charles Wesley, Hymn LX [“Hymn for One Fallen From Grace”], *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1749), st. 11, 1:115.

<sup>48</sup>For John Wesley on formation/habitation, see, e.g., Sermon 77, “Spiritual Worship,” II. 6, *Works* 3:96-97; for Wesley on virtues, see, e.g., Sermon 141, “The Image of God,” III.3, *Works* 300-301.

Wesley's moral psychology.<sup>49</sup> Maddox also recognizes that a "central aspect of Wesley's moral psychology is his valuing of the affections as holistic motivating inclinations."<sup>50</sup> In other words, when our passions have been healed, as happens by the Holy Spirit in hymn singing, they prime us to act in accord with their renewed, holy state.<sup>51</sup> Furthermore, participation in the means of grace (singing hymns being one of these means) fosters growth in the holy passions and, therefore, growth in the tendency to act in accord with them—that is, in virtue.<sup>52</sup> The obvious corollary is that the more one participates in the means, the more one can expect to grow in grace.

This corollary, however, stands in need of qualification. First, the growth happens responsively; the initiative is always on the side of God. We do not produce the air we breathe; the Spirit is present, preveniently, before even our first gasp. Second, growth depends on attentiveness. Not only must we feel the Holy Spirit, we must pay attention to the promptings, positive and negative, that the Spirit gives as our passions are healed and our virtues are grown. As the promptings of the Spirit are ignored, the Christian slips further and further away from grace. The passions return to their sinful state; that which is displeasing to God becomes pleasurable; faith (the receiving virtue) and love (the responsive virtue) are diminished and ultimately disappear; and the passions now prompt the Christian to act commensurately with the passions' sinful state. Attentiveness is essential to faithfulness.

Just as virtue allows us to speak about an attentive practice of singing that, over time, encourages a more complete renewal of the passions, equally important is that it allows us to speak communally of our participation in the work of the Spirit. Although hymn singing can happen individually, the place where it is most at home is in the context of communal

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<sup>49</sup>On the first, see Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 119ff; on the latter, see Maddox, "Change of Affections."

<sup>50</sup>Randy L. Maddox, "Reconnecting the Means to the End: A Wesleyan Prescription for the Holiness Movement," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 33:2 (1998): 29-66.

<sup>51</sup>This is not automatic. See John Wesley, *Thoughts Upon Necessity* (1774) in *The Works of John Wesley* ed. Thomas Jackson, 14 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978 [London, 1872]), 10:457-474.

<sup>52</sup>See Maddox, "Change of Affections," 17ff.

worship.<sup>53</sup> Communal hymn singing is also communal participation in the reception, in faith, and return, in love, of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit does not only, or even first, come to individual believers. Rather, believers enter the church, a pneumatological community that engages the practice of hymn singing as an essential aspect of its health and salvation.

This habituation, or formation, in singing does not replace the immediate benefits described in the previous section. At the same time, however, I do not intend to portray formational aspects merely as the other side of an equally-weighted scale.<sup>54</sup> The immediate benefits of singing should not be undervalued, but they do not include the attentiveness that John rightly thinks is necessary to prevent backsliding. Attentiveness requires time, patience, and growth in the Spirit. It cannot happen if the only thought one gives to one's life as a Christian occurs in the discrete event of singing a particular hymn.

### **Singing III: Conclusion**

I have attempted to construct a Wesleyan theology of hymn singing by noting relationships and connections within the writings of John and Charles Wesley. I have not attempted to suggest that they made all of these connections themselves, or that they would necessarily make them as I have done. Nonetheless, I believe these connections are tethered tightly enough to their thought that they constitute a genuine theology in the Wesleyan tradition. By way of conclusion, I stretch the tethers to three points that lie in the broader encyclopedia of Christian thought: gift, *perichoresis*, and love.

The breathing patterns of singing recognize the essential “gifted” nature of the air—the Holy Spirit—that is breathed. The Holy Spirit is gift in three important ways. First, it is in the nature of a gift that it cannot be possessed,<sup>55</sup> and singing demands the recognition of the non-possessibil-

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<sup>53</sup>As Andrew C. Thompson argues in “From Societies to Society: The Shift from Holiness to Justice in the Wesleyan Tradition,” *Methodist Review* 3 (2011): 141-172. Holiness for the Wesleys was about social holiness as opposed to *solitary* holiness. Likewise, while we might want to leave room for some possibility of growth among individuals as they sing hymns on their own, hymn singing as a practice of purifying (or making more holy) the passions best happens in communities or societies of Christian holiness.

<sup>54</sup>Contra the implication of Collins, 174-175.

<sup>55</sup>See Paul Griffiths, *Lying: An Augustinian Theology of Duplicity* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2004), 85ff.

ity of breath. One cannot inhale without exhaling; it is a physical impossibility. Even if one were to hold one's breath until life ended, the breath would be expelled as death releases one's muscular control. Second, it is in the nature of gifts that they be used.<sup>56</sup> Since gifts are not to be possessed, this implies that proper use includes the return of the gift; the most common way of returning gifts is through the giving of thanks. In singing, when the breath is exhaled (returned) in songs of praise, the gift has been put to its proper end. Third, singing helps us to recognize something essential about the Holy Spirit's identity as Gift.<sup>57</sup> The gift of the breath of hymn singing is the Gift of the breath of the Holy Spirit.

Since this is so, then another connection can be formed, this one between singing and *perichoresis*. If singing helps us encounter the Holy Spirit who is the breath of God in the economy of salvation, it also suggests that the Spirit is the breath of God within the divine life itself. For instance, "Father, if thou my Father art, / Send forth the Spirit of thy Son, / Breathe him into my panting heart."<sup>58</sup> Do such texts also invite us to think of *perichoresis* as divine breathing—or better yet, as divine song—in which the breath of the Father (the Holy Spirit) is breathed into and returned by the eternally faithful and loving Son?

Finally, if the air breathed in hymn singing is the Gift of the Holy Spirit, then it is also the Gift and Breath of Love. John Wesley says as much in "The Great Privilege of those that are Born of God," but perhaps Augustine can help us flesh out Wesley's theological ligaments. When we read that the inspiration of the Holy Spirit is "an unceasing presence of God . . . perceived by faith; and an unceasing return of love . . . acceptable unto God in Christ Jesus" (II.2), we should recall Augustine's double hermeneutic: love of God and love of neighbor always go together;<sup>59</sup> whenever one reads of the one, it is always right to think of the other.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>56</sup>A. N. Williams, "What is Systematic Theology?" 49.

<sup>57</sup>The Holy Spirit as Gift is essential to Augustine's understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity. See Augustine, *The Trinity*, trans. Edmund Hill (Hyde Park: New City Press, 1991), esp. V.12-16 and XV.27-39.

<sup>58</sup>John and Charles Wesley, "Groaning for the Spirit of Adoption," *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1740), st. 1.

<sup>59</sup>A Wesleyan idea also, to be sure. See, e.g., John Wesley, Sermon 89, "The More Excellent Way," *Works* 3:263ff.

<sup>60</sup>Augustine, *Teaching Christianity*, trans. Edmund Hill (Hyde Park: New City Press, 1996), I.40.

Our return of the Breath has vertical and horizontal dimensions. No one can sing love to God and hate to neighbor. Or, in the words of Charles Wesley:

Jesus the Lord again we sing,  
Who did to us salvation bring,  
And now repeats our sins forgiven;  
We now his glorious Spirit breathe,  
Tread down the fear of hell and death,  
And live on earth the life of heaven.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>61</sup>Charles Wesley, "Hosea ii.5" (no. 1311), *Scripture Hymns*, st. 2, vol. 2:66.

# **“HONORING CONFERENCE”: FOUNDATIONS FOR INTER-RELIGIOUS AND RELIGIOUS-ATHEIST DIALOGUE**

by

**Benjamin B. DeVan**

In 2012, Duke University professor Randy L. Maddox urged Wesleyans to exchange the historically contentious “Wesleyan Quadrilateral” for a new paradigm. He called the new “Honoring Conference,” saying that it better facilitates Wesleyan theological discourse.<sup>1</sup> My intent here is to develop Maddox’s recommendation by arguing that Honoring Conference is fruitful for Wesleyans and other Christians as a ground and guide for ecumenical, inter-religious, and religious-atheist encounter and dialogue.<sup>2</sup>

## **Quadrilateral or Honoring Conference?**

Randy Maddox surveys the Quadrilateral’s history, motifs, and twentieth-century scholars who have traced John Wesley’s appeal to four theological warrants—Scripture, Tradition, Reason, and Experience. Albert C. Outler popularized the resulting “Quadrilateral,” but regretted its literal-minded adapters who inferred the geometric imagery to downgrade Scripture. Accordingly, Maddox at first proposed a “unilateral *rule* of Scripture

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<sup>1</sup>Randy L. Maddox, “‘Honoring Conference’: Wesleyan Reflections on the Dynamics of Theological Reflection,” *Methodist Review: A Journal of Wesleyan and Methodist Studies* 4 (2012), 77-116, adapted from publication in Rex D. Matthews (ed.), *The Renewal of United Methodism: Mission, Ministry, and Connectionalism* (Nashville, TN: General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, The United Methodist Church, 2012), 55-97; cf. Randy L. Maddox, “The Rule of Christian Faith, Practice, and Hope: John Wesley on the Bible,” *Methodist Review: A Journal of Wesleyan and Methodist Studies* 3 (2011), 1-35, republished in *Epworth Review* 38:2 (May, 2011), 6-37.

<sup>2</sup>I am grateful to Karen DeVan and David A. Wilkinson for commenting on an earlier draft. This essay also builds on my “A Paradigm for Methodist Interaction with New Atheists Referencing Wesleyan Interreligious Resources,” *Methodist Review: A Journal of Wesleyan and Methodist Studies* 4 (2012), esp. 117-139.

within a trilateral *hermeneutic* of reason, tradition, and experience.”<sup>3</sup> He now contends for replacing the Quadrilateral with dialogical or conferring imagery.

The fresh reference is to Wesley’s discussions in 1744 and later with his preachers concerning spiritual discipline, doctrinal formation, and practical negotiation for a *personal embrace* of Scripture truths, and recalling the 1972 UMC General Conference call for accountability to core Christian teachings. Maddox presents “Honoring Conference” as more flexible for a swath of personal and cultural contexts, more faithful to Wesley’s “central emphases,” and parses or adds to the Quadrilateral prayer with the Holy Spirit, hermeneutical helps for interpreting Scripture, consulting contemporary as well as historic Scripture readers, the “Book of Nature” or natural sciences, the “Analogy” of Faith liturgizing in the Apostles’ Creed the grand truths of God’s saving work, and Wesley’s *discrimen* of God’s universal pardoning and transforming love.<sup>4</sup>

### Conferring with Holy Scripture, the Holy Spirit, and Hermeneutical Helps

The Bible is preeminent within Honoring Conference. Wesley referred to early Oxford Methodists as *homo unius libri* in their tempers, words and actions.<sup>5</sup> The elder Wesley reiterated the younger, “I want to know one thing, the way to heaven—how to land safe on that happy shore. God himself has condescended to teach the way: for this very end he came down from heaven. He hath written it down in a book. O give me that book! . . . Let me be *homo unius libri*.”<sup>6</sup>

Isolating these quotes might suggest that Wesley relied solely on the Bible, but Wesley admonished, “If you need no book but the Bible, you are got above St. Paul (who requested to be sent some books).”<sup>7</sup> Wesley compiled a *Christian Library*, read avidly on horseback, and cited litera-

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<sup>3</sup>Albert Cook Outler, “Through a Glass Darkly: Memories, Forebodings, and Faith,” in Bob W. Parrott (ed.), *Albert Outler: The Churchman* (Anderson, IN: Bristol House, 1995), 463; Maddox, “Honoring Conference,” 79-90, 110.

<sup>4</sup>Maddox, “Honoring Conference,” esp. 83-91, 106, 112, 115; Randy L. Maddox, “John Wesley’s Precedent for Theological Engagement with the Natural Sciences,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 44:1 (Spring, 2009), 23-54.

<sup>5</sup>Wesley, Sermon 107, “On God’s Vineyard,” §I.1, *Sermons* 3:504.

<sup>6</sup>Wesley, *Sermons on Several Occasions*, vol. 1 (1746), Preface §5, *Sermons* 1:104-6.

<sup>7</sup>Wesley, *Minutes* (1766), Q. 30, *Works* 10:340, cf. 10:887.

ture ranging from Plato to Virgil, Horace, Milton, and Alexander Pope.<sup>8</sup> Even so, he regarded no book *equal* to the Bible.<sup>9</sup> He alluded to the Apocrypha, but never preached from it and rejected its canonical status in 1756 and 1779, omitting it from his 1784 Methodist Episcopal Church Anglican Articles abridgement.

Wesley valued scholarly tools such as original Hebrew and Greek texts and grammars, histories, commentaries, lexicons, and critical resources for understanding the Bible. He sought to blend “scholarship with pastoral concern,” since Bible reading was for Wesley a crucial means of grace influencing readers’ characters or tempers, which in turn affected thoughts, words, and actions.<sup>10</sup> Wesley also extended “inspiration” to *reading* the Bible profitably (cf. 2 Timothy 3:16). “We need the same Spirit to *understand* the Scripture which enabled the holy men of old to *write* it.”<sup>11</sup>

Wesley prayerfully conferred with the Holy Spirit when confused by Scripture, pondered parallel or apparently clearer Bible passages, and consulted those “experienced in the things of God, and then the writings whereby, being dead, yet they speak.”<sup>12</sup> Honoring Conference attitudes are consequently prayerful, practical, and holistic, attuned to relevant scholarly and confessional literature, and affirm the Bible’s preeminence without repudiating other resources. Honoring Conference, grounded in and using the Bible for ecumenical, inter-religious, and religious-atheist dialogue, is bolstered by virtually all Christians recognizing the Protestant and Jewish (Old Testament) canons as sacred scripture.

Christians and Jews may also appeal to Muslims on the basis of *Qur’an* Surah 10:94, “if thou [Muhammad] art in doubt concerning that which We reveal unto thee, then question those who read the Scripture

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<sup>8</sup>Scott J. Jones, “The Rule of Scripture,” in W. Stephen Gunter, Scott J. Jones, Ted A. Campbell, Rebekah L. Miles, and Randy L. Maddox, *Wesley and the Quadrilateral: Renewing the Conversation* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1997), 42, 148.

<sup>9</sup>Maddox, “Honoring Conference,” 83-84.

<sup>10</sup>Maddox, “The Rule of Christian Faith,” 32-33 citing Wesley, Sermon 107, “On God’s Vineyard,” I.1, *Sermons* 3:504; Sermon 115, “Dives and Lazarus,” III.7, *Sermons* 4:18.

<sup>11</sup>Wesley, *Advice to the People Called “Methodists”*, §6, *Works* 9:124; Wesley, “Letter to Bishop of Gloucester,” II.10, *Works* 11:509; Wesley, *OT Notes*, Preface, §18, Jackson 14:253; Wesley, *Sermons*, Vol. 1, Preface, §5, *Sermons* 1:105–106.

<sup>12</sup>Wesley, *Sermons*, vol. 1 (1746), Preface, §5, *Sermons* 1:106-107.

(that was) before thee.”<sup>13</sup> A number of historic Muslim luminaries have acclaimed Jewish and Christian scriptures as divinely revealed and preserved along with the *Qurʾān*, which affirms or confirms Jewish and Christian scriptures in numerous Surahs.<sup>14</sup> The *Qurʾān* and Hadith literature regularly echo, paraphrase, or extrapolate the New Testament.<sup>15</sup>

Hindus, Buddhists, and others who interact with Jews and Christians are apt to identify the Bible’s importance and express interest in understanding its message, perhaps especially if Jews and Christians reciprocate for Hindu, Buddhist, or other sacred texts. Even notorious atheists like Richard Dawkins acknowledge the Bible’s significance for history and literature.<sup>16</sup> When any party questions or perceives misunderstandings or disputes regarding the Bible or another sacred text, Honoring Conference supports a robust array of illuminating, adjudicating resources.<sup>17</sup> Dialogue partners might choose to adjust Honoring Conference principles for non-biblical sacred texts, and Christians may discover that inter-religious and religious-atheist dialogue augments Christian exegesis, hermeneutics, and theology. Says Gerald R. McDermott: “God uses the religions to teach the church deeper insight. . . . We saw this even in the Bible. . . . It may be that some of today’s religions portray aspects of the Divine mystery that the Bible does not equally emphasize.”<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>Marmaduke Pickthall, *The Meaning of the Glorious Qurʾān* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1930), <http://al-quran.info/>.

<sup>14</sup>Cf. Benjamin B. DeVan, “Allah: A Christian Response—A Review Essay,” *Christian Scholar’s Review* 41:2 (Winter, 2012), esp. 183–184.

<sup>15</sup>Cf. David Cook, “New Testament Citations in the Hadith Literature and the Question of Early Gospel Translations into Arabic,” in Emmanouela Grypeou, Mark Swanson, and David Thomas (eds.), *The Encounter of Eastern Christianity with Early Islam* (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill, 2006), 185–223; Benjamin B. DeVan, Review of *Apocalypse in Islam*, by Jean-Pierre Filiu and trans. M. B. Debevoise, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 51:2 (June, 2012): 393–395; Timothy C. Tennent, *Theology in the Context of World Christianity: How the Global Church is Influencing the Way We Think about and Discuss Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 59–60.

<sup>16</sup>Richard Dawkins, “Religious Education as a part of Literary Culture,” in *The God Delusion* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2006), 340–344.

<sup>17</sup>For one attempt, cf. Benjamin B. DeVan, “New Atheists on Genesis 1–11 and 19,” *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies* 11:32 (Summer, 2012), 37–75, <http://jsri.ro/ojs/index.php/jsri/article/view/613/544>.

<sup>18</sup>Gerald R. McDermott, *God’s Rivals: Why Has God Allowed Different Religions? Insights from the Early Church* (IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 162–167; cf. Gerald R. McDermott, *Can Evangelicals Learn from World Religions? Jesus, Revelation and Religious Traditions* (IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000).

### Conferring With the Community of Saints

Reading the Bible in Honoring Conference includes the great cloud of witnesses whose lives and legacies reverberate across time, geography, and culture.<sup>19</sup> For Wesley, a *via media* applies, negotiating between idealizing Christian history and condemning it as corrupt or regressive. He conspicuously valued Christianity's first three centuries in the East (Greek) and West (Latin), and seventeenth-century Anglican standards.<sup>20</sup> Representing the early Church were "Clemens Romanus, Ignatius, and Polycarp . . . more at large in the writing of Tertullian, Origen, Clemens Alexandrius, and Cyprian; and even in the fourth century . . . [reeling from Constantine] in the works of Crysostom, Basil, Ephrem Syrus, and Macarius."<sup>21</sup>

Arthur Christian Meyers, Jr., documents Wesley interacting with Syrian, Greek, and Latin Christians.<sup>22</sup> He consulted tradition partly for disputation, leveraging Augustine, "He who created us without ourselves will not save us without ourselves" against Calvinists, and Athanasius with "Neo-Arians."<sup>23</sup> Ted A. Campbell extends tradition after Wesley, specifically to African-American Methodism and world or global Christianity.<sup>24</sup> Samuel Hugh Moffett, Kenneth Cracknell, and Susan J. White reveal this global scope reflects Methodist presence in some 135 countries from Albania to Brazil, from China to Ghana.<sup>25</sup> William H. Willimon

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<sup>19</sup>Cf. Maddox, "Honoring Conference," 85-87; Maddox, "The Rule of Christian Faith," 17-20; Wesley, *Sermons*, vol. 1 (1746), Preface, §5, *Sermons* 1:106-7.

<sup>20</sup>Maddox, "Honoring Conference," 88; cf. 79, 81, 88, 109; cf. Seung-An Im, "John Wesley's Theological Anthropology: A Dialectic Tension between the Latin Western Patristic Tradition (Augustine) and the Greek Eastern Patristic Tradition (Gregory of Nyssa)" (Ph.D. diss., Drew University, 1994).

<sup>21</sup>Wesley, Sermon 132, "On Laying the Foundation of the New Chapel, near the City Road, London," §II:3, *Sermons* 3:586.

<sup>22</sup>Arthur Christian Meyers, Jr., "John Wesley and the Church Fathers" (Ph.D. diss., St. Louis University, 1985), v-vi, 118-153, 162-163.

<sup>23</sup>See Ted A. Campbell, "The Interpretive Role of Tradition," in Gunter et al., 71-72, 153-154; *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1.1.1.8.1.1847 traces the quote to a sermon of St. Augustine's.

<sup>24</sup>Campbell, 74-75.

<sup>25</sup>Multiple examples in Kenneth Cracknell and Susan J. White, *An Introduction to World Methodism* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005), 62 (quotation), esp. viii, 1, 3, 5, 67-89, 172, 271-272; and Samuel Hugh Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia: Volume 2* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2005), 658, 660, 671, 672, 680, 682, 692, 699, 703, 706-711, 713, cf. 693, 715, 718, 733; cf. *Happy Birthday!* (Nashville, TN: General Council on Finance and Administration, The United Methodist Church, 2008), 3, on African growth from 1.5% (1968) to 32.5% (2006) of United Methodist members.

adds the Methodist roots for Pentecostalism to Wesley's legacy of looking "upon *all the world as my parish* . . . and my bounden duty to declare unto all that are willing to hear the glad tidings of salvation."<sup>26</sup>

Maddox calls for "critical appropriation" of history's miscues and blind alleys as well as its exemplary models.<sup>27</sup> This critical conferring complements Christian discernment by nurturing holy creativity, roving outside overt or subconscious boundaries stipulated by spirits of the age, and ameliorating propensities to ethnocentrism, chronocentrism, and cultural myopia. Christopher J. H. Wright elaborates, "Theology is a cross-cultural team game with global players. . . . No part of the global body of Christ can say to any other part, 'I have no need of you.' Every part is enriched—theologically too—by every other part."<sup>28</sup>

Just a few candidates for critical inter-religious conferring are Clement of Alexandria, Irenaeus, Justin Martyr, and John of Damascus.<sup>29</sup> Other possibilities are St. Patrick's historic mission to enemies in Ireland, Patriarch/Mar Timothy I with Abbasid Caliph al-Madhi, St. Francis of Assisi with Sultan al-Malik al-Kâmil, Chinese Christian Ching-Ching or "Adam" with Buddhist missionaries in 700s CE China, Genghis Khan's Christian daughter-in-law Sorkaktani Beki, E. Stanley Jones in India, Casper and Corrie Ten Boom in the Netherlands, Annalena Tonelli in Somalia and Kenya, Catholic former Columbian president Alvaro Uribe praying and reading the Bible with an *evangelico* pastor, and Mozella G. Mitchell on African Methodist Episcopal Zion resources for ecumenism and religious diversity.<sup>30</sup> Seeking the Spirit's work even more widely

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<sup>26</sup>Wesley, "Letter [to the Revd. John Clayton?]" (28 March 1739?), *Works* 25:616; William H. Willimon, *United Methodist Beliefs: A Brief Introduction* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 35; cf. Richard Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1995), 97, 100, on the Evangelical Revival in England marked by various features associated with Pentecostalism.

<sup>27</sup>Maddox, "Honoring Conference," 108-109.

<sup>28</sup>Christopher J. H. Wright in Tennent, front matter.

<sup>29</sup>E.g., Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*; Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*; Justin Martyr, *First and Second Apology*; and John of Damascus, "Heresies."

<sup>30</sup>E.g., Henry Chu, "Moved by the Spirit to Govern," *Los Angeles Times*, June 7, 2007; E. Stanley Jones, *Christ at the Round Table* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1928); Mozella G. Mitchell, "Discovering Christian Resources for a Theology of Interfaith Relations from the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church," in S. Mark Heim (ed.), *Grounds for Understanding: Ecumenical Resources for Responses to Religious Pluralism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 157-174.

within what Methodist world religions scholar Huston Smith deems “the distilled wisdom of the human race” leads us to inquire, who are our interlocutors? Who are our Virgils, Horaces, Platos, Popes, and Miltons?<sup>31</sup> Wise Christians would be glad to know them.

### Conferring With Reason and Logic

Wesley esteemed reason as God’s precious gift for processing, understanding, comparing, and responding to God’s revelation in Scripture, tradition, and creation.<sup>32</sup> Reason is “joined” and goes “hand in hand” with religion and theological debate.<sup>33</sup> Wesley perceived Jesus and the disciples appealing to reason and, as a fellow at Lincoln College Oxford, Wesley “taught logic, Greek, and rhetoric—all subjects that promote critical reasoning.”<sup>34</sup> Reason is useful for weighing motives and arguments, calculating whether these are based on reliable data, comparing and contrasting new with earlier data, and catalyzing active thinking in reflection and dialogue.<sup>35</sup> Wesley insisted, “Let reason do all that it can, employ it as far as it will go.”<sup>36</sup> Reason, however, can describe but not impart faith, hope, and love.<sup>37</sup> Reason can also be co-opted for deception. Cognizance of reason’s limits and distortive powers drives us toward God who ultimately gives “greater spiritual knowledge.”<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>Huston Smith in *The Wisdom of Faith with Huston Smith, a Bill Moyers Special* (Public Affairs Television, 1996).

<sup>32</sup>Maddox, “Honoring Conference,” 94; cf. Rebekah L. Miles, “The Instrumental Role of Reason,” in Gunter et al., 77-78, 154; Wesley, “Letter to John Smith” (28 September 1745), §14, *Works* 26:158; Wesley, Sermon 69, “The Imperfection of Human Knowledge,” §1:4, *Sermons* 2:590.

<sup>33</sup>Wesley, *An Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion* (1743), §27, *Works* 11:55; Wesley, *Journal* (28 November 1750), *Works* 20:371; Wesley, “Letter to Dr. Thomas Rutherford” (28 March 1768), §III.4, *Works* 9:382; Wesley, “Letter to Joseph Benson” (5 October 1770) in John Telford, *The Letters of the Reverend John Wesley*, 8 vols. (London: The Epworth Press, 1931), 5:203.

<sup>34</sup>Miles, 82, cf. 80, 155; Wesley, “Letter to Freeborn Garrettson” (24 January 1789), Telford 8:112.

<sup>35</sup>Cf. Miles, 84-88, 157.

<sup>36</sup>Wesley, Sermon 70, “The Case of Reason Impartially Considered,” §II:10, *Sermons* 2:600.

<sup>37</sup>Wesley, Sermon 70, “The Case of Reason Impartially Considered,” §§II:5-10, *Sermons* 2:595-600.

<sup>38</sup>Miles, 105-106, cf. 99, 159-160.

Rebekah L. Miles prods Wesleyans to confront reason's "overvaluers" since reason, working with science, brings technologies of destruction as well as healing.<sup>39</sup> Wesley's example further rebukes claims that supposedly establish "what all rational people believe," and prompts sensitivity to human power's role in shaping what people conceive to be rational.<sup>40</sup> Wesley inversely encourages postmodern or religious "undervaluers" of reason to reconsider reason and logic as tools for self-understanding and dialogue.<sup>41</sup> Logic may consciously or unconsciously influence even those interlocutors who are professedly hostile or ambivalent toward reason.

### Conferring With Personal and Communal Experience

Wesley articulated experience as subjectively feeling affected, sympathizing with others undergoing similar circumstances, practical skills honed through repeat performance, lifelong learning, trial and error, and simple observation.<sup>42</sup> Experience can involve a felt inward relationship with God, a sure trust and confidence, actively practicing works of mercy, long-term leadership acumen, training others for God's work, and examining spiritual fruit.<sup>43</sup> But spiritual experience also has its limits.

Because individuals are susceptible to misinterpreting experience, Christians best interpret with Christian brothers and sisters, including historically marginalized or excluded voices.<sup>44</sup> Wesley advised conferring

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<sup>39</sup>Miles, 100-101.

<sup>40</sup>Miles, 104.

<sup>41</sup>Cf. Miles, 101-103; Wesley, Sermon 70, "The Case of Reason Impartially Considered," §§3-6, II:10, *Sermons* 2:588-89, 599.

<sup>42</sup>See documentation in Maddox, "The Enriching Role of Experience," in Gunter, 108-112 and 161-162.

<sup>43</sup>Wesley, "A Letter to the Author of 'The Enthusiasm of Methodists and Papists Compared'" (1749-1750), §32, *Works* 11:374; Wesley, *Journal* (27 February 1740) and (5 June 1772), *Works* 19:158, 22:336; Wesley, "Letter to Henry Stebbing" (25 July 1739), §6, *Works* 25:671; Wesley, "Letter to Miss March" (27 December 1774), Telford 6:133; Wesley, *NT Notes*, Matthew 16:21, Matthew 23:34, John 17:13, Acts 22:19, Romans 15:14, and Titus 2:3; Wesley, Preface to *Primitive Physick: Or, an Easy and Natural Method of Curing Most Diseases* (1747, and later), §§ 4-7, 9, Jackson 14:308-310; Wesley, Preface to *The Christian's Pattern; or, a Treatise of the Imitation of Christ*, (1735), §III.6, Jackson 14:207-8; Wesley, Sermon 98, "On Visiting the Sick," §II.3, *Sermons* 3:390-91.

<sup>44</sup>Maddox, "The Enriching Role of Experience," 116, 137, 162, 165, and, more generally, Wesley, *Hymns and Sacred Poems*, Preface §§4-5, Jackson 14:321; Wesley, Sermon 26, "Sermon on the Mount, IV," §O.1, *Sermons* 1:533-34; Wesley, "Minutes" (25 June 1744), Jackson 8:275.

with mature believers, conferring in groups socially, and listening to opponents and critics.<sup>45</sup> He privileged publically verifiable experience over individual subjective claims. Experience empowering Christ-like living via direct awareness of God's love and grace endows the Christian life with "existential force."<sup>46</sup> Like reason, experience helps to winnow disputable teachings based on the fruit they ostensibly bear. For early Christians, experience was a *guide* toward the *goal* of abundant life, a "stimulus or goad" for doctrinal reflection.<sup>47</sup>

Integrating "experience" into ecumenical, inter-religious, and religious-atheist dialogue imports manifold possibilities. Participants can testify to positive, ambivalent, and negative personal, social, and spiritual experiences with religion, agnosticism, or atheism. This fosters opportunities for empathy and for conveying existential significance. John Cobb counsels: "If we trust Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, we have no reason to fear that truth from any source will undercut our faith. Indeed, we have every reason to believe that all truth, wisdom and reality cohere in him . . . faith in Jesus Christ encourages and even requires us to assimilate into our tradition what others have learned."<sup>48</sup>

God may re-sensitize seared consciences through dialogue. God's prevenient grace grants every person some ability to will good, some conscience of the moral law that condemns or approves actions and passions, "some measure of that light, some faint glimmering ray" that sooner or later, more or less, enlightens everyone.<sup>49</sup> This grace for Wesley initiates "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. All

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<sup>45</sup>See Maddox, "Honoring Conference," 86-87; Maddox, "The Rule of Christian Faith," 17-19.

<sup>46</sup>Outler, "Wesleyan Quadrilateral in Wesley," 10-11; cf. Heitzenrater, 80; Maddox, "Honoring Conference," 111; Maddox, "The Enriching Role of Experience," 117-118, 162 citing esp. Wesley, *A Second Letter to the Author of "The Enthusiasm of Methodists and Papists Compar'd"* (1752), §20, *Works* 11:399; Wesley, Sermon 11, "Witness of the Spirit, II," §§II.6, V.2, *Sermons* 1:287-288, 1:297.

<sup>47</sup>Maddox, "The Enriching Role of Experience," 120-126, 163-164 citing e.g. Wesley, *Doctrine of Original Sin*, Part II, §II.20, §VII, Part IV, Q.1 §4, Jackson 9:318, 9:338, 9:361; Wesley, "Original Sin," §II.2, *Works* 2:176.

<sup>48</sup>John B. Cobb Jr., "Being a Transformationist in a Pluralistic world," *The Christian Century* (August 10, 1994), 749.

<sup>49</sup>Wesley, Sermon 85, "On Working Out Our Own Salvation," §III.4, *Sermons* 3:207; cf. e.g. Romans 2:15.

these imply some tendency toward life, some degree of salvation, the beginning of a deliverance from a . . . heart . . . insensible of God.”<sup>50</sup>

### Conferring With the “Book of Nature”

Wesley’s Anglican upbringing emphasized God’s revelation in the “natural world” for strengthening faith awakened by Scripture, and deepening admiration for God’s power, wisdom, and goodness. This attitude undergirds Wesley’s biblical eschatological vision of God renewing “the whole universe,” including fauna and presumably flora.<sup>51</sup> Wesley furnished his *The Desideratum; or, Electricity Made Plain and Useful* (1760) and *A Survey of the Wisdom of God in Creation; or, A Compendium of Natural Theology* (1763 and later) to Methodist preachers, exhibiting his “enchantment” with natural sciences.<sup>52</sup>

Wesley abridged science books and journals extensively, expanding the 1777 edition of his *Survey* to five volumes with excerpts serialized and supplemented in the *Arminian Magazine*.<sup>53</sup> Wesley’s life-long medical study in the tradition of other Anglican clergy is further evidenced by Wesley’s *Primitive Physick: Or, an Easy and Natural Method of Curing Most Diseases* (1747 and later).<sup>54</sup> He compiled his survey “to display *the invisible things of God*, his power, wisdom, and goodness,” and to “warm our hearts, and fill our mouths with wonder, love, and praise!”<sup>55</sup> For Wes-

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<sup>50</sup>Wesley, Sermon 85, “On Working out Our Own Salvation,” §II.1, *Sermons* 3:203-4; cf. Sermon 34, “The Original Nature, Property, and Use of the Law,” §1.4, *Sermons* 2:23.

<sup>51</sup>Maddox, “Honoring Conference,” 91; cf. Randy L. Maddox, “Anticipating the New Creation: Wesleyan Foundations for Holistic Mission,” *Asbury Journal* 62:1 (Spring, 2007), 49-66.

<sup>52</sup>Joel B. Green, “Science, Theology, and Wesleyans,” in M. Kathryn Armistead, Brad D. Strawn, and Ronald W. Wright (eds.), *Wesleyan Theology and Social Science: The Dance of Practical Divinity and Discovery* (Newcastle Upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), 185; Maddox, “John Wesley’s Precedent,” 25.

<sup>53</sup>Maddox, “John Wesley’s Precedent,” 25, 28, cf. 41; Robert E. Schofield, “John Wesley and Science in 18<sup>th</sup>-Century England,” *Isis* 44 (1953), 337-338.

<sup>54</sup>Cf. James G. Donat, “Empirical Medicine in the 18th Century: The Rev. John Wesley’s Search for Remedies that Work,” *Methodist History* 44:4 (2006), 285-298; Randy L. Maddox, “John Wesley on Holistic Health and Healing,” *Methodist History* 46:1 (October, 2007), 5-6.

<sup>55</sup>Wesley, “Preface, §1, *Survey*, 1:ii-iv, viii, Jackson 14:300-302; cf. Green, “Science, Theology, and Wesleyans,” 186.

ley, studying nature confirmed Christian faith and evoked awe for God's magnificent design rather than coercing or requiring belief as "*evidentialist apologetics*" attempted to do.<sup>56</sup>

Theology and science both encounter objective realities, but human interpretations of these realities are fallible and open to modification.<sup>57</sup> Wesley told one critic, "Permit me, sir, to give you one piece of advice. Be not *so positive*, especially with regard to things which are neither easy nor necessary to be determined."<sup>58</sup> And, "God has so done his works that we may admire and adore, but we cannot search them out to perfection."<sup>59</sup> One best proceeds when faced by apparent conflict between the Bible and the Book of Nature not by bickering about which is more "authoritative," but by aiming for "*justice to all*" to the extent realizable at that moment.<sup>60</sup> Science and other Honoring Conference voices can provoke fresh awareness of obscured biblical and other truths, but accommodation should not flow *only* from science, rational critique or experience to hermeneutics and theology. Maddox instead urges dialogue in areas of resonance and dissonance, especially by those who possess requisite knowledge or expertise.<sup>61</sup>

Finally, appreciating the Book of Nature counters "anthropocentric exploitation."<sup>62</sup> Contra a Baconian equation or reduction of science to technological benefits, Wesley endorsed a stewardship schema wherein everything ultimately belongs to God who consigns certain aspects of creation to human care for fulfilling basic human and (other) creaturely needs. For Wesley, Eden prefigured and the New Heavens and Earth will consummate

<sup>56</sup>Maddox, "John Wesley's Precedent," 41-43, cf. 38; Psalm 19.

<sup>57</sup>Maddox, "John Wesley's Precedent," 44. Maddox sees this as an extension of Wesley's "Catholic Spirit."

<sup>58</sup>John Wesley, "Letter to the Editor," *London Magazine* 35, January 1, 1765, 28.

<sup>59</sup>Wesley, Preface, §5, *Survey*, 1:vii, Jackson 14:301; Maddox, "John Wesley's Precedent," 45.

<sup>60</sup>Maddox, "John Wesley's Precedent," 46, cf. 50; Randy L. Maddox, Review of *Grace & Responsibility: A Wesleyan Theology for Today* by John B. Cobb, Jr., *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 31:2 (Fall, 1996): 215, "Rational reflection helped recover a critique of patriarchy present within scripture itself."

<sup>61</sup>Maddox, "John Wesley's Precedent," 50-52.

<sup>62</sup>Maddox, "John Wesley's Precedent," 52; cf. Michael Lodahl, "Wesley and Nature," in Armistead et al., 24, 30.

this interactive thriving.<sup>63</sup> Science, reason, and experience are common courts of appeal for Christians, atheists, and various non-Christian religions despite the slander that religion is inherently anti-scientific.<sup>64</sup>

Science may prove to be an exceptionally fertile subfield of inter-religious dialogue. *Science and Religion around the World* traces the interplay in Judaism from the Hebrew Bible to Ashkenazi Jews; in Christianity from the early Church to Galileo, Newton, Faraday and others; in Islam from medieval philosophy to Ottoman interactions with “Western” science; in “Indic religions” Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism on mathematics, medicine, and astronomy; and in Chinese religion on music, medicine, and technology invigorated by interactions with the Jesuits.<sup>65</sup> Maddox with other Wesleyan scholars further refracts the “Book of Nature” through behavioral, human, or social sciences in *Wesleyan Theology and Social Science: The Dance of Practical Divinity and Discovery*, delving into moral, self, systems, and social psychologies, cognitive science, and research on the unconscious to form, shape, and stretch Wesleyan theology.<sup>66</sup>

### Conferring With the “Analogy” of Faith

The “Rule” or “Analogy” of faith in Honoring Conference are the core convictions of apostolic Christianity, “the central narrative of God’s sav-

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<sup>63</sup>Maddox, “John Wesley’s Precedent,” 53-54 citing Wesley, Sermon 1, “The Good Steward,” §I.1, *Sermons* 2:283; Sermon 28, “Upon Our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, VIII,” §§11, 25-26, *Sermons* 1:618-619, 628-629; Sermon 50, “The Use of Money,” *Sermons* 2:266-280; cf. Maddox, “Anticipating the New Creation,” 49-66; Sandra Richter, *The Epic of Eden: A Christian Entry into the Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008); Wesley, Sermon 60, “The General Deliverance,” §1.6, II, III.10, *Sermons* 2:441-445, 449.

<sup>64</sup>Early propaganda promulgating a science and religion “warfare” myth are John William Draper, *History of the Conflict Between Religion and Science* (New York: D. Appleton, 1874), followed by Andrew Dickson White, *A History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom Two Volumes* (New York: D. Appleton, 1876).

<sup>65</sup>Benjamin B. DeVan, Reviews of *Science and Religion around the World*, by John Hedley Brooke and Ronald L. Numbers, eds., and *Darwin’s Pious Idea: Why the Ultra-Darwinists and Creationists Both Get It Wrong*, by Conor Cunningham, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 50:4 (December, 2011), 848-851; cf. Benjamin B. DeVan, “A Marriage Made in Heaven?,” *The InterCollegiate Review: A Journal of Scholarship and Opinion* 47:1 (Spring, 2012), 60-63, [http://www.mmisi.org/ir/47\\_01/devan.pdf](http://www.mmisi.org/ir/47_01/devan.pdf).

<sup>66</sup>Armistead, et al.

ing work in Scripture,” or for Wesley, the grand biblical truths.<sup>67</sup> Maddox grounds *regula fidei* phraseology in St. Augustine’s directions for interpreting difficult Bible passages by “more open” Scripture and tradition, and “analogy of faith” (*analogia fidei*) via Romans 12:6 as early Christianity’s “communal sense of what was most central and unifying in Scripture, to aid in reading the whole of Scripture.”<sup>68</sup> This ideally nourishes a non-vicious circularity where central Christian beliefs and the Bible from which they arise are interdependent and synergistic.

Reformation controversies recast the “Rule of Faith” as Holy Scripture and the “Analogy of Faith” as “at least the Apostle’s Creed” for interpreting Scripture.<sup>69</sup> Wesley extolled, “In order to be well acquainted with the doctrines of Christianity you need but one book (besides the New Testament)—Bishop Pearson *On the Creed*.”<sup>70</sup> Samuel and Susanna Wesley commended *On the Creed* to John who used it at Oxford, assigned it to assistants, and recommended it in correspondence. John wanted Methodists to assert Christianity’s central historic doctrines in conjunction with liberty to “think and let think” on “opinions which do not strike at the root of Christianity.”<sup>71</sup> Wesley yearned for unity neither in “*peculiar notions*” nor “*doubtful opinions*,” but in the “undoubted, fundamental branches (if there be such) of our *common Christianity*.”<sup>72</sup>

Honoring Conference inter-religious and religious-atheist dialogue thus prioritizes “common Christianity” over intra-Christian quarrels, even if sporadically tackling intra-Christian dissent. Christians must be tentative about assuming when non-Christian interlocutors will adhere to equivalent analogies of faith, even though Maimonides’ thirteen principles, Islam’s five pillars, or the Buddhist Four Noble Truths and Eightfold Path sometimes function similarly.

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<sup>67</sup>Maddox, “Honoring Conference,” 89; Wesley, *NT Notes*, Romans 12:6.

<sup>68</sup>Maddox, “Honoring Conference,” 89; cf. Augustine, *On Christian Teaching*, Book III, §2; Maddox, “The Rule of Christian Faith,” 21-22.

<sup>69</sup>Maddox, “Honoring Conference,” 89; Maddox, “The Rule of Christian Faith,” 22-23 referencing Wesley, *The Character of a Methodist* (1742), §1, *Works* 9:34; Wesley, Sermon 5, “Justification by Faith,” §2, *Sermons* 1:183; Wesley, *An Address to the Clergy*, §II.1, Jackson 10:490; Sermon 62, “The End of Christ’s Coming,” §III.5, *Sermons* 2:483; Sermon 64, “The New Creation,” §2, *Sermons* 2:501.

<sup>70</sup>Wesley, “Letter to Cradock Glascott” (13 May 1764), Telford 4:243.

<sup>71</sup>Maddox, “The Rule of Christian Faith,” 24; Wesley, *The Character of a Methodist*, §1, *Works* 9:33-34.

<sup>72</sup>Wesley, Sermon 4, “Scriptural Christianity” §IV:4, *Sermons* 1:173.

### Conferring With God's Universal Pardoning and Transforming Love

A final Honoring Conference category is God's universal pardoning and transforming love. When Bill Moyers asked Huston Smith what chief wisdom Christianity had bequeathed to the world, Smith replied: "That God is love. Now, other traditions do not deny that, but they do not place it in the centrality of the faith."<sup>73</sup>

Helpful for determining Wesley's *discrimen* is the "working canon" he frequently appealed to for interpreting Scripture broadly.<sup>74</sup> For Wesley, every truth in Scripture matters, yet some are "more immediately conducive" to salvation.<sup>75</sup> Wesley prioritized teachings he perceived the Bible reiterating, with 1 Corinthians 13 as "a compendium of true religion," and the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) as "the noblest compendium of religion found in the oracles of God."<sup>76</sup> Maddox adds Psalm 145:9, "The Lord is loving to every [person], and his mercy is over all his works." Wesley praised 1 John as "the deepest" Holy Scripture, alluding to it in sermons proportionally more than any other book in the Bible. Wesley viewed 1 John 4:19, "we love because God first loved us," as "the sum of the whole gospel."<sup>77</sup>

Maddox concludes: "Wesley increasingly and self-consciously read the whole of the Bible in light of a deep conviction that God was present in the assuring work of the Spirit both to *pardon* and to *transform* all who respond to that inviting and empowering love—and *all* can respond! . . . A key dimension of reading the Bible in Wesleyan ways today would be embracing Wesley's central *discrimen*, even as one continues to test and

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<sup>73</sup>Huston Smith in "Christianity and Judaism," *The Wisdom of Faith with Huston Smith, a Bill Moyers Special* (Public Affairs Television, 1996).

<sup>74</sup>David H. Kelsey, *Proving Doctrine: The Uses of Scripture in Modern Theology* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1999), 103-104; Maddox, "The Rule of Christian Faith," 26; Wesley, Sermon 91, "On Charity," proem, *Sermons* 3:292.

<sup>75</sup>Wesley, Sermon 73, "Of Hell," §1, *Sermons* 3:31.

<sup>76</sup>Wesley, Sermon 73, "Of Hell," §1, *Sermons* 3:31; *Journal* (17 October 1771 and 30 March 1789), *Works* 22:293, 24:126. Maddox, "The Rule of Christian Faith," 27 notes thirteen of forty-four sermons in Wesley's original first four volumes on the Sermon on the Mount.

<sup>77</sup>Maddox, "The Rule of Christian Faith," 27 (with statistics), 28-30, citing Wesley's *Journal* (18 July 1776 and 9 November 1772), *Works* 22:12, 22:352; Wesley, "Letter to Richard Thompson" (28 June 1755), *Works* 26:566-67; Wesley, *Sermons*, Vol. 5, Preface, §6, *Sermons* 2:357.

refine it by ongoing conference with the whole of Scripture and the range of other readers.”<sup>78</sup>

Countless Christians will instinctively adopt a universal pardoning and transforming love *discrimen*, yet Calvinists or the Reformed may prefer Divine sovereignty or eternal decree, Charismatics or Pentecostals pneumatology, Eastern Orthodox theosis, Catholics the teaching magisterium, Muslims submission or surrender to God, Hindus and Buddhists *moksha*, atheists social or self-actualization, and so forth. Although Wesleyans do not dictate others’ *discrimen*, love for Wesleyans is even more essential than the abounding wisdom Honoring Conference facilitates. Wesley proclaimed, “For how far is love, even with many wrong opinions, to be preferred before truth itself without love! We may die without knowledge of many truths and yet be carried into Abraham’s bosom. But if we die without love, what will knowledge avail?”<sup>79</sup>

### Conferring Together

Honoring Conference as a dialogical framework for common or “real” Christianity looks to Wesley’s example of using “all available tools to enable persons to live fully and well.” It also reinforces Wesley’s vision for Methodists, “being of no sect or party, are friends to all parties and endeavor to forward all in heart-religion, in the knowledge and love of God.”<sup>80</sup> Honoring Conference ideally engages “the full range of divine revelation,” orchestrating Scripture, history, reason, experience, the Book of Nature, the Analogy of Faith, and God’s universal pardoning and transforming love in a glorious ensemble resounding through the communion of saints.<sup>81</sup> Yet, Honoring Conference, like the Quadrilateral, is corrupt-

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<sup>78</sup>Maddox, “The Rule of Christian Faith,” 30. Maddox adds, “George Whitefield defends God’s ‘distinguishing love’ rather than God’s universal love (26) and rejects any possibility of sinless perfection (19–20) in *A Letter to the Rev. Mr. Wesley, in answer to his sermon entitled ‘Free Grace’* (London: T. Cooper & R. Hett, 1741);” but cf. Steven J. Koskie, “Can We Speak of a Wesleyan Theological Hermeneutic of Scripture Today?” in Joel B. Green and David F. Watson, *Wesley, Wesleyans, and Reading the Bible as Scripture* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2012), 314, for brief disagreement regarding 1 John as a “canon within the canon” for Wesley.

<sup>79</sup>Wesley, “Preface,” §10, *Sermons* 1:107.

<sup>80</sup>Wesley, *The Character of a Methodist*, §18, *Works* 9:42; Wesley, Sermon 121, “Prophets and Priests,” §18, *Sermons* 4:82; cf. Albert C. Outler, “The Wesleyan Quadrilateral in Wesley,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 20:1 (1985), 17.

<sup>81</sup>Maddox, “Honoring Conference,” 110, cf. 105–107.

ible if Wesleyans discard Scripture's preeminence, pit categories against each other, or refuse to consider revisions or replacements. To adapt Russell Richey's appraisal of the Quadrilateral, Honoring Conference works best as an "operative methodology, a way of doing theology, not itself a doctrine to be subscribed."<sup>82</sup>

So-called secular fields of inquiry, atheists, and other religions may enliven Honoring Conference. But can any or all cohere as permanent contributors? This essay provisionally concludes that academic disciplines might be integrated into the "Book of Nature" or other categories. But atheists, atheism, other non-Christians and non-Christian religions are perhaps best welcomed as challenging and enriching guests, honored delegates who intercede where applicable. If honored guests become permanent partakers in Christian Honoring Conference, they must in some sense be willing to sing in harmony with Christian Scripture and other Honoring Conference voices. Christians can cordially accept interlocutors' counter-invitations to serve as delegates to other conferences chaired by non-Christian religions or atheism, but our "evangelistic love of God and neighbor" impels us to hope and invite "whosoever will" (Rev. 22:17) to join us in pursuing full Christian discipleship around the Lord's Table.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>82</sup>Russell E. Richey with Dennis M. Campbell and William B. Lawrence, *Marks of Methodism: Theology in Ecclesial Practice* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2005), 13.

<sup>83</sup>Phrase from Scott J. Jones, *The Evangelistic Love of God and Neighbor: A Theology of Witness and Discipleship* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2003).

# **ZIPPORAH'S CUT: WESLEY AND THE FATHERS ON CIRCUMCISION**

by

**Karen Strand Winslow**

The textual expressions of male circumcision in the biblical story and its actual practice in the social world of Israel indicate inclusion and exclusion of males born into Israel and those born outside of Israel. Although we know that other nations practiced circumcision, for Israel, circumcision turned male outsiders into insiders and demonstrated those who were outsiders to Israel. Circumcision became the sign of the covenant between Abraham and his descendants according to God's directive to Abraham in Genesis 17:9-14. All males of the household were to be circumcised, regardless of their geographic or genetic origins, lest they be "cut off" from their people (Gen. 17:23-27). Even male infants born to Israelites were not sons of the covenant until they were circumcised on the eighth day. Like sacrifice (of which it is a type), circumcision was a primary way Israelite/Jewish males legalized their bonds to one another and to God.

Although it is tempting to conclude that females born to Israel were assumed to be Israelites, the status of Israelite/Jewish females in relation to Israel is not addressed in the Bible. Females could never be sons of the covenant; they were part of Israel because they were attached to circumcised males. Normally, outsider women could enter Israel through legal connection to Israelite males (as wife or slave) or faith confessions (Rahab) and other shows of loyalty (Ruth), but the Scriptures contain exceptions to this.<sup>1</sup> Females were excluded from other insider-creating and confirming rituals such as offering sacrifices, another blood-letting, communal, kinship-creating rite (see Ex. 18; 24:9-11).

Surprisingly, a female, Moses' Midianite wife Zipporah, performed a circumcision that saved Moses life from the Lord's attempt to take it (Ex.

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<sup>1</sup>Ezra 9-10 is an attempt to abrogate females entering the community through marriage. Rahab joined Israel through her quick wits and confession of faith (Josh. 2).

4:24-26). This act made her legal kin to Moses (*hatan damin*, in-law relation of blood), a relation that was otherwise the sole province of males.<sup>2</sup> The Midianite wife became more closely bound to Moses through quickly cutting off her son's foreskin than she had been through their marriage (which had served to unite Moses to her father, Ex. 2:21| 18:1-7). In her case, even though she was female, circumcision became one of the many ways throughout the Scriptures that a person marked Other entered Israel or is portrayed as a model for Israel who preserves God's people through words or actions.

Early Jewish and Christian interpreters do not notice or underscore the text's repeated interpretation of the incident: that Zipporah—an outsider woman—had thereby become in-law kin to Moses through her salvific (for Moses) bloodletting of her son. None of them saw in Ex. 4:24-26 a biblical precedent for inclusion and embrace of Others, an important theme to the biblical redactor. Zipporah and the redactor claimed that she was doubly related to Moses, as his wife, legally, and through blood (which was a means to establish legal relations).

### A Wesley Interlude

John Wesley has been commended for his openness to those with differing "opinions," his "catholic spirit," for his doctrine of prevenient grace that applies to all peoples, and for his definition of the nature of true religion as that which is evidenced by love of God and neighbor.<sup>3</sup> However, in puzzling over this perplexing passage, Wesley suggested that God's attack on Moses was caused by "his being unequally yoked with a Midianite, who was too indulgent of her child, and Moses so of her."<sup>4</sup> Wesley used the outsider Midianite status of Moses' wife to explain Moses' failure

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<sup>2</sup>The context of the term determines the translation: husband, father-in-law, or brother-in-law.

<sup>3</sup>See discussions that show the complexities of Wesley's catholic spirit or ecumenism. For example, Donald Thorsen, "Ecumenism, Spirituality, and Holiness: Exploring Wesley and the Variety of Christian Spiritualities," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 41, 1 (Spring 2006): 189-204; Norman Young, "Wesley's View of Catholic Spirit and the Ecumenical Situation Today," *Uniting Church Studies* 5 (Mar 1999): 59-66; and John A. Newton, "The Ecumenical Wesley," *Ecumenical Review*, 24 (April 1972): 160-175.

<sup>4</sup>John Wesley, *Notes on the Second Book of Moses Called Exodus*. Cited July 12, 2012. Online: <http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/john-wesleys-notes-on-the-bible>.

to circumcise his son and hence the Lord's attack, as did a number of early Jewish interpreters: Moses should not have been "unequally yoked."

Wesley's view of prevenient grace could have led him to explain this passage alternatively: Zipporah, acting out of love of neighbor (her husband), moved swiftly and with insight provided by God's grace to perform the required circumcision.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, Wesley would have been consistent with his own theology had he suggested that God's prevenient grace was functioning in Midian through Jethro and Zipporah from the moment he met them there (Ex. 2). The fact that the Lord came to him at the bush in Midian could have suggested to Wesley that God dwelt among the Midianites, or even that Jethro was a priest of the Lord or was at least directed by God's grace to shelter and provide a wife for Moses.<sup>6</sup> Clearly, Wesley did not understand the Lord's attack on Moses or Zipporah's circumcising as an example of inclusiveness or permeable boundaries between Israel and others.

Nonetheless, recently Wesleyan and feminist biblical interpreters have recognized the many biblical precedents and methods for receiving into God's people those previously defined as outsiders. These interpreters underscore the narratives that show how the biblical text repeatedly defines God's people through stories about faith, loyalty, quick thinking, and courage, but not lineage. They show that the New Testament is not alone in expanding the People of God to include Gentiles; the Jewish Scriptures/Christian Old Testament frequently holds up those previously defined as outsiders as models for those who assume that their lineage and traditions are the identifying marks of true Israel.<sup>7</sup>

Wesley's further explanation of Exodus 4:25-26 contrasts with my interpretation of this passage. He claimed that Moses sent his wife and

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<sup>5</sup>For Wesley the true essence of religion was based on love of God and neighbor, on a heart fully devoted to God and others. See Mark Grear Mann, "Religious Pluralism," in *Philosophy of Religion: Introductory Essays* ed. Thomas Jay Oord (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 2004), 271-273.

<sup>6</sup>No writings of the Midianites or other evidence exists to indicate that they worshipped the LORD, but scholars have suggested Moses' encounter with God at the Midianite mountain bush (beyond the wilderness, "Horeb, the mountain of God") implies it was their sacred place. Henry Flanders Jr., *People of the Covenant* (New York: Oxford, 1996), 186.

<sup>7</sup>See, for example, Karen Strand Winslow, *Early Jewish and Christian Memories of Moses' Wives: Exogamist Marriage and Ethnic Identity* (New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2005); and Frank Anthony Spina, *The Faith of the Outsider: Exclusion and Inclusion in the Biblical Story* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005).

sons away because of her passionate expression: “you are my bloody husband.”<sup>8</sup> Instead, I contend that Zipporah and the editor’s concluding proclamation is an assertion that her circumcising bound her to Moses in a legal way that had been reserved to males. Furthermore, I claim that the author intentionally edited the material in order to feature both the “Circumcision by Zipporah” tradition of Ex. 4:24-26 and the Ex. 18 account of Jethro’s confession, communal meal, and wise counsel for Moses. The author “arranged” for Zipporah and her sons, who had left Midian for Egypt with Moses, to have been sent back to Midian so that Jethro could bring them back to Moses after Israel’s escape from Egypt (Ex. 18:2). This created the occasion for Jethro to confess that he now knows that Israel’s God is greater than all gods (in contrast to Pharaoh’s obduracy) and be of further good use to Israel. Thus, both narratives are purposely included in order to feature Midianites as protagonists to be emulated by Israel and have the effect of promoting openness to outsiders.<sup>9</sup>

Recognizing biblical narratives that subvert the antipathy of some Old Testament passages toward outsiders remains a worthy challenge for Wesleyan biblical scholars and pastors. To do so results in reconciliation between the New Testament, perceived to be inclusive of Gentiles, and the Scriptures of Jesus and his followers, which are thought to be more exclusive of non-Israelites. Consider, for example, Jesus’ introduction to his ministry in his hometown of Nazareth (Luke 4:16-30), which depicts Jesus quoting his Scriptures to show God’s visitation upon enemies of Israel. Many aspects of the Jewish Scripture library that Christians call the Old Testament are every bit as concerned to embrace strangers as is the New Testament.<sup>10</sup>

I focus below on early Christian interpreters who used Ex. 4:24-6 to develop lessons about circumcision for Jews and Christians. Whereas early Jewish interpreters appealed to this story to stress the importance of the command of circumcision and the atoning quality of circumcision’s blood, the Christian Fathers used it to claim circumcision’s allegorical quality, its purpose in marking Jews for exclusion, or its irrelevance for

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<sup>8</sup>John Wesley, *Notes on Exodus*.

<sup>9</sup>See *Moses’ Wives*, 51-54; 58-73.

<sup>10</sup>In *Moses’ Wives*, I show that the outsiders who led Israel to apostasy were to be avoided (e.g. Num. 25), but other outsiders who recognized and showed loyalty to Israel’s God and his ways were to be embraced and emulated (*passim*). One’s background did not determine one’s place in the community of faith.

Christians. Augustine found in circumcision support for infant baptism, the Jewish rite of repentance carried into the nascent Jesus movement for the same purpose. He did not, however, extol baptism for being more inclusive as a rite equally available to both sexes.

After a survey of their views, I will examine the writings of the Fathers in more detail, beginning with Jerome, then turning to Tertullian, Origen, and Gregory of Nyssa, concluding with Augustine. I will focus on how they manage a female *mohel* (circumciser) while failing to recognize the result that both she and the narrative's editor claimed for her quick and effective action in this pericope: Moses became her legal relation by blood. Although the Church Fathers did not commend the story of Zipporah's circumcising or the Christian use of baptism as foundational for an inclusive stance toward women and additional Others, Wesleyan and feminist interpreters have done so. They highlight the biblical narratives that construct ways to honor and accept women and outsiders, constructing models for God's people today.<sup>11</sup> They thus emulate Jesus at Nazareth when he reminded his kin and neighbors of Scriptures that focus on God's concern for Outsiders (Luke 4:16-27).

### A Survey of the Fathers

**Jerome.** Jerome's interpretation of 1 Cor. 7 showed that true circumcision for Christians was analogous to the chaste life and uncircumcision represented the married state. Married people (the uncircumcised) should not divorce (be loosed from marriage, i.e. be circumcised) and the singles (the circumcised) should not seek to acquire a wife (become uncircumcised). Thus, in Jerome we find a combining of the images of conjugal relations with that of circumcision. Ephrem the Syrian sage is the only other Church Father who rewrote Ex. 4:4-6 to include a sexual renunciation motif. In Ephrem's case, he re-presented the incident to defend Moses' sexual renunciation, whereas Jerome interpreted it allegorically against marriage in general.

**Tertullian.** Tertullian, an apologist of Christianity who eventually joined the Montanist sect, deployed Ex. 4:24-26 to claim that if circumcision brought salvation, Moses would not have neglected it in the case of

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<sup>11</sup>For example, Spina, *The Faith of the Outsider*; Winslow, *Moses' Wives*; Idem, *The Faith of Midianite Outsiders: Zipporah and Jethro in Exodus and in Jewish Interpretation* (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Pacific Northwest Region of the SBL, Spokane, Wash., 11 May, 2006).

his son. Tertullian was born in Carthage between 150 and 160 C.E, wrote between 197 and 223, and died between 220 and 240. He wrote *Against the Jews* (*Adversus Iudaeos*) to a pagan convert to Judaism in order to prove that the Christ was not still to come, but had come in Jesus.<sup>12</sup>

Here he wrote that the fact that *Zipporah* circumcised on her son demonstrates that he was endangered by the angel because the command that all Jews be circumcised had not been observed.<sup>13</sup> Thus, other people groups are not susceptible to such danger. Rather, wrote Tertullian, circumcision was given to the Jews as a sign on their flesh so that they could be physically distinguished from others who were allowed to enter Jerusalem during the much later period that Jews were restricted from the city. Tertullian appealed also to numerous other passages from the Jewish Scriptures. His claim that Zipporah's handiwork was more narrowly applicable simply because *she* did it—although consistent with his views of women<sup>14</sup>—is unusual.

In their praise of circumcision, Jewish interpreters debated the causes of Moses' negligence, the nature of his culpability, and the lesson he and the receivers of the text must learn about the greatness of the command. While they did not consider this story to provide grounds to advise women to circumcise, they found in this passage support for the command of circumcision or the atoning quality of circumcision's blood. Even *Avodah Zarah* did not discount the importance of *circumcision* because Zipporah did it; rather the rabbis there said that circumcision was so important that a *man*—even Moses—must have done it (not Zipporah). This is the same logic deployed inversely by Tertullian. If circumcision was so important, he wrote, Moses would have done it on the eighth day. Since he neglected this procedure, the command of circumcision must apply more narrowly to Jews alone.

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<sup>12</sup>See Brown, *The Body and Society*, esp. 76-82, 382; Heid, *Celibacy*, 72-89, 103-104; James M. Fuller, "Tertullian," *A Dictionary of Christian Biography and Literature to the End of the Sixth century A.D.* (ed. Henry Wace and William C. Piercy; Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 940-953.

<sup>13</sup>Cf. Origen said the danger was to "the Jewish nation."

<sup>14</sup>See *De Cultu Feminarum, De Exhortatione Castitatis, De virginibus, ad Exorem, de Monogamia* (CCL 1-2). This statement from *Cultu Feminarum* 1.1.2 is often cited: "Do you not know that each of you women is an Eve? The sentence of God on this sex of yours lives in this age; the guilt must necessarily live too. You are the gate of Hell: you are the temptress of the forbidden tree; you are the first deserter of the divine law." In this same regard, see in *de Oratone* the section on the dress of women and the veiling or non-veiling of virgins.

Tertullian continued with a replacement theology based on a new spiritual circumcision over the old physical circumcision of the Jews. He repeats that because Jews sinned, they were signed with circumcision so that they could be detected after their expulsion from the holy city and not allowed admission. He wrote: "carnal circumcision, which was temporary," was generated for "a sign" in a stubborn people, the Jews.<sup>15</sup> Now, spiritual circumcision is given to an "obedient people" who are circumcised of heart (Jer. 4:3-4), according to a "new covenant" (Jer. 31:31-32). The former circumcision has ended and a new law announced by which all nations (the "people who were ignorant of God, who in days bygone knew not God" (Ps. 18:43-44; Hos. 1:10; 1 Pet. 2:10) may ascend "unto the house of the God of *Jacob*" (Isa. 2:2-3). He identified "*Jacob*, the second [son]" as "*our* people, whose mount is Christ." Thus, for Tertullian, the threat by the angel proved circumcision to be necessary for Jews, but it was not a sign of their favor, but of their exile.

**Origen.**<sup>16</sup> Origen approached Ex. 4:24-26 differently. Circumcision was effective against a "hostile" angel who endangered the uncircumcised until the time of Jesus' circumcision, which applied to all male infants vicariously. Just as Jesus' death atoned for everyone's sin, so Jesus' circumcision rendered the angel impotent, from that time forward.

Origen was born in 186 C.E. in Alexandria of Christian parents a few years after Celsus wrote accusations against Jews and Christians in a treatise named *The True Doctrine*.<sup>17</sup> He died in 253 at Tyre. Origen's *Con-*

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<sup>15</sup>Tertullian continues: For Israel—who *had* been known to God, and who had by Him been withdrawn from Egypt, and was transported through the Red Sea, and who in the desert, fed forty years with manna, was shaped to the semblance of eternity, and not contaminated with human passions, or fed on this world's meats, but fed on "angel's loaves" (Ps. 78:25; John 6. 31-32)—the manna—and sufficiently bound to God by His benefits—forgot his Lord and God. He said to Aaron: "Make us gods, to go before us: for that Moses, who brought us from the land of Egypt, has quite forsaken us; and what has befallen him we know not."

<sup>16</sup>Eusebius of Caesarea is the primary source for Origen's biography, but Pierre Nautin has evaluated Eusebius' sources to provide a more critical reconstruction of Origen's life. Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica* Book 6 (ed. E. Schwartz. Nautin, *Origene: sa vie et son oeuvre*; Paris: Beauchesne, 1977) and cited by Ronald Heine in his introduction to *Origen: Homilies on Genesis and Exodus* (Washington D.C.: Catholic Univ. of America Press, 1982), 3. My quotations of Origen are taken from Heine.

<sup>17</sup>Chadwick, *Origen: Contra Celsum*, 5. Chadwick traces the research on Celsus and dates his work at 177-180 C.E., xxiv-xxiii.

*tra Celsus* ("Against Celsus") was written between 246-8 C.E. and is one of his many contributions to the Christian apologetic movement of the second and third centuries.<sup>18</sup>

The context for Origen's memory of Zipporah circumcising is Celsus' argument that Jews were not particularly unique and they are arrogant and ignorant to assume that they are more pious than others because of certain ideologies and practices, e. g., Jews were mistaken to claim that they alone were given the doctrine of heaven, circumcision, and abstinence from pigs. Celsus (according to Origen) claimed that it does not matter what name people call their god—Zeus, Zen, Adonai, Amoun, Papaius, or Sabaoth. Jews were deceived by Moses' sorcery and do not, in fact, know the great God.<sup>19</sup>

Origen responded to these charges by saying that any student of the Jews would admire no other people more, for they were sexually restrained and not given to display. Origen and other Christians adopted and even intensified Jewish mixing/pollution language, which is relatively rare in the Jewish Scriptures. As Gentiles themselves, they seemed particularly concerned to adopt rituals and practices that marked their break with pagan Gentiles. Origen affirmed that Jews were right to avoid mixing with polluted and impious peoples.

Origen's reference to Ex. 4:24-26 appears when he refuted Celsus' view that Jewish circumcision represents Jewish ignorance and arrogance (HO 2). Origen pointed out that Jews recognized that Arabs, Egyptians, and Colchians practiced circumcision, but that it is the timing of Jewish circumcision—the eighth day after birth—that is unique to the Jews (Gen. 17:2-23; Gen. 21:4). Origen comprehended a reason for the original command of circumcision by means of Ex. 4:24-26, for it provides insight into God's purposes for requiring circumcision to Abraham. He said that Ex. 4:24-26 shows that circumcision could thwart the powers of a threatening angel over uncircumcised Jews.<sup>20</sup> He argued that it was for this reason the command was given to Abraham in the first place. He said that Zipporah's circumcised her son after she learned the protection afforded by circumcision against a hostile *angel's* attack ( Ex. 4:25).

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<sup>18</sup>Heine, *Origen*, 1-43; Chadwick, xiv-xv.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, 297.

<sup>20</sup>Origen specifies the Jewish nation, but he later indicates that "*people who were not circumcised, and generally over all who worship only the Creator*" were also at risk. *BT* depicts two adversarial angels attacking Moses and names them, *Af and Hemah*: anger and wrath.

Thus Origen combined the LXX version of 4:25-26, which says “angel,” with that of the Hebrew version for he claims that Zipporah knew that the blood of circumcision “checked” (LXX: staunched/ stopped) the power of the angel. This is why she said to Moses, “A bloody husband art thou to me.” Thus Moses was called “bloody husband” because circumcision blood thwarts angels who attack them. The son’s circumcision *blood* saved Moses’ life. Similar interpretations appear in the Targums and other versions.<sup>21</sup> For the rabbis, the *commandment* of circumcision saved or the child.<sup>22</sup>

Origen then asserted that once Jesus (whom Origen assumed to have had some sort of existence before he assumed a human body) had been circumcised, he abolished this angel’s power over (all) uncircumcised people. Origen interpreted Galatians 5:2 as referring not to the passion or resurrection of Christ, but to Jesus’ circumcision on his eighth day of embodied life. In *Contra Celsum*, Origen wove together allusions to Gen. 17 and Ex. 4:24-26 with his quote of Gal. 5:2 to maintain that circumcision had been effective against an adversarial angel, whose hostility prompted the command for it. Now, however, circumcision is redundant, not because Christ’s blood had been shed through his crucifixion, but rather through his own infant circumcision. Thus, Jesus’ *circumcision* protects the uncircumcised from the powers of angry, adversarial angels and is sufficient for all males born since that day. Christ is of no benefit for the circumcised against these harmful powers, for any such threat has already been resolved through the individual’s circumcision blood. The salvation provided by Christ’s circumcision is not from sin or its consequences, but a rescue from the angel of old.

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<sup>21</sup>*Targum Onqelos*: “May my husband be given to us by the blood of this circumcision.” *Fragmentary Targum*: “My husband wished to circumcise, but his father-in-law did not permit him. Now may the blood of this circumcision atone for the guilt of my husband.” *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan*: “My husband wished to circumcise, but his father-in-law prevented him. Now may the blood of this circumcision atone for my husband.” The Ethiopic version: “May the blood of the circumcision of my son be in his place,” the Armenian text: “Behold the blood of the circumcision of my son.”

<sup>22</sup>In the *Mekilta*, and *b. Ned.*, the *commandment* of circumcision saved Moses (R. Eleazar, R. Judah, R. Yose, and R. Joshu b. Karha) or the child (R. Simeon b. Gamaliel). In *y. Ned.* 3.9, there is a dispute over the victim based on the referent for *hatan*. In *b. Ned.*, according to R. Simeon b. Gamaliel, two angels swallowed Moses. In some versions, *Satan* sought to kill the child.

**Gregory of Nyssa.** Gregory, bishop of the see of Nyssa, one of the “Cappadocian Fathers,” was an exegete in the Alexandrian tradition to which Origen also belonged. He was born in 335 C.E., over eighty years after Origen had died, and shortly before the death of Constantine. Gregory is known for his involvement in establishing Trinitarian orthodoxy at the second ecumenical council at Constantinople in 381, and successfully battled Arianism, leading to his reputation as a master of Christian doctrine.<sup>23</sup>

Gregory had no formal training in pagan education, but found certain aspects of it to be beneficial for a person’s progress, (those with which he agreed), but compared the “alien” themes to the foreskin removed by circumcision, as we shall see.<sup>24</sup> For Gregory, whose exegesis bears similarities to the allegories of Origen and Philo, Zipporah, the literal wife of Moses, “appeased” the angel who threatened death.

In Gregory’s *Life of Moses*, he interpreted Moses and Zipporah’s story first on the literal level (Book 1 *The Life of Moses or Concerning Perfection in Virtue*) and then on the figurative level (Book 2 *Contemplation on the Life of Moses*).<sup>25</sup> The former is of the genre, “rewritten Bible,” while the latter is allegorical interpretation of his version of Moses’ story, in which Gregory seeks to define the spiritual meaning of the Jewish Scriptures. Naturally, Book 1, his *historia*, serves his subsequent allegorical interpre-

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<sup>23</sup>Malherbe, *The Life of Moses*, xi-xvi, 1-4. Texts for Gregory of Nyssa’s works include PG 44 and Jean Daniélou, *Grégoire de Nysse, La vie de Moïse Sources Chrétiennes* 1 bis. (Paris, 1955). Gregory is clearly indebted to Plato and Philo. See George S. Bebis, “Gregory of Nyssa’s ‘De vita Moysis’: A Philosophical and Theological Analysis,” *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 12 (1967): 369-393 and Jean Daniélou, *Platonisme et Théologie Mystique* (Paris: Theologie 2, 1944).

<sup>24</sup> Gregory uses other images for pagan learning: “always in labor but never giving birth; it never comes to the knowledge of God” (Book 2, 17). However, he also considers the ark that saved Moses to symbolize education is different disciplines (2.7) and that God commanded one to acquire the learning of the Egyptians (2.15). Gregory is clearly indebted to Plato and Philo.

<sup>25</sup> Philo before him interpreted Zipporah both as the literal wife of Moses (*Vita Moses*) and as the prophetic nature, as well as wisdom, herself (his allegorical works). Through her, Moses acquired received beneficial offspring. Gregory follows a similar pattern—Book 1 after *Vita Moses* and Book 2 after Philo’s allegorical works modified in the service of Gregory’s Christian interests.

tation in Book 2, his *theoria*, as we shall see in the case of circumcision and Zipporah.<sup>26</sup>

Notice the *italics* in his passage from Book 1 (*The Life of Moses or Concerning Perfection in Virtue*), where Gregory reiterated the Ex.us account of Moses' flight to Midian, marriage to Zipporah, and their journey to Egypt.<sup>27</sup> They point out the solitary aspect of Moses' life, both before and after his marriage, which are innovations of Gregory and of particular interest to this study.

Gregory's Moses left his Egyptian household to live with his natural mother. While living with his Hebrew family, he became an arbiter between "brothers" after killing an Egyptian who was fighting with a Hebrew. When he was rebuffed by the Hebrew "in the wrong, Moses withdrew to the solitary, philosophical life."<sup>28</sup> Although Gregory skips Moses' flight to Midian encountering the priest, he follows the Hebrew text to affirm that Moses became the son-in-law of "a foreigner." Moses was permitted by his discerning father-in-law to live as he wished—alone.<sup>29</sup> Although Gregory referred later to Moses' sons, he did not seem to allow for the possibility that Moses' new wife lived with him, both of them separated from the marketplace. Gregory himself had been married, but withdrew to a monastery and became a well-known advocate of chastity and the solitary or monastic life.<sup>30</sup> Nonetheless, Zipporah and the sons she produced served his allegorical interests.

1.20. Moses at the bush is dazzled by the light in his eyes and his ears.] "The voice from the light forbade him to approach *the*

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<sup>26</sup>All schools of interpretation used *historia* for the literal wording or an actual event. Gregory and others in the Alexandrian tradition used the term for a simple account of "facts" or "historical narration," and also for all types of literature. Gregory and the Alexandrians used *theoria* synonymously with *allegoria*, the method by which one gains insight into deeper meaning beyond the literal, i.e., "the spiritual meaning."

<sup>27</sup>See Appendix 3. Gregory of Nyssa *Life of Moses* SC 1:18-19.

<sup>28</sup>*Life of Moses* SC 1:18-19 (Malherbe, 34).

<sup>29</sup>*Life* SC 1:19-22 (Malherbe, 34-5).

<sup>30</sup>See especially his *De virginitate* 5, 12-13 (SC 119:398-430) and *De hominis opificio* (PG 46.12-160). In *De virg.* 5.1-2, Gregory speaks of virginity as "divination" and participation in God's uncorrupted nature. "Virginity enjoys communion with the whole celestial nature; since it is free from passion, it is always present to the powers above" (see Boniface Ramsey, *Beginning to Read the Fathers* [New York: Paulist Press, 1985], 142).

*mountain* burdened with *lifeless sandals*. He removed the sandals from his feet, and so stood on that ground on which the divine light was shining.<sup>31</sup>

Gregory associated Moses' lifeless sandals with circumcision and garments of skin, which he found to be symbolic of the life of transgression from paradise (Gen 3.21). "Circumcision means the casting off of the dead skins which we put on when we had been stripped of the supernatural life after the transgression."<sup>32</sup>

1.22. Moses went down to Egypt and he took with him his *foreign wife* and the children she had borne him. Scripture says that an angel encountered him and threatened death. His wife *appeased* the angel by the *blood* of the child's circumcision.

Although the concept of appeasement underlies the references to circumcision's blood in the LXX and Targums, the term is an innovation.

In his Book 2, *Contemplation on the Life of Moses*, Gregory determined the spiritual significance of this passage for the pilgrim progressing toward perfection. Moses' foreign wife stands for classical learning whose offspring can be purified by circumcising "anything that is hurtful or impure," as we see below in his allegorical interpretation of this passage.

2.37. The *foreign wife* will follow him, for there are certain things derived from profane education that should not be rejected when we propose to give birth to virtue. Indeed moral and natural philosophy may become at certain times a comrade, friend, and companion of life to the higher way, provided that the offspring of this union introduce nothing of a *foreign defilement*.<sup>33</sup>

Zipporah's accompaniment of Moses on his return to Egypt was thus compared to the value of a profane education in producing virtue and may aid in one's progress—*ascent*—to the life of perfection in virtue.

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<sup>31</sup>*Life* SC 1:20-22 (Malherbe, 34-5).

<sup>32</sup>*De beat.* 8, PL 44. 1292 b (trans. from *Ancient Christian Writers* 18: 166; ed. J. Quasten and J. C. Plümpe; Westminster, Md., 1946). See Malherbe, *The Life of Moses*, 160, n. 29 where he documents Gregory's use of the image of skins in developing an anthropology.

<sup>33</sup>For the following sections from *Life* SC 2:37-42, see Malherbe, 62-64.

There is always the possibility, however, that something defiling may be transmitted through the foreign companion.<sup>34</sup>

2.38. Since his son had not been circumcised so as *to cut off completely everything hurtful and impure*, the angel who met them brought the fear of death. His wife *appeased* the angel when she presented her offspring as *pure by completely removing that mark by which the foreigner was known*.

The angel came to bring the fear of death on account of the hurtful and impure taint or defilement, symbolized by the foreskin, found in the offspring of the man and his pagan companion. This angel prompted the foreign wife's circumcision of her son, which represents the removal of foreign impurities, aspects of pagan learning that are untenable to him.

Gregory's interpretation of foreskin as the mark of the foreigner is consistent, on the literal level, with an implication of traditional Jewish expressions about circumcision. All male infants born to Israelite/Jewish parents are foreigners unless and until circumcised.<sup>35</sup> The foreign wife produced a son tainted with defiling aspects of her own foreignness, just as each male is born uncircumcised. The fact that insider wives also produce uncircumcised sons is beside Gregory's point that the flawed aspects of pagan learning can be fully removed to create a purged and pure contribution to progress in perfection.

2.39. There is something fleshly and uncircumcised in what is taught by philosophy's generative faculty; when that has been completely removed, there remains the pure Israelite race.

Zipporah's circumcised son symbolizes that which edifies and nurtures one's ascent to perfection.<sup>36</sup> Moses' preparations for and subsequent

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<sup>34</sup>Recall that Origen held the similar view that pagan education could be valuable for winning converts and interpreted the patriarchs' foreign wives as representing classical learning. However, Origen's Zipporah was not such a wife. Philo's "Agar" as noted above, represented pagan education, but his Zipporah, though recognized to be Midianite, represented the prophetic nature.

<sup>35</sup>"Foreskinned males will be cut-off from their people" (Gen. 17:14).

<sup>36</sup>Just as the offspring of pagan education must be circumcised of all that is alien and fleshly, so also must the "respectability" and "outward pursuits" of life be cleansed before one ascends the mountain to be seen by God. This is his interpretation of Ex. 19. Integrity, or the purity of both the inward and outward life, is required in order to attain "the knowledge of God," a "mountain steep indeed and difficult to climb—the majority of people scarcely reach its base" (Book

ascent on Sinai (Ex. 19) provided for Gregory occasion to describe the spiritual meaning of cleansing oneself from the “defilements” and “pollutions” of intercourse and passion in order to be “initiated, cleansed of every emotion and bodily concern.” He wrote in his *historia* that only men who were “purified from every pollution” were allowed to approach the mountain (Book 1.42). Furthermore, the angel of destruction that once came to endanger the pilgrim/student is transformed into an angel of mercy that rejoices in the good that remains when pagan learning (Zipporah’s son) has been shorn of defective ideas about the soul and about the Creator etc.

No other exegete effected such a transformation of the attacker! The early interpretive literature shows a wide range of views of the identity of the attacker in Ex. 4:24-26: the LORD in the primary text, an angel of the LORD in the LXX (and *Tg. Onq.*, *Tg. Ps.-J.*) an angel from before the LORD (*Tg. Neof.*) Prince Mastema and the Destroyer in *Jubilees* (and *Tg. Neof.*, *Frag. Tg.*), the angel of death (*Tg. Neof.*, *Frag. Tg.*), and the destroying angel (*Tg. Ps.-J.*).<sup>37</sup>

At this point, we shall turn to Augustine’s deployment of Ex. 4:24-26 to explain how circumcision was replaced by *infant* baptism and how Christ’s coming and his cross served to render traditional Jewish circumcision void.

**Augustine.** Augustine (354-430 C.E.), the most influential of the Church Fathers, was the Bishop of Hippo for thirty-five years and wrote extensively on theology and Christian community. In certain writings, he appears under compulsion to support marriage and has thus been called the “best known defender of Christian marriage against ascetic onslaughts of both Manicheans and Catholics such as Jerome.”<sup>38</sup> However, his writings reveal his conviction that monastic continence is compulsory

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2.158). Gregory did not see the achievement of perfection as possible, but found perfection in eternal progress. He followed both Origen and Philo in viewing the spiritual life as progress, but went further to claim there is no boundary or limit to perfection—it is growth in goodness. Thus, the image of Moses’ mountain is especially useful to him. See SC 1:5-10 (Malherbe, 30-31); SC 2:219-248, esp. 236-242, (Malherbe, 11-119).

<sup>37</sup>A more elaborate “angelology” is provided in regards to his interpretation of Aaron’s role in the Exodus story in Book 2.45-53 (Malherbe, 65-66).

<sup>38</sup>Clark, *Reading Renunciation*, 195. He wrote *On the Good of Marriage* (CSEL 41) around 401, probably in response to Jerome and Jovinian’s conflict and as a mediating treatise (Clark, 269).

for clergy and almost the only way to escape immorality. He uses Zipporah's story in Ex. 4:24-26 to explain how circumcision was replaced by *infant* baptism and how Christ's coming and his cross served to render traditional Jewish circumcision void (*De baptismo contra Donatistas*, (400 C.E.), and *Letter 23*).<sup>39</sup>

In Augustine's treatise supporting infant baptism, he claimed that infant circumcision was instituted, not only in Genesis 17, but also in Ex. 4:24-26. These Scriptures are the divine authority that sanctions infant baptism. Both of these texts show circumcision to have been a *sacrament* of "great avail" that counted for the infant as righteousness. Both, he argued, indicate that infant baptism, like circumcision, is a seal of faith that leads to salvation based on the individual's mature volition and belief.<sup>40</sup> Augustine adduced the circumcision of Zipporah's "infant" son to prove that adults who act upon their children's bodies thereby lead them to faith and salvation. His unnamed circumciser is the model for all such worthy parents and guardians. Thus, Augustine's interpretation contrasts to that of Tertullian, who denigrated circumcision because Zipporah—not Moses—performed it. Just as circumcision was an outward sign performed by adults upon the eighth day of a boy's life, so functions the sacrament of baptism performed on any infant by clergy at the behest of parents.

In Augustine's understanding of Ex. 4:24-26, the angel made it apparent that the child should be circumcised. This message was communicated by the "manifest peril" and not in a less innocuous manner. Augustine did not say whose life was in peril, only that the danger of death—to someone—was removed once the child was circumcised. As with the other interpreters that we have examined, Augustine claimed that an angel, not the LORD threatened Moses' family on their way to Egypt. In any case, the child's unnamed mother marked him for righteousness and salvation that meant no less because she, not Moses, cut the foreskin. Like the rabbis, Augustine underscored the impact of *circumcision* while obscuring the *circumciser*, by using the passive tense.

For Augustine, eighth day circumcision by Jews is the rite that demonstrates that infant baptism is a necessary and effective component

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<sup>39</sup>He alluded also subtly to the incident in *On the Grace of Christ and Original Sin* where he gives the knife and the foreskin an allegorical interpretation. "Christ was the rock whence was formed the stony blade for the circumcision, and the flesh of the foreskin was the body of sin (NPNF<sup>1</sup> 5:250).

<sup>40</sup>*De baptismo contra Donatistas* dates from c. 400 C.E.; the English translation used here is that by J. R. King (NPNF<sup>1</sup> 4:411-514).

of the salvation process. Zipporah's son's surgery was a sign leading to salvation, although it is not the same as belief. In his "Reply to Faustus the Manichaen," he directly claims that circumcision was *replaced* by baptism.

Circumcision was the type of the removal of our fleshly nature, which was fulfilled in the resurrection of Christ, and which the sacrament of baptism teaches us to look forward to in our own resurrection. The sacrament of the new life is not wholly discontinued, for our resurrection from the dead is still to come; but this sacrament has been improved by the substitution of baptism for circumcision, because now a pattern of the eternal life which is to come is afforded us in the resurrection of Christ, whereas formerly there was nothing of the kind.<sup>41</sup>

In Augustine's *Letter 23*, he claimed that circumcision's power has been rendered void, not by Jesus' circumcision, as Origen maintained, but by "the coming of the Lord" and "the cross." He referred again to the peril afforded by the angel, and the power of circumcision to avert this hazard, but this time he clarifies that the danger is directed against *the son* of Moses and Zipporah. He directly referred to the child's mother as his circumciser, although she is still unnamed. He wrote:

If I had been a Jew in the times of the ancient people, when there was nothing better to be, I would surely have accepted circumcision. That "seal of the justice of faith" (Rom. 4:11), had so much power at that time, before it was rendered void by the coming of the Lord, that the angel would have strangled the infant son of Moses if his mother had not taken up a stone and circumcised the child and thus by this sacrament warded off his imminent destruction. This sacrament even tamed the river Jordan and reduced it to a brook (Joshua 5:3-5). The Lord himself received this sacrament after birth, although on the cross he made it void.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup>"Reply to Faustus," 19.9 (CSEL 25:507), and *NPNF*<sup>1</sup> 14: 242-243. Earlier exegetes saw circumcision as the forerunner of baptism (e.g., Justin Martyr's *Dialogue with Trypho* 19, 114). Also in "Reply to Faustus," Augustine says the physical circumcision symbolizes circumcision of the heart (6.3 CSEL 25:286).

<sup>42</sup>*Fathers of the Church: A New Translation*, vol. 12, 61-62. Augustine is not alone in claiming that Christ replaced circumcision with his own bloody sacrifice. Ambrose wrote in the same context: "who would use a needle (circumcision) in a battle while armed with stronger weapons (baptism)?" He was one of the Fathers who saw in spiritual circumcision a trope for celibacy. Circumcision of desire is like circumcision of the foreskin and he links it to becoming a eunuch for the Kingdom of Heaven (Matt 19.12). See Ambrose, *Ep.* 69, 12.26 (CSEL 82:2, 184, 191-192).

Here Augustine clearly credited Zipporah with warding off her son's "imminent destruction" by circumcising him. Throughout this selection, Augustine exalted circumcision in a manner that reminds us of the rabbis of the Midrash and Talmuds who wrote about the activity of an adversarial angel who was submissive to the purposes of the LORD. Since the LORD required circumcision, an angel from the LORD acted to enforce it.

Although, like other Christians, Augustine viewed circumcision as now obsolete, he recognized that Jesus himself was circumcised and he even calls it a sacrament. He could give it no greater commendation than by saying he would have gladly received it as a seal of faith. Recall that Origen conversely implied that the angel was not acting on God's behalf, but that God commanded circumcision in order to protect the Jews from this "hostile" angel, who would desist destroying at the sight of circumcision.<sup>43</sup>

### Conclusion

We have seen that Augustine paired Zipporah's circumcision of her son to Joshua's circumcision of the generation entering Canaan. This reminds us how rarely the circumciser is named and depicted as actively performing the circumcision. Only Abraham, Zipporah, and Joshua are named as circumcisers in the Hebrew Bible. In all other cases, circumcise (*lwm*) is used in the passive sense, e.g. the Shechemites were circumcised (*lwmy*, Gen 34:24), the circumcised male may eat of the Passover (*wt*) *htlmw*, Ex. 12:44), the male infant shall be circumcised (*lwmy*, Lev. 12:3) etc.<sup>44</sup> Although "cut off" (*trk*) is not used for circumcision in any passage besides Ex. 4:25, I do not find any significance in the different term used for Zipporah's circumcising (*trk*). The context emphasizes that this was indeed a circumcision (*tlwm*, Ex. 4:26), and representative of the power of circumcision in general. The term *trk* is associated with circumcision when the penalty for "foreskinned" males is given: they shall be "cut off" from their people (Gen. 17:14).

Just as in the LXX and all subsequent Jewish versions, Christian interpretations of this passage depict a powerful angel inciting Zipporah's apotropaic circumcision—not the LORD (MT). This angel was an adversary who imperiled the life of Moses (Origen) or his son (Augustine) until the son was circumcised. Gregory's Zipporah "appeased" the angry

<sup>43</sup>This is similar to that of the modern scholars who find an ancient tradition about a demon or foreign deity, underlying the attack story.

<sup>44</sup>In the New Testament (Acts 16:3), it is reported that Paul circumcised Timothy.

angel by drawing the *blood* of the circumcision. This recalls the LXX, the Targums, and other ancient Jewish versions that transformed the “bloody husband” formula (produced by Zipporah in the Hebrew of Ex. 4:24-26) to a “guilty husband” motif. In these translations, she appealed to her son’s foreskin blood on behalf of her husband, as atonement for some sin on the part of Moses.

All interpreters agreed that the circumcision was apotropaic. Nonetheless, their discussions show that they differed concerning which features of the circumcision by Zipporah thwarted the deadly attack: the performance of the commandment or the blood. They also differed concerning circumcision’s continued efficacy. For the Jews, it became increasingly important, the greatest of all commands. For Christians prone to allegory, circumcision represented chastity, while foreskin symbolized marriage or pagan excess. Although the actual practice of circumcision was replaced by baptism in Augustine’s writings, he emphasized its importance for a time—it had functioned for Jews as baptism functioned for Christians. As noted in the introduction, any promotion of baptism because females and males can both submit to it is absent.

The Jewish and Christian responses to the work and words of Zipporah in Exodus demonstrate the questions raised by her story. Was Moses guilty for taking a foreign wife or was this acceptable but he sinned by neglecting to circumcise his son? Was Moses’ foreign marriage directly or indirectly *the reason* he neglected to circumcise his son and hence the cause for the LORD/angel’s attack on the way to Egypt? Some Jews and Wesley affirmed this; the Midianite alliance was associated with Moses’ neglect to circumcise his son. The biblical text does not do this; instead it shows that Zipporah knew what to do, did it quickly, and recognized that she was thereby legally allied to her Moses in a manner reserved for male-male alliances. She is the only circumciser to voice her interpretation of her action, underscored by the narrator’s repeating of her explanation: . . . “she said, ‘For you are my husband (legal relation) of blood!’ And he withdrew from him. It was then she said, ‘A husband of blood’ on account of the circumcision.”<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup>Recall that Wesley claimed that her pronouncement was the reason she was sent back to her father, giving Moses credit for the idea that she take action and circumcise their son: “Zipporah cannot forget, but will unreasonably call Moses a bloody husband, because he obliged her to circumcise the child; and upon this occasion, (it is probable) he sent them back to his father-in-law, that they might not create him any farther uneasiness.” John Wesley, *Notes on the Second Book of Moses Called Exodus*. Cited July 12, 2012. Online: <http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/john-wesleys-notes-on-the-bible>.

The narrative thread of the Hebrew Bible includes outsider women who entered God's story because of their faith, defined as obedience and demonstrated by shrewd actions and confessions of faith. The early Jewish and Christian responses to these stories show how they were troubled by their implications, as Wesley was, but we should not be. They are precedent for our own practice and doctrines, and they encourage all of God's people to pattern their lives after women like Zipporah who were doubly marginal to Israel—women and foreign. Like them, we are to preserve life (Tamar, Gen. 38), be in awe of God's power (Rahab, Josh. 2), demonstrate loyalty (Ruth), and use our wits and keep the commands of God (Zipporah). And we are to embrace those whom our cultures define or treat as outsiders.

# WRESTLING WITH MARDUK: OLD TESTAMENT PARALLELS AND PREVENIENT GRACE

by

Matthew Richard Schlimm

In the mid-1990s I was an undergraduate student in a Christian college enrolled in the course “Introduction to the Old Testament.” As an aspiring Christian minister, I looked forward to studying the Bible in an academic setting. Unfortunately, my excitement quickly turned to anxiety. The course’s instructor was trained at Johns Hopkins University, which was (and continues to be) known for its strengths in examining the ancient Near East. My instructor found it fascinating to describe the close parallels between the Old Testament and other ancient Near Eastern texts.

While these parallels fascinated my professor, I was distressed. I had never heard of any of these parallels previously. Like many Christians, I believed there was one God and that this one God had revealed the divine self in unique ways in the Bible. My views of the uniqueness of the Bible were called into question as I learned names like Ra, Marduk, and Hammurabi. My professor stressed that biblical texts often challenged other ancient Near Eastern texts, but it was clear that such challenges were not always present. I was left wondering why God’s holy word would at times make the same points as pagan myths.

## Faith in Crisis

Questions abounded. Why in the *Enuma Elish* is the sequence of creation so similar to Genesis 1—a movement from chaos to order that takes place with the creation of the firmament, then of luminaries, then of humanity, all before divine rest?<sup>1</sup> Why does the *Gilgamesh Epic*, so much like Genesis, portray humanity’s one shot at immortality as thwarted by a serpent?<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>“The Creation Epic,” 31-39, in James B. Pritchard, ed., *The Ancient Near East: Volume I, An Anthology of Texts and Pictures* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958). See esp. Tablet IV, lines 136-140 (firmament); Tablet V, lines 1-13 (luminaries); Tablet VI, lines 1-10, 33 (humanity); Tablet VI, lines 34-36 (rest/freedom from work and service).

Why do the stories of Atrahasis and Gilgamesh parallel the Genesis flood narrative, not only on the macro-level of the basic story line, but also on the micro-level of various details, such as the ark's construction?<sup>3</sup> Why does the biblical "Book of the Covenant" (Exod. 20:22–23:19) appear, at least by modern standards, to commit plagiarism by borrowing ideas, if not language, from the Code of Hammurabi?<sup>4</sup> These questions and others deeply troubled me.

Rightly or wrongly, I was interested in having a rational defense of my faith. I thought, to use Jon Levenson's characterization, that "if Israel can be shown to be radically discontinuous with her environment, then the likelihood is increased that her identity is the result of supernatural intervention, just as the Bible says (e.g., Gen. 12:1-3)."<sup>5</sup> When I learned that Israel was not as unique as I had hoped, the Bible seemed to be less the result of God's supernatural intervention and more a natural evolution in the history of religions. I found myself wondering if my faith was a mere accident of history.

Even in college, I knew that scholars debate the extent to which "Old Testament parallels" actually parallel the Bible. I also knew that there is debate over whether the Bible is directly dependent upon these sources or whether both the Bible and ancient Near Eastern literature echo popular cultural sentiments. I knew, furthermore, that biblical authors had not merely borrowed cultural ideas but transformed them in a variety of ways.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, my sense of the Bible being a truly *special* type of revelation was called into question.

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<sup>2</sup>"The Epic of Gilgamesh," 40-75, in Pritchard, ed., *The Ancient Near East*. See esp. Tablet XI, lines 277-292.

<sup>3</sup>Note, for example, the use of pitch and bitumen in Gen. 6:14; in "The Epic of Gilgamesh," esp. Tablet XI, line 65; and in Benjamin R. Foster, "Atra-hasis (1.130)," 1:450-453 in William W. Hallo, ed., *The Context of Scripture* (3 vols.: Leiden: Brill, 2003), esp. ii 51.

<sup>4</sup>"The Code of Hammurabi," 138-167, in Pritchard, ed., *The Ancient Near East*. Compare Article 251 with Exod. 21:28-29; Articles 196-197 with Exod. 21:22-25; Article 107 with Exod. 22:7-9; Article 8 with Exod. 22:1, 4; Article 21 with Exod. 22:2-3; and Article 195 with Exod. 21:15. Frank S. Frick, *A Journey through the Hebrew Scriptures* (2nd ed.; Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning, 2003), 224-226, nicely makes these comparisons.

<sup>5</sup>Jon D. Levenson, *Sinai and Zion: An Entry into the Jewish Bible* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1985), 11.

<sup>6</sup>A very useful essay that examines many of these issues is Brent A. Strawn, "Comparative Approaches: History, Theory, and the Image of God," 117-142, in

I experienced a crisis of faith. Peter Enns's book *Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament* nicely summarizes the types of questions I wrestled with in those days. After reviewing several ancient Near Eastern parallels, he asks:

1. Does the Bible, particularly Genesis, report historical fact, or is it just a bunch of stories culled from other ancient cultures?
2. What does it mean for other cultures to have an influence on the Bible that we believe is revealed by God? Can we say that the Bible is unique or special? If the Bible is such a "culturally conditioned" product, what possible relevance can it have for us today?
3. Does this mean that the history of the church, which carried on for many centuries before Old Testament parallels came to light, was wrong in how it thought about its Bible? . . .

There are many ways of asking these questions, but they all boil down to this: *Is the Bible still the word of God?*<sup>7</sup>

Long before I read Enns's book, I had these types of questions on my mind.

In retrospect, I see that a number of my personal questions reflected broader debates within the guild. Many earlier scholars like Walther Eichrodt found it important to stress the unique nature of Israel's faith.<sup>8</sup> It

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*Method Matters* (eds. Joel M. LeMon and Kent Harold Richards; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009). The same author has also written a piece on how to teach about Old Testament parallels in a way that tends not to threaten students' beliefs in the authority of scripture: Steve Delamarter, et al., "Technology, Pedagogy, and Transformation in Theological Education: Five Case Studies," *Teaching Theology and Religion* 10:1 (2007): 64-79, esp. 66-69.

<sup>7</sup>Peter Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2005), 38-39.

<sup>8</sup>Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament* (trans. J. A. Baker; 2 vols.; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1961-1967). To cite several examples, Eichrodt argues that Israel is unique with regard to history (1:41; 2:50), sacrifice (1:43, 157, 166), law (1:71, 74, 83; 2:321), nature festivals (1:121), holiness (1:271, 276), its founder (1:295), seers (1:297), omens (1:302), prophets (1:319), mythical and eschatological elements (1:494-496), theophany (2:16), Spirit (2:68), wisdom (2:82), cosmology (2:96), creation (2:97, 108, 113, 116, 156, 158), God's dwelling place (2:190), the Underworld (2:210), covenant (2:265), and marriage (2:339). Comments like the following are typical: "nothing comparable can be observed in the history of any other civilized people" (*ibid.*, 1:222). Even where there are similarities between Old Testament religion and other ancient Near Eastern religions, Eichrodt stresses the distinctiveness of the former, making comments like the following: "But in this context more than in any other it is necessary to keep in mind the proverb, 'The same thing done by two different people is not the same thing'" (*ibid.*, 1:134; see also 1:275-276).

is clear that for Eichrodt and others, Israel's uniqueness explains why the Old Testament should receive special standing in comparison with other literature. A number of more recent scholars, however, have questioned those like Eichrodt. As Erhard Gerstenberger puts it when examining the Ten Commandments:

Here too we cannot discover anything that is tremendously unique or merely Yahwistic. In fact all the demands in the first table of the Decalogue are quite compatible with the religious rules of the ancient Near East or analogous to them. Nothing in the worship of Yahweh in ancient Israel and the early Jewish community falls out of the frame.<sup>9</sup>

With assessments such as this one, it can be difficult to say why the Bible should receive special standing.

### Sorting Out a Solution

At roughly the same time I took my undergraduate course "Introduction to the Old Testament," I also took "Introduction to Christian Theology." This class had a strong Wesleyan focus. As a Methodist, I was proud that John Wesley considered himself a "man of one book." With envy, I read Wesley's words, "O give me that book! At any price, give me the book of God! I have it: Here is knowledge enough for me."<sup>10</sup> I longed to make that affirmation with Wesley. However, I wondered whether I could say that the Bible was "knowledge enough for me" when biblical writers relied on extra-biblical sources for their knowledge. Although I wouldn't have admitted it at the time, I identified less with that statement of Wesley's and more with the journal entry in March, 1738, when Wesley confesses to Peter Böhler that he does not know how he can preach to others when he does not have faith himself.<sup>11</sup>

Amid my questions and doubts, I discovered a piece of Wesley's thinking that helped me then and continues to help me now. I learned of

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<sup>9</sup>Erhard S. Gerstenberger, *Theologies in the Old Testament*, trans. John Bowden (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 266.

<sup>10</sup>John Wesley, "Preface," in *Sermons*, 4 vols., ed. Albert C. Outler, in *The Works of John Wesley*, Bicentennial Edition, 34 vols. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1976- ), 1:105 (§5).

<sup>11</sup>John Wesley, *Journals and Diaries*, 6 vols., eds. W. Reginald Ward and Richard P. Heitzenrater, in *The Works of John Wesley*, Bicentennial Edition, 34 vols.; (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1976- ), 18:228 (March 4, 1738).

*prevenient grace*. Wesley himself called it “preventing grace,” which in his time meant “preceding grace.”<sup>12</sup> This “grace that goes before” is how people experience God before justification. In Wesley’s mind, the way of salvation was a journey, not a pit stop. As Thomas Langford explains, “There was for Wesley an ‘order of salvation,’ a dynamic movement of the Christian life from its inception to its fulfillment. Moving from conscience to conviction of sin, to repentance, to justification, to regeneration, to sanctification, to glorification, there is a pattern of gracious development.”<sup>13</sup>

Against the backdrop of this order of salvation, prevenient grace is God’s loving activity toward a person that takes place prior to justification. As Randy Maddox explains, prevenient grace serves several functions:

In terms of power, Prevenient Grace effects a partial restoring of our sin-corrupted faculties, sufficient that we might sense our need and God’s offer of salvation, and respond to that offer. To begin with, there is some restoration of our understanding. Wesley mentioned two distinct aspects in this regard. First is a renewed possibility of basic knowledge of “divine things” (e.g., God’s existence and nature, and the possibility of future reward or punishment). The second aspect is a rudimentary discernment of the difference between moral good and evil.<sup>14</sup>

Maddox goes on to say that, in Wesley’s view, prevenient grace also helps restore human liberty and will, so that we can respond to God’s grace by displaying “at least nascent virtuous tempers and actions.”<sup>15</sup> So, although prevenient grace is not the fullness of grace found with justifying or sanctifying grace, it is real and significant. It reveals a measure of who God is and the moral fabric of the world. Wesley believed that this grace is available to all of humanity, a means by which God prevents the world from collapsing into evil and chaos.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Wesley employs a sense of the term “prevent” that is now obsolete, but which the *Oxford English Dictionary* (online) characterizes as “To act before or more quickly than (a person or agent); to anticipate in action; to act in advance of.”

<sup>13</sup>Thomas A. Langford, *Practical Divinity: Theology in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Vol. 1; 2nd ed.; Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), 30.

<sup>14</sup>Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley’s Practical Theology* (Nashville: Kingswood, 1994), 87-88.

<sup>15</sup> *bid.*

<sup>16</sup>For other useful discussions of prevenient grace, see Kenneth J. Collins, *The Scripture Way of Salvation: The Heart of John Wesley’s Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), ch. 2; Charles Allen Rogers, “The Concept of Prevenient Grace in the Theology of John Wesley,” Ph.D. Thesis, Duke University, 1967, esp. 159-203.

As I learned about Wesley's doctrine of prevenient grace, I began to wonder if maybe these ancient Near Eastern parallels were instances where God had revealed the divine self to those in other religions through this form of grace. Obviously, most extrabiblical parallels were not discovered or published in the eighteenth century, and so Wesley did not respond directly to the problems I have described. Nevertheless, I suspected then and am increasingly convinced that Wesley's thinking provides resources that can be used constructively to arrive at a better theological understanding of Old Testament parallels.

In what follows, I build on a point made by Michael Lodahl, arguing that ancient Near Eastern parallels "embody, or more precisely textualize, an important aspect of what we mean when we speak of prevenient grace."<sup>17</sup> I argue that there are four parts of Wesley's doctrine of prevenient grace that are especially relevant for thinking about Old Testament parallels.

### Prevenient Grace and OT Parallels

First, this doctrine of prevenient grace suggests that we see the religions of the ancient Near East less as utterly depraved forms of heathenism and more as forms of religion that reflect, however imperfectly, God's grace. Repeatedly, Wesley stressed that prevenient grace is available to *all*. As he puts it in a letter to his brother written late in life, "No man living is without some preventing grace."<sup>18</sup> Wesley makes the same point on many other occasions.<sup>19</sup> In his sermon "The Heavenly Treasure in Earthly Ves-

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<sup>17</sup>Michael Lodahl, *God of Nature and of Grace: Reading the World in a Wesleyan Way* (Kingswood Books; Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 2003), 38. Lodahl's point is quite similar to the overarching argument here. He uses the parallels between Ps. 104 and the Egyptian Hymn to the Aten as his chief example. Besides turning to alternate ancient Near Eastern texts, this essay amplifies Lodahl's argument in its exposition of the four ways Wesley's doctrine of prevenient grace provides resources for understanding these parallels.

<sup>18</sup>John Wesley, "DXXIV.—*To the Same*," in *Letters*, in *The Works of Wesley*, ed. Thomas Jackson, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 14 vols. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1978), 12:453 (November 21, 1776).

<sup>19</sup>John Wesley, Sermon 85, "On Working Out Our Own Salvation," in *Sermons*, 4 vols., ed. Albert C. Outler, in *The Works of John Wesley*, Bicentennial Edition, 34 vols. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1976- ), 3:199-209, esp. 3:199 (\$1), 3:207 (\$III.4). John Wesley, "The Principles of a Methodist," in *The Methodist Societies: History, Nature, and Design*, ed. Rupert E. Davies, in *The Works of John Wesley*, Bicentennial Edition, 34 vols. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1976- ), 9:64 (\$29).

sels,” he preaches that prevenient grace “is found in every human heart, . . . not only in all Christians, but in all Mahometans, all Pagans, yea, the vilest of savages.”<sup>20</sup> If we join Wesley in affirming that God’s prevenient grace is present among all peoples, then we should expect to see God’s grace at work among the peoples of the ancient Near East who produced biblical precursors. We need not approach these texts with the assumption that they are thoroughly at odds with the Bible.

Secondly, Wesley’s doctrine of prevenient grace is important because it provides a category for dealing with the problem of whether texts paralleling the Old Testament are divine revelation or pagan propaganda. Obviously, the church does *not* affirm that all the fullness of God is revealed in ancient Near Eastern mythology. There are no Christian canons that include the *Instruction of Ankhsheshonq*. Yet, parts of this Egyptian text sound strikingly similar to several biblical Proverbs and even parts of the New Testament.<sup>21</sup> Given these similarities, I do not think we would want to say that these Egyptian writings are entirely bereft of God’s touch. We would want, rather, to affirm that God’s revelation is present in such works *to a degree*.<sup>22</sup> Wesley believed that preve-

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<sup>20</sup> John Wesley, Sermon 129, “Heavenly Treasure in Earthen Vessels,” in *Sermons*, 4 vols., ed. Albert C. Outler, in *The Works of John Wesley*, Bicentennial Edition, 34 vols. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1976- ), 4:162-167, esp. 4:163 (§I.1).

<sup>21</sup> “The Instruction of Ankhsheshonq,” 3:159-184 in Miriam Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature* (3 vols.; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973-1980). Ankhsheshonq 7:4 reads, “Do not instruct a fool, lest he hate you” (ibid., 3:165), which is quite similar to Prov. 23:9, “Do not speak in the hearing of a fool, who will only despise the wisdom of your words” (all references are from the NRSV unless otherwise noted). Likewise, Ankhsheshonq 12:6 (“Do not do evil to a man and so cause another to do it to you” [ibid., 3:168]) is not far removed from Matt 7:12 (“In everything do to others as you would have them do to you”). On these parallels, see Victor H. Matthews and Don C. Benjamin, eds., *Old Testament Parallels: Laws and Stories from the Ancient Near East*, Revised ed. (New York: Paulist Press, 1997, 1991), 289-294.

<sup>22</sup> A key question for further reflection is, To what degree is God’s revelation present in these other works? Obviously, some works are more revelatory than others. However, can we be more specific and tease out the extent to which we can expect divine revelation outside the Bible? If ancient Near Eastern texts are true when they parallel the Bible, are they (sometimes) also true when they do not parallel scripture?

nient grace is *a degree* of God's full grace.<sup>23</sup> It is not the entirety. He stressed that prevenient grace is potent, real, and powerful, but he did not believe it was all that was needed for salvation. In his sermon "On Working Out Our Own Salvation," Wesley writes this:

Salvation begins with what is usually termed . . . *preventing grace*; including 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. 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 the things of God.<sup>24</sup>

Those who join Wesley in affirming that prevenient grace offers a *degree* of sensitivity to God can affirm that there is a *degree* of truth captured in the writings of non-biblical religions. They moreover can affirm that biblical writers built on such truths. They need not expect the Bible to be unique in every respect.

A third reason why Wesley's doctrine of prevenient grace is relevant to Old Testament parallels is that Wesley believed such grace revealed to all peoples something of God's nature. He writes, "Some great truths, as the being and attributes of God . . . were known, in some measure, to the heathen world."<sup>25</sup> In another sermon, "The Imperfection of Human

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<sup>23</sup>As Narendra Singh puts it, "Prevenient grace marks the beginning, but the beginning is not the end. It is not a full salvation, but it prepares individuals to receive full salvation" ("The Significance of Prevenient Grace in Dialogical Proclamation," *TBT Journal: A Theological and Ethical Reflection for Responsible Living* 3 (2001): 51-64, esp. 56). Wesley writes: "Yea, there may be a degree of long-suffering, of gentleness, of fidelity, meekness, temperance, (not a shadow thereof, but a real degree, by the preventing grace of God,) before we 'are accepted in the Beloved,' and, consequently, before we have a testimony of our acceptance: But it is by no means advisable to rest here; it is at the peril of our souls if we do." (John Wesley, Sermon 11, "The Witness of the Spirit, II," in *Sermons*, 4 vols., ed. Albert C. Outler, in *The Works of John Wesley*, Bicentennial Edition, 34 vols. [Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1976- ], 1:298 [§V.4].) See also Wesley, "DXXIV.—*To the Same*," 12:453 (November 21, 1776).

<sup>24</sup>Wesley, Sermon 85, "On Working Out Our Own Salvation," 3:203-204 (§II.1). Italics added.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, 3:199 (§1).

Knowledge,” Wesley gives examples of the divine attributes perceived among peoples who never heard the Bible. Particularly significant for our discussion here is the following quotation:

And the very heathens [i.e., Thales] did not scruple to say, ‘All things are full of God’—just equivalent with [God’s] own declaration, ‘Do not I fill heaven and earth, saith the Lord?’ [Jer. 23:24] How beautifully does the Psalmist illustrate this! ‘Whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I go up into heaven, thou art there: if I go down to hell, thou art there also. If I take the wings of the morning, and remain in the uttermost parts of the sea: even there thy hand shall find me, and thy right hand shall hold me.’ [Ps 139:7-10]<sup>26</sup>

In this text, Wesley examines a phrase attributed to Thales by Aristotle and Cicero, and he finds it “just equivalent” with several passages of Scripture (Jer. 23:24; Ps. 139:7-10).

I suggest that we can here follow Wesley’s example when dealing with ancient Near Eastern parallels. We need not deny the instances where such texts are “just equivalent” with the Bible. Consider the following hymn found in the royal archives of Ebla in Syria, dating from the third millennium B.C.E.

<i>Eblaite Hymn to the “Lord of Heaven and Earth”</i>	<i>Similar OT Texts</i>
Lord of heaven and earth: the earth was not [until] you created it	Gen. 24:3; Ezra 5:11 Gen. 2:4; Isa. 45:12, 18
the light of day was not [until] you created it. . . .	Gen. 1:2-3, 14-18
Lord: [you are] effective word	Gen. 1:3, 6-7; Isa. 55:11
Lord: [you are] prosperity	Deut. 28:11; Prov. 28:25
Lord: [you are] heroism . . .	Exod. 15:2-3; Psalm 18
Lord: [you are] untiring	Ps. 121:3-4
Lord: [you are] divinity	Deut. 6:4; 1 Kgs. 18:39

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<sup>26</sup>John Wesley, Sermon 69, “The Imperfection of Human Knowledge,” in *Sermons*, 4 vols., ed. Albert C. Outler, in *The Works of John Wesley*, Bicentennial Edition, 34 vols. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1976- ), 2:570 (§1.2).

Lord: [you are] who saves  
 Lord: [you are] happy life<sup>27</sup>

Ps. 18:3; Isa. 43:12; 45:17  
 Ps. 68:3; 86:4

When reading such a hymn, it is easy to agree with Wesley that "Some great truths, [such] as the [existence] and attributes of God . . . were known, in some measure, to the heathen world."<sup>28</sup> There are many possible parallels between this Eblaite hymn and Genesis, Psalms, and Isaiah 40-55. Using Wesley as our guide, we can see such parallels as cases where God, through prevenient grace, revealed the divine self to another culture in the ancient Near East.

A fourth and final reason why Wesley's doctrine of prevenient grace is useful when considering Old Testament parallels is that Wesley believed prevenient grace gave to all peoples some measure of right and wrong. On a number of occasions, he equates prevenient grace with the conscience and speaks of its moral and ethical dimensions.<sup>29</sup> He main-

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<sup>27</sup>The text of this hymn (TM.75.G.1682) is difficult and has occasioned a number of different translations, as well as debate (see Alfonso Archi, "The Epigraphic Evidence from Ebla and the Old Testament," *Biblica* 60, no. 4 [1979]: 556-566; Giovanni Pettinato, "Ebla and the Bible," *The Biblical Archaeologist* 43, no. 4 [1980]: 203-216). The quotation here comes from Giovanni Pettinato, *The Archives of Ebla: An Empire Inscribed in Clay* (with an Afterword by Mitchell Dahood; Garden City: Doubleday, 1981), 259. While the notes in the brackets have been added, they reflect Pettinato's commentary (*ibid.*, 259-260) and the understandings of other scholars (see "Hymn to the Creator of the Heavens and the Earth," pages 241-242 in "Ebla Archives," 240-243, in Matthews and Benjamin, eds., *Old Testament Parallels*).

<sup>28</sup>Wesley, Sermon 85, "On Working Out Our Own Salvation," 3:199 (§1). Cf. John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament* (London: Epworth, 1976), 465 (Acts 17:24).

<sup>29</sup>John Wesley, Sermon 105, "On Conscience," in *Sermons*, 4 vols., ed. Albert C. Outler, in *The Works of John Wesley*, Bicentennial Edition, 34 vols. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1976- ), 3:483-484 (§I.9). John Wesley, "Thoughts upon Necessity," in *Letters, Essays, Dialogs, and Addresses*, in *The Works of Wesley*, ed. Thomas Jackson, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 14 vols. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1978), 10:473 (§IV.5). John Wesley, Sermon 43, "The Scripture Way of Salvation," in *Sermons*, 4 vols., ed. Albert C. Outler, in *The Works of John Wesley*, Bicentennial Edition, 34 vols. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1976- ), 2:156-157 (§I.2).

tains that prevenient grace reveals a degree of God's law.<sup>30</sup> He argues that this grace restrains wickedness in the world.<sup>31</sup> In "Thoughts upon Necessity," Wesley writes, "It is undeniable, that [God] has fixed in man, in every man, his umpire, conscience; an inward judge, which passes sentence both on his passions and actions, either approving or condemning them."<sup>32</sup> Wesley believed that all peoples have some measure of right and wrong.

In light of the ethical dimensions of prevenient grace, one can see Old Testament parallels dealing with morality as instances where God has revealed right and wrong to all peoples. Consider the following text from the Babylonian "Counsels of Wisdom":

Do not return evil to the man who disputes with you;  
Requite with kindness your evil-doer,  
Maintain justice to your enemy,  
Smile to your adversary.  
If your ill-wisher is [. . .], nurture him.<sup>33</sup>

Compare that text with Proverbs 25:21-22, which is quoted in Romans 12:20:

<sup>21</sup> If your enemies are hungry, give them bread to eat;  
and if they are thirsty, give them water to drink;

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<sup>30</sup>John Wesley, Sermon 34, "Origin, Nature, Properties and Use of the Law," in *Sermons*, 4 vols., ed. Albert C. Outler, in *The Works of John Wesley*, Bicentennial Edition, 34 vols. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1976- ), 2:7 (\$I.3). John Wesley, "Predestination Calmly Considered," in *Letters, Essays, Dialogs and Addresses* in *The Works of Wesley*, ed. Thomas Jackson, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 14 vols. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1978), 10:230 (\$45). John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament*, 525 (Romans 2:14).

<sup>31</sup>John Wesley, Sermon 23, "Upon our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the Third," in *Sermons*, 4 vols., ed. Albert C. Outler, in *The Works of John Wesley*, Bicentennial Edition, 34 vols. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1976- ), 1:526 (\$III.8). See also Collins, *Scripture Way*, ch. 2.

<sup>32</sup>John Wesley, "Thoughts upon Necessity," in *Letters, Essays, Dialogs, and Addresses*, in *The Works of Wesley*, ed. Thomas Jackson, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 14 vols. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1978), 10:473 (\$IV.5).

<sup>33</sup>"Counsels of Wisdom," 96-107, in W. G. Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature* (London: Oxford University Press, 1975, 1967, 1960), 101, lines 41-45. The editor places this text in the Kassite period (dated by some to approximately 1595-1155 B.C.E.).

<sup>22</sup> for you will heap coals of fire on their heads,  
and the LORD will reward you.

I suspect that if Wesley were to read these texts in juxtaposition with one another, he would suggest that God's prevenient grace was present among ancient Near Eastern societies, revealing something of right and wrong.

Terence Fretheim, a Lutheran Old Testament scholar, describes how many ancient Near Eastern laws were in place before Israel. He writes, "The sheer existence of such bodies of law testifies to the work of God the Creator in and through such lawgivers, who quite apart from their knowledge of God, mediate the will of God, however dimly perceived, or imperfectly expressed, for their societies."<sup>34</sup> I think Wesley would be quick to agree with Fretheim. He writes, "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."<sup>35</sup>

## Conclusion

Thanks to Wesley's doctrine of prevenient grace, Wesleyans can affirm that Old Testament parallels do not threaten a high view of Scripture, but rather illustrate God's concern for all peoples. It is possible to join Wesley both in calling ourselves a people of one book and in affirming God's prevenient grace—the grace that abandons no one to their own devices, including ancient Near Eastern societies. Old Testament parallels point to the grace that goes before the Bible.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>Terence E. Fretheim, *God and World in the Old Testament: A Relational Theology of Creation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005), 133. Cf. Wesley, *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament*, 520 (Romans 1:19).

<sup>35</sup>Wesley, "On Working Out Our Own Salvation," 3:207 (§ III.4).

<sup>36</sup>This article was originally a presentation titled "Wrestling with Marduk: The Authority of Scripture, Old Testament Parallels, and Prevenient Grace" and presented at the annual meeting of the Wesleyan Theological Society at Duke Divinity School, March 15, 2008. I wish to thank those who offered feedback, including John Stanley, Brent Strawn, and Randy Maddox.

# SOCIAL SIN AND NEEDED CORPORATE REFORM IN THE WESLEYAN TRADITION

by

Michael Tapper

I am not afraid that people called Methodists would ever cease to exist in Europe or America. But I am afraid, lest they should only exist as a dead sect, having the form of religion without the power.<sup>1</sup>—John Wesley

As one who calls himself a Methodist in the twenty-first century, I cringe at John Wesley's words, fearing that the powerlessness of which our founder spoke may be quickly approaching, if it is not already upon us. Contemporary Methodism is struggling with an identity crisis. William J. Abraham offers a striking description of Methodism's decline:

What is gone is a coherent experiment in theology that bears any kind of robust continuity with Wesley. The great hymns are no longer sung; the fervent sacramentalism has been eroded; the robust orthodoxy has been undermined; the commitment to the poor has become a normative theology; the evangelical fervor has been sidelined; the biblical literacy has been lost; the official, canonical doctrines of the tradition are despised or are idling; and the specific doctrines of new birth, assurance, perfection, and predestination are unknown or received with consternation.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>*The Works of John Wesley*, Sermon: "Thoughts Upon Methodism" (London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, 1872; reprint, Grand Rapids Book House, 2002), 13: 258 (hereafter cited as *Works*).

<sup>2</sup>William J. Abraham, "The End of Wesleyan Theology," in *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 40, no. 1 (Spring 2005), 18. Within the context of Abraham's strong denunciation, I interpret Abraham's use of the term *normative theology* to be an indictment (not a compliment, as it is commonly understood) of contemporary Methodism. Abraham is implying here that Wesley's ardent and distinctive emphasis on the poor has become a rather casual and unremarkable emphasis in the present age.

As I consider Methodism's future, it has been helpful for me to engage the work of Gregory Baum, especially his discussion, found in his seminal work *Religion and Alienation*, of social sin, in order to shed light on unsettling aspects of Methodism that remain invisible and hence resistant to analysis. Contemporary Methodism can profit from a fuller awareness of the complexity of social sin as it manifests itself in Methodism's symbols, structures, religious norms, and decision-making. However, if we could gain an increased understanding of how Methodism is influenced by social sin, then we might address its debilitating effects, clarify our identity, and become more purposeful agents of change.

My fellow Methodists may be surprised to learn that the inspiration for this critical assessment comes from an increased awareness of the Wesleyan tradition—indeed, it comes from John Wesley himself. While Wesley is not a perfect model for contemporary Methodists to imitate, his life and teaching can be applied in such a way as to inspire critical analysis of current circumstances. Using Baum's definition of social sin as a guiding framework, this paper considers ways to re-appropriate Wesley's thinking and practice into our contemporary context in order to make us more effective Methodists.

### Social Sin in Wesley's Context

Gregory Baum's analysis of social sin begins with an identification of the *dehumanizing trends* embedded within social institutions, that is, formational contexts and traditions.<sup>3</sup> Living in a world marred by human wickedness, we often uncritically accept destructive habits embedded in our social, political, economic, and religious institutions.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, by embracing *harmful ideologies*, Baum argues, we commonly legitimize forms of social sin that serve to protect the power and privilege of society's dominant individuals and institutions.<sup>5</sup> Baum contends that social sin is further characterized by a *false consciousness* through which "people

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<sup>3</sup>Gregory Baum, *Religion and Alienation* (Toronto: Novalis Publishing, 2006, Second Edition), 174.

<sup>4</sup>The Methodist Church of Bolivia in its *Manifiesto a la Nacion* (1970) affirmed: "Social, political, cultural, or economic structures become dehumanized when they do not serve 'all men and the total man,' in other words, when they are structured to perpetuate injustice. Structures are products of men, but they assume an impersonal character, even a satanic one, going beyond the possibility of individual action."

<sup>5</sup>Baum, *Religion and Alienation*, 175.

involve themselves collectively in destructive action as if they were doing the right thing.”<sup>6</sup> This self-delusion, adopted by both the rich and powerful as well as the weak and oppressed members of society, exacerbates unjust behavior.<sup>7</sup> Finally, social sin is comprised of *collective decisions*, exemplified in laws, policies, and norms, which reinforce or even amplify the dehumanizing trends in social institutions and practices—often contrary to our own wishes.<sup>8</sup> To summarize Baum, then, social sin involves:

1. Dehumanizing Trends
2. Harmful Ideologies
3. False Consciousness
4. Collective Decisions

Eighteenth-century Britain—the social context of Wesley’s life and work—offers one contextual setting to which Baum’s fourfold description of social sin can be applied. While this period represented the dawning of a new age in which Enlightenment reason introduced tremendous possibilities for social development, there are many examples to show how eighteenth-century Britain was still marked by social sin, in particular, its harmful class stratification and destructive treatment of the poor.<sup>9</sup> Despite rapid social development and economic growth, critics observe, the plight of the working class worsened as England industrialized. Karl Polanyi describes the devastating situation in the latter half of the 1700s by noting: “It happened for the first time that a boom in trade was remarked to have been accompanied by signs of growing distress of the poor.”<sup>10</sup>

The dehumanizing trends in early capitalist society were legitimated by an ideology of individualism that served the self-interest of the owners, generated alienation, and reinforced unjust systems. Alexis de Tocqueville, an important nineteenth-century thinker, observed that a “new

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<sup>6</sup>Baum, *Religion and Alienation*, 175.

<sup>7</sup>“To do evil a human being must first of all believe that what he’s doing is good, or else that it’s a well-considered act in conformity with natural law.” Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago, 1918-1956: An Experiment in Literary Investigation*. Vol. 1, Trans. T. P. Whitney (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), 173.

<sup>8</sup>Baum, *Religion and Alienation*, 175.

<sup>9</sup>Charles Dickens’ novels provide vivid pictures of the deplorable living conditions of the proletariat in this time.

<sup>10</sup>Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001 <1944>), 97.

individualism” fueled the Industrial Revolution and separated people from their environment.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies expressed concern that the autonomous spirit of this era encouraged a movement from community (*Gemeinschaft*) to society (*Gesellschaft*) and represented an alienation of people from each other.<sup>12</sup>

This individualistic ideology, along with the unjust social structures, gave rise to what Baum would identify as false consciousness. As their society promoted increased personal comfort and financial gain, members of the upper classes could not see how their actions adversely affected other people. They often traced the plight of the poor to either the will of God or the low morals and behavior among the lower classes.<sup>13</sup> However, a false consciousness also typified those in the oppressed working classes.<sup>14</sup> Surrounded by hopelessness, and deplorable conditions, the poor became increasingly anesthetized to the oppression they themselves endured.<sup>15</sup>

Baum’s final factor in social sin, the harmful collective decisions rooted in this false consciousness, was also present in eighteenth century Britain. Those in positions of power shaped social structures and institutions according to their values and furthered the dehumanizing trends that hurt people in the lower strata of society. Those in the ascending classes, who wanted to take advantage of the economic climate, were able to influence decisions and increase their power, wealth, and standard of living. Child labor and the enclosure acts demonstrate how destructive trends, ideology, and false consciousness were perpetuated by dehumanizing institutional and collective decisions.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Vol. 2 (New York: Vintage Books, 1945 <1840>), 104-106.

<sup>12</sup>See: Ferdinand Tönnies, *Community and Society* (1887; repr., New York: Harper & Row, 1963).

<sup>13</sup>Thomas W. Madron, “John Wesley on Economics,” in *The Future of the Methodist Theological Traditions*, 102-115, ed. M. Douglas Meeks (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985), 110.

<sup>14</sup>Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1963 <1932>), 109-114.

<sup>15</sup>Theodore Runyan, “Introduction: Wesley and the Theologies of Liberation,” in *Sanctification and Liberation*, 9-48, ed. Theodore Runyan (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1981), 42.

<sup>16</sup>Though Enclosure Acts existed in varying degrees in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the latter half of the eighteenth century witnessed a new wave of Enclosure Acts which coincided with the emergence of the Industrial Revolution. Subsequent Factory Acts in 1819, 1833, 1844, 1847, 1850, 1874, and 1878 became increasingly stringent with regard to exploiting child labor.

Obviously, this brief application of Baum's model is by no means exhaustive. Still, Baum's four-part description of social sin allows us to see the alienating and dehumanizing elements inherent in the societal stratification and treatment of the poor in early industrial society. These trends were legitimated and fueled by an ideology, adopted by many members of all strata of society, that championed the individual and blinded both the oppressed and oppressor. Collective decisions endorsed by institutional leaders exacerbated problems and perpetuated the social sin inherent in the structures and institutions of the eighteenth century.

### **Wesley's Response to Social Sin**

Having considered the pervasiveness of social sin in this historical context, we can ask: How did Wesley respond? Admittedly, some ambiguity exists both within Wesley's own accounts and among interpretations by scholars regarding his ability to critically address the complexities of social evil. Some scholars argue that, within his historical context, Wesley served as a model of how to successfully critique the complexities of structural or social sin. Others, however, are more cautious in their appraisal. They argue that his response to systemic evil was overly simplistic, individualistic, and, in some cases, more harmful than constructive.

In response to harmful class stratification and destructive treatment of the poor in eighteenth century England, supporters of Wesley claim that he was a cogent voice for those who were marginalized. For example, in a sermon preached after observing the way the poor were being oppressed, Wesley remarked, "It is hard, indeed, to comprehend this; nay, it is hard to believe it, considering the *complicated wickedness* and the *complicated misery* which we see on every side [emphasis added]."<sup>17</sup> As he addressed the problem of poverty, in the midst of gross prosperity among the affluent British population, it became commonplace for Wesley to refer to *complicated wickedness* and *complicated villainy* as descriptions of the apathy, greed, and general disregard for human life he observed.<sup>18</sup>

Some contend that Wesley also attacked the injustices of class. One of his most consistent assaults against the extreme social stratification of the day came in the form of a critique against the accumulated wealth and

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<sup>17</sup>*Works*, Sermon: "On Divine Providence," 2: 317.

<sup>18</sup>Christina Pohl, "Holy Living and Complicated Wickedness," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 42, no. 1 (Spring 2007): 8-11.

property in the upper classes of society.<sup>19</sup> To those who spent money, for example, on elegant clothing and “delicate” food, he wrote, “You bind your own hands. You make it impossible for you to do that good which otherwise you might. So that you injure the poor in the same proportion as you poison your own soul. . . . And so this wasting of thy Lord’s goods is an instance of complicated wickedness; since hereby thy poor brother perisheth, for whom Christ died.”<sup>20</sup> Expressions of this nature have led some to herald Wesley as a defender of the poor against the upper classes that were enchanted by the glory of early capitalism.

Despite these accolades, however, others insist that Wesley did not go far enough in his critique of dehumanizing trends that privileged the rich at the expense of the lower classes. Argentinean Methodist José Bonino, for example, suggests that Wesley’s article, “Thoughts on the Present Scarcity of Provisions,” exemplifies his inability to fully understand the more systematic and complex aspects of evil in his day. Bonino posits, “His attempt to work with hard data, statistics, prices, and market conditions is extraordinary for a religious leader. But when he attempts to find causes and remedies, he remains totally within the premises of the mercantilist system and completely unaware of the structural causes of the crises.”<sup>21</sup>

Furthermore, some contend that Wesley’s inability to see the complex nature of the social problems around him ultimately helped to prevent those in the lower social classes from addressing the deeper causes of their problems and led them to complacently accept their subordinate role in society.<sup>22</sup> Critics of Wesley point to the work of Elie Halévy, who asserted that Britain was able to avoid civil revolution because British Methodism worked to accommodate the lower classes to the new capitalist order in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.<sup>23</sup> Thus, while some

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<sup>19</sup>See: *Works*, Sermon: “Dangers of Riches,” 7: 1ff. See also: *Works*, Sermon: “Increasing Riches,” 7: 355ff.

<sup>20</sup>*Works*, Essay: “A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion,” 8: 190.

<sup>21</sup>José Miguez Bonino, “Wesley’s Doctrine of Sanctification from a Liberationist Perspective,” in *The Future of the Methodist Theological Traditions*, 51-63, ed. M. Douglas Meeks (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985), 57.

<sup>22</sup>Bonino, “Wesley’s Doctrine of Sanctification from a Liberationist Perspective,” 58-59.

<sup>23</sup>See: Elie Halévy, *History of the English People in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Routledge, 1963 <1912>).

scholars consider Wesley to have effectively addressed the destructive social trends of poverty and stratification, there are those who consider his approach to these issues to have been naïve and even detrimental to dealing with the major forms of the social sin of his day.

In relation to the ideological individualism which characterized the British Industrial Revolution, supporters of Wesley interpret his writings as evidencing a soteriology focused on the atoning work of Christ for *all* humanity. In his sermon “Fourth Discourse Upon Our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount,” for example, Wesley remarked, “Christianity is essentially a social religion; and that to turn it into a solitary one, is to destroy it. . . . When I say this is essentially a social religion, I mean not only that it cannot subsist so well, but that it cannot subsist at all without society—without living and conversing with other men.”<sup>24</sup> Wesley insisted upon a form of Christianity which makes a connection between a relationship with God and a relationship with fellow human beings. Nonetheless, Wesley has been criticized by some who consider his ideas to be firmly entrenched in eighteenth-century ideological individualism.

While quick to concede that Wesley spoke of “social holiness,” some still criticize him for possessing an anthropology that was incurably individualistic and incapable of dealing with the complexity of social evil.<sup>25</sup> For example, Rupert E. Davies argues that “salvation for Wesley concerned an individual’s personal life and personal relations, first with God and then with neighbors and friends and fellow Christians. This was as far as Wesley looked for the whole self.”<sup>26</sup> Critics, then, claim that, while his doctrine of holiness was “social” in the narrow sense (i.e., it related persons with one another), it still suffered from the influence of an ideology in which the individual was the primary focus.<sup>27</sup>

Those who suggest that Wesley dealt adequately with the blindness that Baum associates with social sin often argue that his longest essay and

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<sup>24</sup>*Works*, Sermon: “Fourth Discourse Upon Our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount,” 5: 296.

<sup>25</sup>Bonino, “Wesley’s Doctrine of Sanctification from a Liberationist Perspective,” 55.

<sup>26</sup>Rupert E. Davies, “Justification, Sanctification, and the Liberation of the Person,” in *Sanctification and Liberation*, ed. Theodore Runyon (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1981), 78.

<sup>27</sup>Bonino, “Wesley’s Doctrine of Sanctification from a Liberationist Perspective,” 54-55.

only explicit doctrinal opus is a strong defense of the doctrine of original sin.<sup>28</sup> In a sermon condensing this treatise, Wesley wrote, "So long as a man born blind continues so, he is scarce sensible of his want: Much less, could we suppose a place where all were born without sight, would they be sensible of the want of it. In like manner, so long as men remain in their natural blindness of understanding, they are not sensible of their spiritual wants."<sup>29</sup> Moreover, some scholars interpret his strong denunciation of oppression of the poor as further evidence of his thorough understanding of the blindness generated by social sin. For example, in a sermon addressing moral blindness among the privileged class, Wesley proclaimed:

Open your eyes! Look round you! See darkness that may be felt; see ignorance and error; see vice in ten thousand forms; see consciousness of guilt, fear, sorrow, shame, remorse, covering the face of the earth! See misery, daughter of sin. See on every side sickness and pain, inhabitants of every nation under heaven; driving on the poor, helpless sons of men, in every age, to the gates of death!<sup>30</sup>

In another sermon, Wesley chastised the rich, in particular, for being blind to the suffering of the poor. He wrote, "Hence it is that . . . one part of the world does not know what the other suffers. Many of them do not know because they care not to know; they keep out of the way of knowing it; and then plead their voluntary ignorance as an excuse for their hardness of heart."<sup>31</sup>

In contrast, modern critics of Wesley argue that his theology never addressed false consciousness, a central feature of social sin. In this respect, critics commonly point to his commentary entitled "A Plain

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<sup>28</sup>See: *Works*, Essay: "The Doctrine of Original Sin, According to Scripture, Reason, and Experience," 9: 191-464.

<sup>29</sup>*Works*, Sermon: "Original Sin," 6: 58.

<sup>30</sup>*Works*, Sermon: "The Fall of Man," 6: 223.

<sup>31</sup>*Works*, Sermon: "On Visiting the Sick," 7: 119.

<sup>32</sup>Some Wesley scholars, such as Theodore Runyan, grant that "A Plain Account of Christian Perfection" is not well-reasoned or developed. Rather, they see it as a defensive and polemical article written by Wesley in response to years of criticism and perceived misunderstanding of the phrase "Christian perfection." Some even suggest that the article should never have been written or printed due to the widespread confusion it has created.

Account of Christian Perfection.”<sup>32</sup> Here, Wesley established a clear distinction between sin as “voluntary” and “involuntary” disobedience. He wrote, “Not only sin, *properly so called* (that is, a voluntary transgression of a known law), but sin, *improperly so called*, (that is, an involuntary transgression of a divine law, known or unknown,) needs the atoning blood [emphasis added].”<sup>33</sup> Detractors suggest that these divisions in Wesley’s definition of sin reinforce a strident individualistic line in him that makes any notion of social sin difficult to reconcile with Wesleyan theology. In other words, if distinctions can be made between sin “properly so called” and sin “improperly so called,” then it becomes problematic to build an argument for a theology of social sin, which, by nature, is often expressed involuntarily and concealed in social structures.<sup>34</sup>

Finally, an examination of Wesley’s dealings with unjust collective decisions inevitably leads scholars to focus on his unique engagement with political issues in his day.<sup>35</sup> Regarding the issue of government-sponsored land enclosures, proponents of Wesley note his objection to the way enclosures edged smaller farmers in Britain out of business. In his sermon “Thoughts on The Present Scarcity of Provisions,” he argued:

But why are pork, poultry, and eggs so dear? Because of the monopolizing of farms; perhaps as mischievous a monopoly as was ever introduced into these kingdoms. The land which was some years ago divided between ten or twenty little farmers, and enabled them comfortably to provide for their families, is now generally engrossed by one great farmer.<sup>36</sup>

Similarly, Wesley invested considerable energy speaking out against the generally accepted institution of slavery.<sup>37</sup> In 1774, he published a pamphlet entitled “Thoughts upon Slavery” which outlined his position

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<sup>33</sup>*Works*, Essay: “A Plain Account of Christian Perfection,” 11: 396.

<sup>34</sup>Baum makes a similar indictment against Roman Catholic believers based on the way the sacrament of penance is celebrated. He argues that Catholics are prone to see sin as exclusively being a conscious and free decision that violates a divine commandment. Baum, *Religion and Alienation*, 198.

<sup>35</sup>Bonino, “Wesley’s Doctrine of Sanctification from a Liberationist Perspective,” 58.

<sup>36</sup>*Works*, Article: “Thoughts on the Present Scarcity of Provisions,” 11: 56.

<sup>37</sup>Less than a week before his death, Wesley was reading *The Interesting Narrative* by prominent African Olaudah Equiano, a text which Wesley referred to in his final known letter on March 2, 1791 to William Wilberforce.

concerning the slave trade. Regarding slave owners, he accusingly wrote:

Are you a man? Then you should have an [sic] human heart. But have you indeed? What is your heart made of? Is there no such principle as compassion there? Do you never feel another's pain? Have you no sympathy? No sense of human woe? No pity for the miserable? When you saw the flowing eyes, the heaving breasts, or the bleeding sides and tortured limbs of your fellow-creatures, was [sic] you a stone, or a brute? Did you look upon them with the eyes of a tiger? When you squeezed the agonizing creatures down in the ship, or when you threw their poor mangled remains into the sea, had you no relenting? Did not one tear drop from your eye, one sigh escape from your breast? Do you feel no relenting now? If you do not, you must go on, till the measure of your iniquities is full. Then will the great God deal with you as you have dealt with them, and require all their blood at your hands.<sup>38</sup>

Nevertheless, some scholars argue that his strong allegiance to the British monarchy exemplified a more acquiescent approach when dealing with institutionalized social and political inequality. Undeniably, he demonstrated his loyalties to the king in several articles written later in his life. In a 1777 text, for example, he wrote, "Do any of you blaspheme God or the King? None of you, I trust who are in connexion [sic] with me. I would no more continue in fellowship with those who continued in such practice, than with whoremongers, or Sabbath-breakers, or thieves, or drunkards, or common swearers."<sup>39</sup>

### **The Relevance of Wesley Today**

This review shows that, before addressing the question of whether Wesley be appropriated to inspire Methodists to confront social sin today, some issues must be addressed. Any attempt to apply Wesley to a discussion regarding present-day social sin must take into consideration some significant challenges, including issues of hermeneutics and the diverse, even contradictory, scholarly accounts of Wesley's thought and practice. Certainly, the hermeneutical challenges associated with utilizing a historical character from an eighteenth-century context and reinterpreting him almost three centuries later cannot be overlooked. Many socio-economic,

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<sup>38</sup> *Works*, Article: "Thoughts on Slavery," 11: 77.

<sup>39</sup> *Works*, Sermon: "A Calm Address to the Inhabitants of England," 11: 139.

epistemological, and philosophical perspectives considered normative today simply did not exist in Wesley's day. It is clear that his understanding of the term "social holiness" did not carry with it the sociological, political, or economic weight it does for many today.<sup>40</sup> Consequently, attempts to uncritically translate his words into contemporary theological terminology may likely prove unsuccessful.<sup>41</sup>

Another challenge that we must consider is the enormous ambiguity that surrounds the historical view of Wesley and early Methodism. Some argue coyly, "There are as many 'Wesleys' as there are Wesley scholars."<sup>42</sup> Certainly, it is indisputable that many interpretations of him exist.<sup>43</sup> As a result, it is easy to overemphasize and celebrate certain aspects of his legacy, while ignoring others, in order to reinforce a particular viewpoint. The obstacles to the quest for a "historically-accurate Wesley" pose some considerable challenges when we attempt to reinterpret him in light of today's understanding of social sin. The challenges of hermeneutics and historical interpretation make it difficult for us to decide if Wesley can serve as a model of an adequate response for Methodists to emulate in response to today's "complicated wickedness," or whether his dealing with social sin is best understood and even left in the context of his own time.

Despite these difficulties and ambiguities, I would argue that some important aspects of Wesley's legacy can, indeed, be re-appropriated in accordance with Baum's discussion of social sin. Specifically, I suggest that Wesley's identification with the poor, reform-motivated yet non-divisive spirit, and willingness to promote honest self-critique present Methodists today with three practical gifts. These gifts, if appropriately engaged, could prove life-giving and provide renewed incentive for

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<sup>40</sup>Runyan, "Wesley and the Theologies of Liberation," 42.

<sup>41</sup>Davies, "Justification, Sanctification, and the Liberation of the Person," 67.

<sup>42</sup>Abraham, "The End of Wesleyan Theology," 13.

<sup>43</sup>Abraham illuminates this challenge when he writes, "(Wesley's) legacy is a contested one that has been claimed by Revivalists and Institutionalists, by Social Gospellers and Personalists, by Fundamentalists and Modernists, by Liberals and Conservatives, by Liberationists and Pietists, by Radicals and Moderates, by Revisionists and Traditionalists, by Marginalists and Centrists, by Systematicians and Occasionalists, by Inclusivists and Exclusivists, by Feminists and Patriarchists, by Holiness Advocates and Pentecostals, by Conventionists and Charismatics, and by Confessionalists and Pluralists." Abraham, "The End of Wesleyan Theology," 14.

much-needed change in the Methodist movement.

**1. Identification With the Poor.** First, recovering Wesley will strengthen Methodism today by revitalizing the foundational Wesleyan emphasis on ministry to the marginalized, bringing a renewed sense of purpose to our churches. At its inception, Methodism was distinctly characterized as a religion “of the poor.” In the nineteenth century, though, as thrifty Methodists became members of the middle class, that emphasis shifted to ministry “for the poor.”<sup>44</sup> In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the divide between affluent Methodists and the poor has continued to grow. Many Wesleyans have become increasingly committed to institutions associated with capitalism and the globalization of the free market.<sup>45</sup> Bishop Peter Storey of the Methodist Church in South Africa, in his address to the World Methodist Council in 1996, described the “struggle for the soul of World Methodism” in these robust terms:

There is a prosperous Methodism in the developed world, and Methodism with the poor in the rest of the world, and in some places like South Africa, where both exist in glaring contrast to each other. The question is: what model will become the true sign of what we are? The prosperity model of success is very seductive, and it is sad to see how many poorer congregations there are to emulate it. But the gospel of Jesus—who was rich, yet for our sakes became poor—surely calls for the opposite to happen. *Prosperous Methodism must do something about its manna pile* [emphasis added].<sup>46</sup>

Contemporary Methodism’s unwillingness to acknowledge the enormous economic disparity between wealthy and poor nations has had a damaging effect on the sense of mission in the twenty-first century. While present-day problems within Methodism cannot be reduced to one particular cause, it is arguable that the clear shift in our religious movement’s socio-economic reality has played a part in the current identity crisis.

Methodism’s rediscovery of a compelling mission can come from a

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<sup>44</sup>M. Douglas Meeks, et. al., “Salvation, Justice and the Theological Task,” in *The Future of the Methodist Theological Traditions*, 85-92, ed. M. Douglas Meeks (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985),” 85.

<sup>45</sup>Kenneth Cracknell and Susan J. White, *An Introduction to World Methodism* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 231.

<sup>46</sup>Cracknell and White, *An Introduction to World Methodism*, 3-4.

re-appropriation of its early tradition. It is clear that, throughout Wesley's life, he was closely engaged with the poor and involved in the struggle against the mistaken, yet pervasive, idea that God's love and grace was limited to select members of humanity. Wesley exemplified a strong commitment to ministry *among* the poor. Today, this commitment is needed in contemporary contexts where people who are oppressed seek liberation from the constraining effects of social sin.

Wesley's refusal to embrace extravagant wealth and his critique of dominant power structures are recognized as exemplary by many theologians today. In the closing remarks of Storey's sermon, he proclaimed emphatically, "God's warning to prosperous Methodism is: find ways of engaging face to face with the poor: your soul depends upon it."<sup>47</sup> This remark implies that ministry among the poor has as much, and perhaps even more, to do with *our own* faith development than it does with salvation for the marginalized. In other words, Methodism depends upon the poor to offer a unique perspective on redemption, which Wesley argued, can only be gained by solidarity with the poor. In his journal, he wrote, "I love the poor. In many of them I find pure genuine grace, unmixed with paint, folly and affection."<sup>48</sup> If affluent Methodism is to experience renewed vibrancy in its mission, it is improbable that we will discover it without a close engagement with the poor and the marginalized.

**2. Reform-motivated, Non-divisive Spirit.** Second, reclaiming Wesley's general resistance to fragmented and institutional formalism will reinvigorate Methodism with a renewed power of unity. The present lack of unified purpose among Methodists could be attributed to a selfish, individualistic mindset that has accentuated distinctions and failed to celebrate our commonalities, such as our history of engagement with the poor. In less than three hundred years, Methodism has expanded from one Englishman's vision within a national church, to an independent church, and, presently, to a complex, global community of over 100 self-regulating denominations and churches.<sup>49</sup>

At present, approximately 75 million people across 135 countries claim Wesley as a spiritual ancestor.<sup>50</sup> In some respects, this expansion of

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<sup>47</sup>Cracknell and White, *An Introduction to World Methodism*, 4.

<sup>48</sup>*Works*, Letter: "Letters to Miss Furly, Sept. 25, 1757," 11: 200.

<sup>49</sup>Cracknell and White, *An Introduction to World Methodism*, 3.

<sup>50</sup>Cracknell and White, *An Introduction to World Methodism*, 66.

Methodism is cause for celebration. On the other hand, Methodism's worldwide growth and complex denominational expansion has too often been the result of our unwillingness to work together. We are reminded that American Methodism was birthed in the 1800s without the blessing of British Methodism. Not long afterward, American Methodists became deeply divided over disagreements concerning slavery, temperance, and the role of women in the church, resulting in the emergence of several breakaway Methodist denominations. Canadian Methodism, for that matter, emerged in the Maritime provinces, shaped by Irish missionaries and former New England loyalists who held an anti-American sentiment following the War of 1812.<sup>51</sup>

As a result, many of the denominational branches of Methodism today operate independently from one another with varying appreciation for their Wesleyan tradition and its essentials.<sup>52</sup> This division serves as an indictment against fragmented, contemporary Methodist institutionalism, especially since Wesley never set out to create an ecclesial body—never mind many of them. In fact, in his time, Wesley had difficulty conceiving of Methodism as playing a role beyond that of a reforming movement *within* the Church of England. As such, Wesley would presumably be shocked to see the division among Methodists today.

Those of us associated with contemporary Methodism would do well to reclaim the reforming and ecumenical spirit which Wesley possessed. The United Church of Canada, created in 1925 through the alliance of Canadian Congregationalists, Presbyterians, and Methodists, serves as a compelling historical example of Methodist Christians committed to the Gospel mission above an unyielding fixation upon their individual identity as Methodists. More recently, David Gamble, president of the Methodist Conference (UK) in his 2010 address to the General Synod of the Church of England, evoked some astonishment when he hinted about the potential of a future union between the Church of England and the Methodist Church. Gamble said, "We are prepared to go out of existence not because we are declining or failing in mission, but for the sake of mission. In other words we are prepared to be changed and even

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<sup>51</sup>Cracknell and White, *An Introduction to World Methodism*, 71-72.

<sup>52</sup>M. Douglas Meeks, "The Future of the Methodist Theological Tradition," in *The Future of the Methodist Theological Traditions*, 13-33, ed. M. Douglas Meeks (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985), 23.

<sup>53</sup>David Gamble, address speech, Church of England General Synod, London, February, 2010.

to cease having a separate existence as a Church if that will serve the needs of the Kingdom.<sup>53</sup> This sort of innovative approach, found often in Wesley, places similarities above differences and creates energy and hope in churches. As contemporary Methodists, we stand to benefit from such empowering unity if we choose to embrace it fully in the future.

**3. Promote Honest Self-critique.** Third, re-appropriating Wesley will make contemporary Methodism a more effective agent of the gospel of Christ by provoking honest and thorough self-criticism, which, though heart-rending, has the potential to increase contemporary Methodism's ability to effectively proclaim the Christian message. Regrettably, Methodists have historically participated in social sin—for example, injustices related to slavery, apartheid, and missionary activity associated with colonialism.<sup>54</sup> Undoubtedly, Methodists today continue to be blind to their participation in other unjust structures and institutions. In this regard, Baum aptly describes the effects of social sin on the Christian Church, contending that corrupting religious trends “attach people uncritically to their tradition, protect them from coming to self-knowledge, defend the authority of the dominant classes, create a false sense of superiority over others, and produce dreams of victory over outsiders.”<sup>55</sup> This, I argue, is an accurate description of the worst of contemporary Methodism.

More critical self-understanding is urgently needed. While Methodists have a longstanding tradition of collecting statistical information regarding church attendance, finances, and capital investment, we have rarely engaged in significant critical analysis of our social reality.<sup>56</sup> It is telling that attempts to collect research data at a deeper level (i.e., regarding gender, marital status, age, ethnicity, education, and social class) have consistently met resistance and indifference among Methodists.<sup>57</sup> The paucity of socio-religious research in Britain and North America today suggests that affluent Methodists, like other first-world Christians, refuse to engage in a critical assessment of themselves and their churches.

Against this trend, we can look to Wesley as a source of inspiration to

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<sup>54</sup>Cracknell and White, *An Introduction to World Methodism*, 10.

<sup>55</sup>Baum, *Religion and Alienation*, 76.

<sup>56</sup>Clive Field, “The People Called Methodists Today: Statistical Insights From the Social Sciences,” in *Epworth Review* (2009), 16.

<sup>57</sup>Field, “The People Called Methodists Today: Statistical Insights From the Social Sciences,” 16-29.

respectfully challenge the social structures and ideologies that exist among us. We are reminded by his example that this can be done in an appropriate way and with a hopeful perspective. His ability to remain a loyal, yet inquiring member of the Church of England is very well documented. Wesley is not unlike Baum in this respect. Baum, operating out of a twenty-first-century liberationist perspective, has remained unapologetically Roman Catholic, despite a longstanding reputation for challenging the *magisterium* on a number of significant issues. Reflecting this critical stance, Baum writes, "A church's unwillingness to subject its corporate life to a systematic and principled critique is the great barrier that prevents it from proclaiming the Gospel with power."<sup>58</sup> Without this critical approach, the Methodist Church, along with other Christian denominations for that matter, is sure to continue to perceive itself in elitist terms, as special members of Christ's redeemed community, even while engaging in harmful superstition, hypocrisy, idolatry, legalism, and false consciousness.<sup>59</sup>

If by drawing upon Baum's analytical work and the teachings and practices of John Wesley, the very source of the Wesleyan tradition, we are willing to be open to an awareness of certain contradictions that exist between God's intention for us and our present church reality, a liberating consciousness-raising can emerge.<sup>60</sup> Our Methodist practices can be critiqued and evaluated in light of Wesleyan and biblical teaching so that these practices can more adequately reflect our faith profession.<sup>61</sup> To be sure, this process will demand great courage and resolve. It is a humbling task to discover elements of false consciousness, complicity, and forms of exploitation imbedded in our religious traditions.

Further, it is difficult to accept responsibility for shared involvement in dehumanizing activities. Still, the benefits of engaging in this critical task are enormous: hearts and minds liberated from the grip of social sin. In that respect, an openness to be questioned and criticized, individually and collectively, may prove life-giving and provide inspiration for much-needed change in the contemporary churches associated with the Methodist movement.

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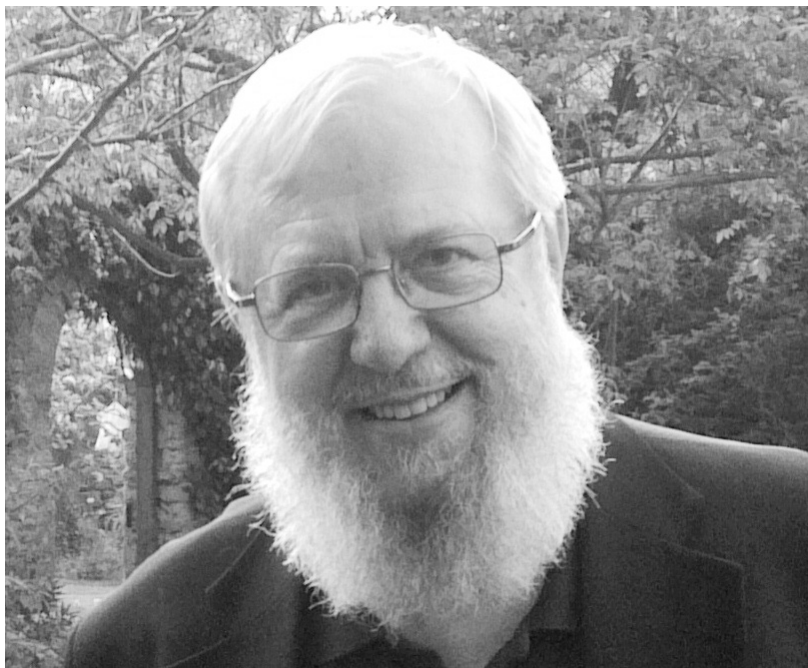
<sup>58</sup>Baum, *Religion and Alienation*, 181.

<sup>59</sup>Baum, *Religion and Alienation*, 75.

<sup>60</sup>Meeks, et. al., "The Future of the Methodist Theological Traditions," 89-90.

<sup>61</sup>Baum, *Religion and Alienation*, 169.

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**The 2013 Lifetime Achievement Award**  
**of the Wesleyan Theological Society**



**DR. WILLIAM (“Billy”) J. ABRAHAM**

Tribute delivered by Jason E. Vickers at the annual WTS banquet on the  
campus of Seattle Pacific University, March, 2013

A self-described bog-Irish Methodist with an Oxford education and an Eastern Orthodox update, William J. “Billy” Abraham embodies an ecclesial practice historically associated with Methodism itself, namely, itinerancy. Constantly on the move, he is a philosopher, pastor, evangelist, missionary, catechist, and systematic theologian. He is also a keen observer of international politics, a preacher, a Sunday school teacher, a spiritual and theological mentor to students, a distinguished university teaching professor, and a close personal friend to many clergy and professional academics. Those who know him best marvel at his boundless energy for theology and ministry.

Despite the breadth of his scholarly interests and activities, Abraham’s work can be mapped along two trajectories. The first trajectory

reflects his philosophical interests, as indicated by such titles as *Divine Revelation and the Limits of Historical Criticism* (1982, republished in 2000 as an Oxford Scholarly Classic), *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion* (1985), and most recently, *Crossing the Threshold of Divine Revelation* (2006) and *Aldersgate and Athens: John Wesley and the Foundations of Christian Belief* (2010). Motivating the work in this trajectory is Abraham's deep concern that, for many people, epistemological issues must be taken seriously before they will be receptive to the work of the Holy Spirit and the Gospel. Partly a reflection of his own journey from skepticism and philosophical atheism to Christianity, this work also reflects Abraham's awareness of the modern phenomenon of de-conversion from Christianity, no small part of which is the result of a well-intended appeal to faith over against modern skepticism and doubt.

The second trajectory represents Abraham's engagement with the life of the church, as evidenced by such titles as *The Coming Great Revival: Recovering the Full Evangelical Tradition* (1984), *The Logic of Evangelism* (1989), *The Art of Evangelism: Evangelism Carefully Crafted into the Life of the Local Church* (1993), *Waking from Doctrinal Amnesia* (1995), and *The Logic of Renewal* (2003). For Abraham, the purpose of evangelism and missions is, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to initiate people into the Kingdom of God. As he conceives it, however, the task of initiation requires prolonged and patient catechesis. On this front, Abraham's commitments extend well beyond his scholarly work to include teaching a Sunday school class at Highland Park United Methodist Church in Dallas, TX, writing basic catechetical materials that have been used in local churches around the world, and regularly preaching and teaching in places as diverse as Costa Rica, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Nepal, and Romania.

Abraham's mature theological vision brings together these two distinct trajectories of thought. In *Canon and Criterion in Christian Theology: From the Fathers to Feminism* (the recipient of the 2001 Smith-Wynkoop Book Award of the WTS), he set forth and explored an illuminating insight about the difference between ecclesial canons on the one hand and epistemic criteria on the other. Ecclesial canons function within the life of the church as "means of grace and salvation," whereas epistemic criteria are "means of demarcating truth from falsehood, reality from illusion, rationality from irrationality, knowledge from opinion."<sup>1</sup> The burden of this work is to show the intellectual and spiritual conse-

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<sup>1</sup>William J. Abraham, *Canon and Criterion in Christian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 1-2.

quences of transforming ecclesial canons, most notably Scripture and the episcopacy, into epistemic criteria. On the one hand, people ceased to approach ecclesial canons primarily as means of grace in and through which they come to know and to love God and to be transformed into God's likeness. On the other hand, the appeal to ecclesial canons as epistemic criteria led to sloppy work in the epistemology of theology.

Getting right the conceptual difference between ecclesial canons and epistemic criteria should be liberating for both ordinary Christians and Christian philosophers and theologians. For ordinary Christians, Abraham's work holds forth the appealing prospect that God has given the church an entire range of materials, persons, and practices in and through which the Holy Spirit is present and at work immersing people in the Triune life of God. These include Holy Scripture, doctrine, sacraments, liturgy, episcopal oversight, iconography, and saints. Taken together, these materials, persons and practices comprise the canonical heritage of the church.

Abraham's work liberates Christian philosophers and theologians to attend to the vast array of resources and proposals concerning knowledge, truth, rationality, and the justification of religious beliefs that have emerged in religious epistemology over the last twenty-five to thirty years. Instead of shoehorning ecclesial canons into the conversation, Christian philosophers and theologians are free to examine the wide range of options now available with a view toward discerning appropriate epistemic fit with the Christian faith.

The deep motivation behind Abraham's mature theological vision is his abiding concern for church renewal. Above all, Billy Abraham is a renewalist. When he compares the canonical heritage of the church to a grand medicine chest (one of his favorite metaphors), he often does so with a view toward the medicine's latent (and explosive!) power to bring about renewal. For example, he says,

Within her bosom the church possesses the medicine for her many illnesses, and there is no reason to think that someone someday will not find the recipe we need to cure us of our current waywardness. Once the medicine begins to take effect, the grace of God now resisted will be the source of boundless healing; it is the gospel of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, which alone can save us from our corruption and idolatry.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>William J. Abraham, "Inclusivism, Idolatry and the Survival of the (Fittest) Faithful," in Mark Husbands and Daniel J. Treier, eds., *The Community of the Word: Toward an Evangelical Ecclesiology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 145.

Most recently, Abraham's work has inspired a long-haul research program known as Canonical theism. Initially explored by an ecumenical team of scholars in the programmatic volume *Canonical Theism: A Proposal for Theology and Church* (2008), the project's main aim is to attend to the vision of God and salvation embedded in the canonical heritage of the church. And while the project is being carried out in diverse ways around the world, the most intriguing development to date has been its reception among Pentecostal philosophers and theologians.<sup>3</sup>

Finally, Abraham's commitment to church renewal reflects his early and deep formation in the Methodist theological tradition. To be sure, Abraham frequently draws upon Eastern Orthodox resources, but at no point has he abandoned his Irish Methodist heritage. His ongoing commitment to Methodism can be seen in his regular contributions to Wesleyan and Methodist studies over the last thirty years, including, most recently, *Wesley for Armchair Theologians* (2005), *The Oxford Handbook of Methodist Studies* (2009), and the controversial and often quoted *Wesleyan Theological Journal* essay "The End of Wesleyan Theology" (Fall 2005), in which he makes the case that, instead of perceiving Wesley as a great systematic theologian, Methodists should receive and emulate Wesley as a saint of the church.

However, Abraham's Methodist theological orientation is perhaps best reflected in his commitment to pneumatology as the heart and soul of both Christian theology and the Christian life. Like Wesley himself, Abraham undertakes theological reflection from the standpoint of the third article of the Creed. In good Methodist fashion, he insists that, while the Holy Spirit has given the church an over-abundance of gifts for her sustenance and healing, what matters most is our "reception of the Giver of the gifts, the life-giving Holy Spirit who comes to baptize and immerse us into the life of God."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>See Daniel Castelo, "Canonical Theism as Ecclesial and Ecumenical Resource," *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 33.3 (2011): 370-389; and James K. A. Smith, *Thinking in Tongues: Pentecostal Contributions to Christian Philosophy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), ch. 5.

<sup>4</sup>*Canon and Criterion*, 54.

## A WORD OF GRATITUDE AND APPRECIATION

### **The Public Response of William J. Abraham**

When I received the word that I would be receiving the Lifetime Achievement Award from this august body, the Wesleyan Theological Society, I was stunned. I was simply speechless. While the Irish were at one time famous for their saints and scholars, it would be more accurate to say now that the Irish are religious and it is impossible to make them moral. The English, of course, are moral and it is impossible to make them religious! So it is strange (and wonderful) to be given an award by the Holiness wing of the Wesleyan tradition!

Frankly, I thought that over the years I had made way too many enemies to preclude anything like this happening. Besides, a lot of my work has not been explicitly linked to my identity as a Methodist or to work that is immediately discernible as Wesleyan in orientation. Hence it is a singular honor to have my work recognized in this manner. It is especially pleasing that the award should be given to me while we are here at Seattle Pacific University. I wish to acknowledge the marvelous help of Larry Sheldon in bringing me here; and I continue to believe that the sessions at coffee with him, Eugene Lemcio, Frank Spina, and Rob Wall were better than many academic seminars I have attended when I was a student.

The award is deeply satisfying in and of itself. What is additional gravy to the meat and potatoes is the fact that somebody somewhere has noticed that virtually all of my work inside and outside of the Wesleyan tradition (in evangelism, on renewal, in epistemology, in systematic theology, in analytic theology, in canonical theism) is rooted in my experience and formation in the Methodist tradition.

Within the Wesleyan tradition, it would be fair to say that I have been something of a gadfly, giving the appearance that I am all too ready to pick a quarrel not just with the tradition but with those who have been stalwart and worthy defenders of the tradition. In this respect, it is useful to be rooted in the Irish version of the tradition, where being Irish gives cover for passionate disagreement! No doubt there is some truth in this. However, I would qualify this observation in at least two ways. First, I have been an equal opportunity critic, not sparing the giants of my own tradition, most notably the work of Albert Outler. Second, my work within the tradition has been driven by several laudable desires, that is, to read the tradition faithfully, to avoid projecting my own concerns onto

the tradition, and to face up to the problems that the tradition has had to tackle across the years, and which it still must face today.

In terms of actual writing within the Wesleyan tradition, one volume that has given me special satisfaction is the *Oxford Handbook of Methodist Studies* that I co-edited with James Kirby. I have to confess that, when Oxford University Press asked me to review the possibility of such a volume, my first reaction, after approving it, was to make sure that it did not fall into the hands of the Duke Divinity School academic mafia! It is a great pleasure to note here in this conference the presence of the Southern Methodist University academic mafia.

Moreover, it is difficult to overstate the admiration and appreciation I have for one of our plenary speakers at this conference, my esteemed colleague Bruce Marshall. As you will have observed from his presentation, this is a theologian's theologian who delivers first-rate, first-order theology.

Things have changed at SMU across the years. I recall my first appearance at a faculty retreat when Schubert Ogden announced that, if Jesus applied for a job at Perkins School of Theology, he would not get it, and he (Jesus) would be the first to acknowledge that he should not get it. Immediately, Victor Furnish noted that he was surprised that Schubert claimed to know so much about the historical Jesus. For my part I wanted to say that Jesus as Risen Lord had more important work to do; but I refrained from saying anything since that this was my first faculty retreat. While we continue our methodological work, we are clearly in the business of doing theological theology at SMU.

To return to my contribution to *The Oxford Handbook of Methodist Studies*, I tackled there the thorny topic of Christian perfection. I am convinced that this is, as we all know, a crucial part of our heritage. I think the vision developed by John Wesley and the early Methodists still has legs under it. When I started teaching formally in the Outler Chair at Perkins, one of my goals was to see to it that Methodist Studies would, at some point, be recognized by Oxford University Press. It is an additional pleasure to see serious engagement with our tradition now being picked up by Cambridge University Press because of the fine editorial work by Randy Maddox and Jason Vickers.

We belong to a noble stream of the Christian tradition. As Donald Dayton has long insisted, we represent a post-Reformation tradition that reaches back into the Christian past and forward into the tumultuous world of Pentecostalism. In fact, I think that Wesley re-read the early

patristic period in the light of his experience in revival and awakening; this deserves further attention in the years ahead. This whole trajectory of faith and practice we have inherited from Wesley deserves to be represented at the highest levels of the academy and at the forefront of Christian social and missionary practice.

For my part, the next phase of my work within the tradition will be taken up with several small-scale projects: work on the meaning of Methodism in the wider history of Christianity, work on normative ecclesiology, and work on the canonical sermons of Wesley. As to the bigger project currently engaging my energies, that is, a four-volume project on divine agency and divine action, this stands in deep continuity with my formation in the Wesleyan tradition. Among other things, it will give a really serious place to an industrial-strength conception of human action in soteriology, it will seek to resolve the Augustinian-Pelagian controversy, it will deploy a strong vision of divine action in the Eucharist, and it will begin in the third volume from the bottom up, with divine action in the Christian life. Back of it all will be the deep background music of the patristic and biblical traditions, but I will begin from below with divine action in the Christian life. I have no qualms about being a Supernaturalist and a Pietist of a lower order!

It remains for me to thank all of you for putting up with me all these years, for enriching my life intellectually and spiritually, and for bestowing this great honor upon me this evening. Given the death of my beloved son Timothy in June of last year, this has been something of a brutal year for me personally. Yet, in and around my grief and pain I have been blessed beyond measure by your affection and friendship, and now by this award which is a most gracious gift. Beyond that I have been blessed in a significant way by two simple elements of our heritage, by two hymns of Charles Wesley that he penned in and around the death of his first born son (and that I carry with me in my pockets), and by a fresh immersion, week in and week out, in a seminar on the canonical sermons of John Wesley. So, I thank you one and all!

## SMITH-WYNKOOP BOOK AWARD, 2013

Given to Jennifer L. Woodruff Tait for her book  
*The Poisoned Chalice: Eucharistic Grape Juice and  
Common-Sense Realism in Victorian Methodism*

Tribute by Douglas Strong

When in the late 1990s the WTS officers first envisioned the establishment of a book award, we intentionally named it after two Holiness scholars of particular distinction—theologian Mildred Bangs Wynkoop and historian Timothy L. Smith. The writings of Smith and Wynkoop were important not only for advancing scholarship within the Holiness movement from which they came, but also for the critical acclaim they received from the larger academic community. The award, therefore, is an effort to encourage and support significant breakthrough, cross-over scholarship. In the past decade and a half, the fruit of the Society's work has demonstrated the wisdom of this endeavor, as many monographs—both those commended by this prize as well as others—have passed the test of being both groundbreaking and widely disseminated.

The Smith-Wynkoop book prize winner for 2013—*The Poisoned Chalice: Eucharistic Grape Juice and Common-Sense Realism in Victorian Methodism* by Jennifer Woodruff Tait—is solidly in that camp. A revision of the author's doctoral dissertation, the scholarship exhibited in this book represents an amalgam of different communities of discourse: Jennifer's personal heritage in the Holiness Methodism of the Asbury institutions (via the lineage of her grandfather, longtime seminary president Frank Bateman Stanger); her formal education and employment in the mainline Methodism of Duke and Drew universities; her academic nurture in the more evangelical Methodism of the John Wesley Fellowship; and her scholarly mentoring by noted religious historians Grant Wacker, Richard Heitzenrater, and Laurie Maffly-Kipp, each of whom has achieved substantial academic recognition beyond standard church history circles. In short, Jennifer's book is both authentically Holiness in ethos and academically broad-based in scholarship.

Just mentioning the history of the use of grape juice in communion elicits sneers from a lot of people: from historians tracing the stigmatization of alcohol in America; from sociologists who want to link the conservatism of Victorian mores to the narrowness of Puritan values; and from liturgists who need a straw man to blame for the resistance they

encounter to their sacramental renewal efforts. All these folks seem to agree that the switch to grape juice was primarily a *cultural* turn, a sociologically reactionary move that represented a capitulation to prudishness, to American individualism, and, most notably, to the savvy capitalistic marketing techniques of Charles Welch. Even those few (primarily Holiness historians) who have attempted to link grape juice use—via the temperance movement—to more admirable causes such as the radical reformist inclinations of abolitionism and women's rights advocacy have also tended to interpret grape juice use as the result of cultural forces.

But not Jennifer Woodruff Tait. While acknowledging these cultural factors, she also sees a consistent *theological* rationale for the use of grape juice (and, later, for the switch to individual cups in communion). She insists that we look at late-nineteenth-century folks on their own terms, as Christians who believed that they were living out their faith consistently, and that using grape juice was the theologically right thing to do, not a manipulative tool to control society by Victorian rules.

But what was their theological argument? Here is where Woodruff Tait's analysis is so interesting. She concludes that theological claims based on common-sense realism led temperance activists to accept the then-dominant scientific conclusion that all stimulants were poisonous. According to common-sense reasoning, alcohol consumption broke down a person's ability to produce appropriate emotional and intellectual responses. Alternatively, the consumption of grape juice allowed the human mind to perceive external reality accurately and base moral acts on accurate physical perceptions. Theologically stated, then, grape juice was life-affirming, natural, and holy.

The nuanced case that Woodruff Tait makes so compellingly is that, in contrast to the Victorian stereotype that nineteenth-century evangelicals wanted to repress their emotions, their intent instead was to experience and express emotions fervently, especially emotions related to their faith. They judged that those emotions needed to be controlled and displayed appropriately—a skill that could only be developed if one's mind was clear of all intoxicants. Alcohol, including communion wine, blurred the basis on which they could make moral judgments. Holy people should consume a holy beverage for the Eucharist. Alcohol was associated with excess, self-indulgence, sensuality, dirt, fiction, the theater, and the leisured upper class, while a temperate and holy life was associated with purity, cleanliness, sobriety, and a wise use of resources. The grape juice reformers—which eventually included almost all Methodists and all

Protestants—hoped to cultivate moral character and holiness by preserving clear perceptions as a basis for moral actions.

*The Poisoned Chalice* has opened a new road for Wesleyan/Holiness historians of the nineteenth century—a road that now invites others to travel further or perhaps to take a fork in a different direction. Whichever happens, we are grateful to Jennifer Woodruff Tait for paving the way.

## BOOK REVIEWS

Chan, Francis and Preston Sprinkle. *Erasing Hell: What God Said about Eternity, and the Things We Made Up*. Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2011. 208 pages. ISBN-13:978-0781407250.

Reviewed by David Baggett, Professor of Philosophy, Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA.

In *Erasing Hell: What God Said about Eternity and the Things We Made Up*, Francis Chan teams up with Preston Sprinkle to provide a counterpoint to those like Rob Bell whose popular book was bound to elicit responses by more conservative commentators. The authors defend a more traditional view of hell as ultimately inhabited by the majority of humankind, likely featuring extreme pain if not torture, perhaps literal fire. They consider it their duty as Bible believers to embrace such notions and to warn people of the judgment to come, not softened by wishful thinking about second chances or domesticated pictures of a less-than-terrifying hell.

Chan and Sprinkle are concerned that a driving force in domesticating theology to make it more palatable is that people are slow to let God be God. Their book is intended to be about “embracing a God who isn’t always easy to understand, and whose ways are far beyond us; a God whose thoughts are much higher than our thoughts; a God who, as the sovereign Creator and Sustainer of all things, has every right to do, as the psalmist says, ‘whatever He pleases’ (Ps. 115:3 NASB)” (17). To drive home the point, they then reiterate, “God has the right to do **WHAT-EVER** He pleases” (17). Psalm 115:3 says, “at the end of the day, our feelings and wants and heartaches and desires are not ultimate—only God is ultimate. God tells us plainly that His ways and thoughts are infinitely higher than ours (Isa. 55:9). Expect then that “Scripture will say things that don’t agree with your natural way of thinking” (17).

The fact that God’s ways are above ours does not mean that various efforts at theologizing that do not comport with ultra-literalist or extremely conservative interpretations of scripture represent a denial of God’s transcendence or an effort to domesticate God’s ways to the com-

fortable confines of human ideas. Take the authors' citation of Psalm 115:3. Is it obvious that this verse means that God can do *whatever* God pleases? Chan and Sprinkle treat the verse as if its obvious meaning is that God's will has no constraints. They express the point in terms of God's "right," which really is not a notion we can find in the verse itself. Why are "rights" rather than character, love, or grace language consistent with the actual psalm?

Chan and Sprinkle stand firmly in a Reformed tradition that may be characterized by Ockham, that Medieval thinker who basically espoused that morality is whatever God wills it to be. By contrast and in the older venerable tradition emphasizing the nature of God and humanity having been made in God's image—a fact not altogether vitiated in our fallenness (by God's grace)—God's goodness, though infinitely greater than human goodness, is still essentially recognizable. Certain axiomatic, non-negotiable moral intuitions are sufficiently veridical and reliable that we have a way to adjudicate between conflicting theological claims about God's alleged commands and the like. Ockhamism abandons this approach, opting instead for emphasizing God's otherness, transcendence, and inscrutability.

Thinkers ranging from Alasdair MacIntyre to Charles Taylor to David Bentley Hart have extensively chronicled the paradigm shift effected by moving from the older tradition to Ockhamism. Chan and Sprinkle affirm their place within the newer tradition by their confusing comments about Romans 9. "The text itself is not confusing," they write. To "read it for yourself. It's fairly simple to understand. . . . Maybe we don't want to admit that we believe in a God who is free to do whatever He wants" (129). They interpret Romans 9:22-23 by appeal to exegetical, historical, and contextual considerations, apparently thinking its meaning is obvious. Instead they conclude, "What if God decided to do this? What if God, as the sovereign Creator of the universe, decided to create 'vessels of wrath prepared for destruction'? And what if He did so in order to 'show His wrath' and 'make known His power'? And what if it's His way of showing those He saves just how great His glory and mercy is? What would you do if He chose to do this? Refuse to believe in Him? Refuse to be a 'vessel of mercy'? . . . 'What if?' is a probing question that forces us to face our inflated view of our own logic. It's another way of asking: Just how high is my view of God? (130). Thus, the authors think Romans 9 is easy to understand. What they understand as its correct interpretation is merely classical Calvinism, predicated on notoriously bad exegesis of

Romans 9:22-23. These two verses do not refer to an idea of double predestination but to those worthy of either destruction or mercy due to the kind of lives they lived.<sup>1</sup>

There is simply no hope to rightly understand what Paul is up to in Romans by cherry picking a few passages plucked from context and interpreted with wooden literalness. Paul is telling a dynamic story that culminates in God the Son becoming human, being the perfectly faithful Jew, and making possible God's perfect fulfillment of covenantal faithfulness. It is true that the Jews among the early Christians had to come to terms with God's prerogatives to reconfigure Israel, to reveal the shape of his salvation plan that might be different from their expectations, and theirs was a call to give up thinking that salvation was a function of ethnicity or available through the law. It was through Christ, and for Jew and Gentile alike. This was God's doing, and it was good. Let God be God.

However, when Chan and Sprinkle state, "Let God be God," they mean something very different, not that God is recognizably good, despite residing beyond our ken in many respects, but that God is good no matter what, in the Ockhamistic sense. And the "highness" of one's view of God has to do, not with the extent of God's grace, mercies, and love, but the inscrutability of God's will, the caprice of God's commands, and the arbitrariness of God's choices. The authors keep insisting that we need to stop trying to domesticate God or confine Him to tidy categories and compartments that reflect our human sentiments rather than His inexplicable ways. We serve a God whose ways are incomprehensible, whose thoughts are not like our thoughts. . . . It's incredibly arrogant to pick and choose which incomprehensible truths we embrace" (136).

But our inability to predict or even fully understand some of God's ways does not mean we should infer that our standards of morality and reason are mere human sentiments impotent in comprehending divine truth. Extolling the importance of reason does not require believing that reason could have prognosticated the entirety of salvation history with all its ebbs and flows, vagaries and vicissitudes. However, most of God's actions, in retrospect, are eminently understandable, and even those hard to understand are usually not impossible to believe rationally and are reconcilable with our best moral and rational insights and intuitions. Indeed, these very God-given standards help us distinguish between better and

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<sup>1</sup>See Ben Witherington, with Darlene Hyatt, *Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 258.

worse theologies and biblical interpretations. It is not the domestication of God to reject certain interpretations; it is the use of the minds God has given us to separate the theological wheat from the chaff.

God is truly good, and indeed the Good, not in any sort of Ockhamistic sense, but because God is the best candidate for the ultimate Good to which our best moral intuitions and veridical ethical insights make us privy. Saying God is good is actually meaningful and has determinate content. And the contents of morality will never make us call good evil or evil good. There are cases and times when some of our moral convictions may need to be challenged, and Chan and Sprinkle point out passages in the Bible that may do so. But there is a world of difference between passages difficult but not impossible to square with non-negotiable moral intuitions and entailments of Reformed theology like unconditional election, which is simply rationally impossible to swallow.

Hong, Paul Y. *History of the Korea Holiness Church for 110 Years since the 1897 IHC* [Korean] (Seoul: WWGTM, 2011). 587 pages. ISBN: 978-89-967738-1-8-03230. \$30.00; *idem*, ed. *Biblical Holiness Theology of John Thomas* [Korean and English] (Seoul: Promise Keepers Korea, 2011). 367 pages. ISBN: 978-89-94713-07-6-93230.

Reviewed by David Bundy, Research Professor of World Christian Studies, New York Theological Seminary, New York, NY; Co-editor, *Journal of World Christian Studies*.

The two most recent contributions by this prolific scholar raise interesting historiographical questions for the Holiness Movement in the USA as well as for the identity of the Korean Holiness churches as the Holiness churches of Japan. Together they comprise a passionate argument for a particular history of the Korean Holiness Churches against a perceived colonialist missionary identity.

The basic thesis of the *History of the Korea Holiness Church for 110 Years since the 1897 IHC* is that the historical and theological identity of the Korean (and Japanese) Holiness denominations lies not with the Oriental Missionary Society but primarily with the International Holiness Church (IHC 1913, after several name changes) that traces its origins to the International Holiness Prayer League formed in 1892 by M. W. Knapp. The IHC established, as part of its structure, the missions to Japan and Korea that eventually resulted in the Japanese and Korean Holiness churches. This mission split off from the IHC to become the independent Oriental Missionary Society (OMS). Hong believes that the OMS suppressed the connections with the IHC in its historiography. Instead, credit was given to the OMS American missionaries.

Hong insists that part of the roots of the tradition lie with IHC missionaries like the Welsh John Thomas (also a graduate of the God's Bible School extension in England, the IHC school) and Korean and Japanese missionaries, evangelists and pastors. Even the Cowmans and other early OMS missionaries to Korea were part of the IHC, facts that he states have been obscured in the historiography provided by the mission agency. The diverse network of persons influenced by the IHC deserves the actual credit for the creation of what became the Korean Evangelical Holiness Church and its derivative denominations. Unfortunately, Hong discounts the significance of the Japanese evangelists in Korea and of the Koreans who studied at the Tokyo Biblical Seminary and returned to Korea as Holiness evangelists.

The historiographical question has implications for theological identity. Because of the binary theological definition of the Korean Holiness churches as adherents of the “Four-fold Gospel” and Wesleyan theology, the tradition looked away from its OMS connections toward either John Wesley or the Christian and Missionary Alliance or both. Hong states that the “Four-fold Gospel” or the “Full Gospel” was coined by Martin Wells Knapp and Seth Cook Rees, founders of IHC. The Korean Holiness Church, initially called “The Gospel Mission,” used the constitution of the International Apostolic Holiness Church and was officially an arm of that church. Hong correctly perceives that the theological foci (if not the precise formulation) of the “Four-fold Gospel” were core to the tradition of God’s Bible School, and there were connections between Martin Wells Knapp and A. B. Simpson. Less certain are the date and precision of the formulation of the “Four-fold Gospel.” The term “Full Gospel” was a favorite term for sanctification in the book *The Higher Christian Life* of W. E. Boardman published in 1858. Hong is correct in observing that the American contexts of the early Holiness mission organizations and enterprises were very complex.

The Wesley alternative is problematic in Korea. Wesley became well known in Korea in the post-WWII period as he was then understood among the American Methodists and upwardly mobile Holiness professors. It was Wesley, not as the raw evangelistic revivalist Wesley of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries of the Holiness Movement, but as the comfortable, acculturated High Church Anglican. It was not a Wesley who could relate to their realities. The biographies of Wesley in Korean were translated or written primarily to support the interpretation of Wesley by a particular party of foreign influence in Korea. Therefore, some Korean Holiness scholars are uncomfortable seeing Wesley as a theological mentor. Wesley’s life, ministry and context need careful phenomenological study in the Korean context to place him more accurately in his eighteenth-century context.

The historiographical issue for the North American scene is the nature of the Holiness Movement at the turn of the twentieth century. Most of the studies have focused on the more carefully documented “parlor Holiness” people, primarily Methodists or the established denominations (Wesleyan, Free Methodists). A primary exception to this is the work of William Kostlevy, who studied the Metropolitan Church Association (Burning Bush) whose organization ordained the Cowmans (founders of OMS). Kostlevy’s books are not cited. The Holiness Move-

ment was quite fluid in this period, and that situation continued through the first decade after the founding of the Church of the Nazarene as groups decided either to join that “ecumenical” effort or retain their separate identity.

Much of the reading of the documents of the mission organizations, God’s Bible School, and of the IHC has assumed, as does Hong’s analysis, that denominational structures and differentiations were in place, but within IHC circles that came later. It appears that Hong’s reading of these documents also assumes too much with regard to ecclesial structure of the IHC and of the mission organization that grew up within it. In either case, a comprehensive study of the Holiness Movement during the period 1890-1910 that deals carefully and comprehensively with both the fluid period of the movement and not just on the results of the evolving denomination-ism is a major desideratum for American religious history.

Another historiographical issue has to do with the writing of mission history. Most mission history is written only from the perspective of the missionary efforts of the North American churches and from its sources. Hong’s analysis gives minimal attention and attributes no significance to the roles of Japanese and Korean evangelists who were active in those contexts. Here as in many places, the copiously documented work of Dr. Eung-Ho Yi (*History of the Korean Holiness Church* [in Korean]) is very useful. It is hoped that Hong and other scholars in Japan and Korea will devote more attention to this issue, building on the historical research of Dr. Yi. This will complicate the understanding of the evolution of the IHC and OMS in Korea, both before and after the Korean War that divided the country. Who were the Korean interpreters of the tradition that carried the Holiness vision of life into the cities and villages of the peninsula? What were the foci of their preaching? What was the Korean Holiness ethic? These are questions of pressing importance for Hong’s arguments.

The practical implications of the theological identity question are crucial for the future of the Korean Holiness churches. Is their future to be found as part of the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition, as represented by the USA Holiness churches? Or is it to be found as part of the Reformed tradition with which the U.S.A. Christian and Missionary Alliance has increasingly identified as it has simultaneously moved away from its formative “Four-fold Gospel” tradition? The Korean Holiness Church has already signed a “sister denomination” agreement with the C&MA (U.S.A.). Will it be able to establish meaningful relationships with American Holiness denominations? Can the Holiness movement be truly

global, with a historiography that facilitates loss of identity among non-North American Holiness churches? These are urgent ecumenical and missiological, as well as historical questions. How do the churches established through the missions of the Korean Holiness churches relate to the rest of Christianity?

This volume is missing two standard academic features that would have significantly enhanced the presentation of the thesis: footnotes and an index. The text is documented with photos of texts that are often hard to read, by quotations with minimal bibliographical references in the text. The lack of notes and index make it difficult to evaluate Hong's analysis and historical claims.

The presentation of the *Biblical Holiness Theology of John Thomas* is more than a reprint with an introduction (5-12). The texts presented here were important introductions to theology and spirituality in the Korean Holiness tradition. Hong has endeavored to make available in both English and Korean two volumes authored by a formative figure of the Korean Holiness churches, IHC leader, and graduate, teacher and trustee at God's Bible School and other Holiness institutions. The text will be useful for devotional purposes but less so for scholarly purposes, since the quotations of biblical texts have been replaced by the NIV version and reverse editing is a dangerous project! However, it does call attention to these important and now quite rare volumes. It is hoped that a reprint of both the English and Korean texts, in their original forms with a scholarly introduction to John Thomas, can be arranged. A summary of the "life ministry and theology" of John Thomas is presented, but without documentation (331-59).

These two volumes will be key texts in the discussions of the post-colonial theological, missional, and ecumenical identity of the Korean and Japanese Holiness churches. Hopefully, they will also inspire scholars to examine afresh the crucial period out of which came many Holiness denominations and mission organizations, and during which Holiness missionaries fanned out across the globe from Europe, North America, Asia and Africa.

Hugon, Anne. *Un protestantisme africain au XIXe siècle. L'implantation du méthodisme en Gold Coast (Ghana) 1835-1874*. Paris : Éditions Karthala, 2007. 404 pages. ISBN: 978-284586-826-7.

Reviewed by David Bundy, Research Professor of World Christian Studies, New York Theological Seminary, New York, NY; Co-editor, *Journal of World Christian Studies*.

Unlike most mission work of the modern period, the Wesleyan Methodist (British, hereafter WMMS) mission on the Gold Coast began with an invitation from a group of local Christians. Normally, the missionaries just went “called by God.” The background of the group is unclear, but their enthusiastic preaching and teaching had already brought the opprobrium of the local British authorities. Note that the Gold Coast was not a British Colony at the time, but the British had a “concession” on the coast for business where they exercised real power.

The local Christians wanted a missionary to teach them, but especially they wanted to interface with the British proto-colonial authorities. The fact of this invitation led to quite complex relationships with the WMMS. The WMMS mission to the Gold Coast is the subject of this massive and erudite volume by Anne Hugon, historian and “Master of Conferences” at the University of Grenoble. The period under consideration is that between the arrival of the first WMMS missionaries and the official colonization of the Gold Coast/Ghana in 1874.

Writing about mission history has become quite complicated, especially since most of the sources represent and are both provided and preserved by the Western churches. Hugon has worked judiciously with the WMMS papers (which include significant numbers of letters written by Ghanaians). She did significant research in Ghana where she examined local archives and met with descendants of both missionaries and the early Methodists. These sources, together with the extensive published materials produced because of the Methodist penchant for records and statistics, have provided the base for a nuanced analysis of the Wesleyan Methodist mission on the Gold Coast.

The presentation of the results of the research is in three parts. The first section, “Cultural Contexts and Contacts” (29-148), provides the basis on which Africans and English met, including what each brought to the encounter. The second, “The Mission, A Game of Strategy” (151-261), discusses Methodist preaching, organization, and control of the believers;

the ambiguities of the school strategy; the education/formation of African church persons including evangelists; and the secular activities of the WMMS missionaries. This section focuses primarily on what the missionaries thought they were doing, although, because of the careful interaction with the sources, it provides insight into the actions and responses of the Africans to support, counteract, and/or interpret the missionary's avowed intentions.

The third section, "The Methodist Community of the Gold Coast" (265-348), analyzes the social configurations of Methodism on the Gold Coast, the development of opposition within local African culture, the evolution of the converted toward dissidence from WMMS perspectives, and the political involvement of African Methodists. Far from being passive recipients of the missionary, the African Methodists were the primary evangelists and church planters (especially the African Methodist merchants) who preached in the open places and disciplined their converts. Hugon demonstrates clearly that the African Methodists became an important social force within Gold Coast culture.

This fulsomely documented book is an important contribution to several areas of research: world Methodism, mission history, colonialism, British colonial history, African history and culture, and the evolution of the Gold Coast/Ghana during the decades before the formal imposition of colonial status. The work can be included with post-colonial works on mission history. It enables the Ghanaian voice to be forcefully present. It documents the instrumentality of Ghanaians in the development of Methodism. It is attentive to the perspective of the sources. And it is written with careful attention to the contexts as experienced by both Ghanaians and missionaries. The only drawback to the volume is this: there is no index.

Smith, Jeremy H. *The Staircase of a Patron: Sierra Leone and The United Brethren in Christ*. Lexington, KY: Emeth Press, 2011. 330 pages. ISBN-13: 978-1609470166.

Reviewed by J. Gregory Crofford, Director, Institut Théologique Nazaréen, Africa Region, Church of the Nazarene.

What happens when a U.S.-born minister with a socially progressive theology meets an indigenous people living in British West Africa circa 1922? The answer in one word is acculturation; neither party remained the same.

*The Staircase of a Patron*—a title drawn from a poem by E. W. Blyden—chronicles the early twentieth-century missionary work of The United Brethren in Christ in Sierra Leone. The United Brethren—via two mergers later in the century—eventually fused with the United Methodist Church. Jeremy Smith fills out the details from the predecessor denomination, with a special focus on a young missionary to Sierra Leone, Lloyd Mignery. Drawing on the neglected journal of this colorful figure—memoires left to Otterbein University in Westerville, Ohio—Smith paints the portrait of an adventurer who set out to bring in the Kingdom, only to find himself post-furlough stranded in the United States without a contract to return to the people he had come to love on their own terms.

Mignery appears to have been the victim of multiple factors, including his own naiveté, submerged racism, and slow adaptation to the local language and customs, as well as the political machinations of a distant mission bureaucracy. Yet the value of Jeremy Smith's account is not in its arcane details of a forgotten chapter in mission history. Rather, it is the theological, historical, and anthropological context that Smith weaves around his main character that captures the reader's attention.

Chapter 1 outlines the theological diversity that existed in Lloyd Mignery's denomination at the turn of the twentieth century, a church largely conservative but including significant pockets of social gospel liberalism informed by thinkers such as Adolf Harnack and Walter Rauschenbusch. In chapter 2, Smith provides a brief history of Sierra Leone from 1787 to 1922, with a careful description of the democratic elements of African chieftaincy that ironically were later destroyed by official British colonial rule beginning in the late 1890s. Following the account in chapter 3 of Lloyd Mignery's two-year term in Sierra Leone, chapters 4 and 5 delve deeper into anthropological waters, including a discussion of the Temne and Mende people groups and their understand-

ing of the ancestors and the spirit world. More controversial is Smith's sympathetic treatment of the not very secret "secret societies" of the Poro and Sande, gender-based groups joined only through coming-of-age initiation rites culminating in circumcision for both boys and girls.

Jeremy Smith, a professor of English, brings a storyteller's heart and skill to the pages of this monograph. Sections drawn from Lloyd Mignery's journal are vivid, ethnographic descriptions of village life, an outsider's keen observations that, for the twenty-first century reader who has sojourned among West Africans, seem timeless. Smith's research presents the logic of polygamy from the agricultural worker's point of view as an economic exigency, a challenge to the missionaries' more rigid (and frequently disregarded) insistence on monogamy. Yet, despite these occasional cultural clashes, United Brethren missionaries and local pastors together built an impressive system of churches, schools, and dispensaries that nurtured many who would eventually serve as Sierra Leone's elite leaders.

Most insightful is Jeremy Smith's presentation of the slow awakening of the young Lloyd Mignery to his own latent racism, thanks in large part to his reading of works from Edward Blyden, the celebrated African-American writer who in 1851 had emigrated to Liberia. Selections from Mignery's journal show his growing misgivings about his own latent prejudices, a bias instilled in him by other Westerners who had written about so-called "dark Africa" and its "savage" peoples. Though less original than his portrayal of Mignery, Smith's explanation of the function of magic and its relationship to African religion and worldview is helpful.

Nevertheless, the book has its faults. The author early on speaks of "Poro" and "Sande" as if the terms are known to all, not clearly defining them until much later in the book. More significantly, the informed reader may wonder whether Jeremy Smith has minimized one troubling cultural practice, namely, female circumcision. Smith comes close to portraying this custom—long targeted by women's rights activists as a form of gender abuse—as merely a positive expression of female solidarity (218-19). Yet from a Christian viewpoint, what does the Song of Solomon's celebration of intimacy within the bonds of marriage have to say to a cultural practice that permanently robs a wife of her capacity to experience sexual pleasure? On this score, Smith is notably silent.

Jeremy Smith is to be credited for his concern to bridge the religious gap between the Western reader and the world of the early twentieth-century citizen of Sierra Leone. To do this, he presents William James' philos-

ophy of the “more” as well as the notion of “participation” derived from Whitehead, Henry, and Lavelle (168). Unfortunately, this section (164-74) seems like a distracting excursus, only marginally related to the book’s main thrust.

Despite these weaknesses, *The Staircase of A Patron* effectively presents the challenges of missionary work in early twentieth-century Sierra Leone. Further, by exposing some of the subtle racist attitudes of past missionaries, Jeremy Smith enables the reader to discern some of his or her own blind spots. This is an added benefit from a well-written account of an intriguing chapter in the history of Christian missions.

Stanglin, Keith D. and Thomas H. McCall. *Jacob Arminius: Theologian of Grace*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012. 240 pages. ISBN: 978-0-19975566-0 and 978-0-19-975567-7.

Reviewed by W. Stephen Gunter, Associate Dean and Research Professor of Evangelism and Wesleyan Studies, Duke Divinity School, Durham, North Carolina.

This is a sophisticated piece of theological analysis on an important figure in Protestant history. Through a confluence of circumstances, James Arminius, discarded to the dust bin of arcane personalities, has been misunderstood and much-maligned for four hundred years. This book signals that there is no longer an excuse to mischaracterize the Dutch theologian as Pelagian or worse. Compressed within the tight confines of their pages, Stanglin and McCall have provided the reader with both a concise biography and a careful analysis of Arminius' fundamental doctrines including, but not narrowly focused on, the singular issue of predestination. Their level of sophistication touches not only on *what* Arminius taught; they tell us why and from whom he had learned or was borrowing.

Their Introduction does more than merely introduce the reader to the content of the book. They tell about the neglect that Arminius has suffered; then they proceed to set out the multiple perspectives and issues that are at play when one attempts to study this theologian of the Dutch Reformation. They suggest that what we need is a "new perspective on Arminius" (14f.), suggesting that the possibility for this move is rooted in Carl Bang's assertion that the Dutchman should be studied "not as a hero, not as a heretic, and not as a forerunner" (*Arminius: A Study in the Dutch Reformation*, 19). The door to this new interpretive possibility was shoved wide open through the monograph of Richard Mueller (*God, Creation, and Providence in the Thought of Jacob Arminius*, 1991). Similar to the broader shifts in the study of church history in recent decades, the approach of this newer book is characterized by words like "objective," "contextual," and "comprehensive." My admiration for this book is enhanced by my assessment that the authors have accomplished this in a rather fine fashion.

Chapter 1, "The Making of a Theologian," provides the reader with a concise overview of the major events, persons, and influences on Arminius. It helps us understand how these shaped Arminius and, at the same time, the biography hints at some of the complexities that the reader

will encounter in the ensuing chapters that interpret Arminius. In those chapters the entire *opus* of Arminius is under review, which reflects the level of sophistication at work. The authors also note that Arminius's *Declaration of Sentiments* is the best place to get a concise overview of Arminius' thought, especially with regard to predestination (17). Due to the depth at which Stanglin and McCall examine Arminius across the breadth of his corpus, the uninitiated might be well served to read the *Declaration* before tackling their detailed chapters. My recent publication (*Arminius and His 'Declaration of Sentiments'*, Baylor University Press, 2012) makes this accessible to the modern reader and also includes a somewhat more expansive "theological biography" of Arminius. Their biographical essay has the advantage of being much more concise.

Chapter 2 covers "God and Creation." Pushing back against previous interpreters who wished to deny that Arminius was "scholastic," we read that Arminius was well-versed in and informed by medieval scholastic developments—holding "classical" positions on God's essence, attributes, and Trinitarian nature. At the same time, the authors make the important point that "God's love for creation and his desire for relationship with humanity provided Arminius with a different theological starting point from that of his opponents" (23). Distinctive Arminian emphases on the doctrine of God and creation come into play. Prominent among these emphases is Arminius' appropriation of divine simplicity. This appropriation influences the entire trajectory of his theology, especially predestination.

The chapter on "Providence and Predestination" is a careful analysis of what Stanglin and McCall describe as the "defining controversy" of Arminius' career. Over against widely-held popular notions, even among those who hold academic posts, they assert: "Far from rejecting God's providence and predestination, Arminius's description of the eternal decrees of God reflected his thoroughly Reformed context. He affirmed a meticulous divine providence, [albeit] one that allows for human freedom and contingency" (23). And Arminius develops this meticulous providence in the context of divine simplicity. The goodness of providence is itself "based in the character and essence of God, who in the simplicity of the divine nature is omnipotent holy love" (106).

God loves humanity and God loves *iustitia* (righteousness and justice): "Arminius thinks that the supralapsarian notion—that God has unconditionally decreed the salvation of some sinners without consideration of their belief or obedience—entails the conclusion that God loves

such persons “more than his own justice” (Gunter, *Arminius’ Declaration*, 114, and Arminius, *Works*, I:624). “While some modern readers simply shrug at such a complaint, given Arminius’ own doctrine of divine simplicity, such a notion is simply absurd—as if God could love anything more than his own righteousness, which is his own goodness, which is goodness itself and his own being” (113). My research resulted in the same conclusion, but it must be said that their volume makes a much more comprehensive case from the entirety of Arminius’ body of writings, not simply taking the arguments developed in the *Declaration of Sentiments*.

Chapter 4 on “Sin and Salvation” reveals Arminius to be quite Augustinian in his theological anthropology. In this sense, Arminius’ soteriology is consistent with typical Protestant Reformed theology. The divergence is, of course, the “resistibility” of grace: “The claim that grace is resistible means that God’s gift of salvation is never irrevocable in this life; but the acknowledgment that God loves all people for salvation, and that he has given grace sufficient for redemption, means that there can be true assurance” of salvation (24).

The “Conclusion” is much more than simply a final word about the content of the previous chapters. The decade after Arminius’ death and the ensuing “pamphlet warfare” is noted, as is the question of whether the Arminians really “lost” at Dort or whether they ultimately won the intellectual battle after losing the vote at the Synod. The “Arminianism of the heart” reflecting Anglo-American Arminianism (Wesleyanism) is described, and the reader is entertained with the authors’ reflections on the Arminian legacy: “Among Protestant churches, the Arminian legacy declares that grace is an unmitigated, extravagant gift of God intended for the healing and restoration of all creation, a gift that liberates humanity to seek the beauty of God’s face and to enjoy eternal fellowship with him” (210).

This is a first-rate piece of scholarly work, but it is also a book for thoughtful pastors and educated laity. Of necessity, there are passages that are rather technical, but even those sections are not characterized by unnecessarily esoteric language. Stanglin and McCall have succeeded in accomplishing the publishing ideal: a book that is both academically accomplished and accessible in its narrative to a broad audience. Whether one is taking a first degree or a post-graduate degree in theology, or whether one is an intellectually curious minister already engaged in ministry after graduation, this book comes highly recommended.

Barnett, Christopher B. *Kierkegaard, Pietism and Holiness*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011. 230 pages. ISBN 978-1-4094-1156-7.

Reviewed by Craig Keen, Professor of Systematic Theology, Azusa Pacific University, Azusa, California.

This book is important, particularly for the Wesleyan Theological Society, in part because it lays out an account of holiness quite resonant with the traditions that mingle in Wesleyan gatherings, and in part because it uses the word “Pietism,” remembering that John and Charles Wesley were “the Anglophone world’s most prominent Pietists” (202); and in part because it shows the ways that such Pietism entered profoundly into the personal, spiritual, and intellectual pilgrimage of Søren Kierkegaard, one of the few most provocative and influential theological and philosophical writers of the last two centuries; and in part because it suggests that the modes of thought and practice so important to Wesleyans have a great breadth of appeal.

However, this book is even more important because it offers reasons to hope that there is a future for the Pietist soul and body—and thus, for the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition, even if this future eludes ownership, but rather comes as a gift and in spite of a distracting, alluring, sometimes idolatrous world of Pietist minutial preoccupations. Pietism, too, is to deny itself, take up its cross, and follow the abased Jesus. This very specific mode of *imitatio Christi* piety, the piety of self-denial, lies at the heart of the work not only of the eighteenth-century Wesleys and their progeny, but also and just as thoroughly in the work of the nineteenth-century Søren Kierkegaard.

Of course, an appeal to a nineteenth-century thinker is hardly as such evidence that a tradition has not by the early twenty-first century seen its best days. Kierkegaard, however, is no ordinary nineteenth-century thinker. In fact, he hardly made a ripple on the surface of the waters of his time. It was not until the early twentieth century that he began seriously to be welcomed and drawn upon. First, in the German-speaking world, it was by such luminaries as Karl Barth, Martin Heidegger, Paul Tillich, Martin Buber, and Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Then it was by French-speakers like Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, Simone de Beauvoir, Emmanuel Levinas, and later Jacques Derrida and Jean-Luc Marion.

Since then, the works of Kierkegaard have come to be read in other languages, appearing in English significantly only after 1940. In the century since his rediscovery, he has left his mark on the vast majority of

major theologians and on an impressive array of philosophers, psychologists, novelists, essayists, and poets. He was for years labeled “the father of existentialism,” a compliment he no doubt would have failed to appreciate. More recently, the recognition of the complexity of his thought has impacted the emergence of “postmodernism” (he also would not have appreciated being located in the postmodernism movement). Barnett thinks that, if we must use a descriptor of him, the word “mystic” might be a better term (207), though I wonder if even that might be too tight a jacket.

*Kierkegaard, Pietism and Holiness* sets out in about its first third to remind the reader of the history of Pietism. Barnett describes very well its deep roots in Luther and Lutherans and before them in medieval mysticism. His brief account of the *varieties* of Pietism is also quite good. He is, of course, especially concerned to explore the branches of the movement that came to prominence in Denmark. Kierkegaard under the guidance of his father, Michael, was “drawn” in particular into Moravian Pietism (107). That is one of the reasons why the tenth stanza of the hymn of Andrew Brorson, whose work stressed a “Moravian-like [sense of] the joyful redemption found in Christ’s cross” (52), provided the words Kierkegaard chose for his tombstone: “It is a little time, / Then I have won, / Then is the whole struggle / Over and done, / Then I can rest / In halls of roses, / And continually, / And continually / Talk with my Jesus” (94).

Of course, Kierkegaard is not a Pietist in any formal sense of the term. There may not be any formal title that describes him helpfully. Still, the marks of the Moravians are to be found in his confidence in the grace and love of God, his relentless call to his reader to deepen “inwardness,” his invocation of the holiness of God, his radical devotion to the particular, concrete, lowly, historical life of Jesus, his confidence that this lowly Galilean peasant is the incarnate Son of God, his prophetic denunciation of a domesticated and passionlessly formal Christianity, his stress on the suffering that accompanies every life that truly follows after Jesus, and his prolonged confession that a human being who has been gifted with faith, who breathes in the love of God, will daily perform the hard work of loving the neighbor as God loves, regardless of the profit or loss such love might entail.

Barnett ends his book looking forward to ways his study might be carried forth in the future and enlarged. He is especially provocative in his suggestions concerning the political implications of Kierkegaard’s

work. What he suggests is intriguingly reminiscent of the way John Howard Yoder comes to speak of the “politics of Jesus,” a politics that does not play by the rules of cause and effect. Kierkegaard, too, calls for the denial of the apparent efficacy of power-management as he calls for the denial of oneself. To live leaning upon God’s good pleasure and faithfulness, to live in imitation of the Jesus who abandoned his future in Gethsemane and on Golgotha to an unmanageable God, has enormous political implications, but largely because it violates every custom of the politics of power.

Living in imitation of Jesus is political in the same way martyrdom is. Barnett’s discussion of Kierkegaard’s position on martyrdom is very helpful. “Christ’s self-denial is *fundamentally* social and political: he dispossesses himself not of eternal power, but of *temporal* power in order to incarnate a truly God-centered life. For Kierkegaard, it is in this sense that Christ is the prototype for *all* human beings, since the ability to place God and neighbor above all else is denied to no person, while things such as power, prestige, and wealth are always already scarce” (174).

Christopher Barnett has rendered a great service to Kierkegaardian scholarship, but no less to those of us nurtured among Pietists who are still struggling to find a way forward. Though it is indeed an unqualifiedly academic work, *Kierkegaard, Pietism and Holiness* is also in the tradition of Pietist and Kierkegaardian “upbuilding literature.” I hope it is read widely, particularly by friends of the Wesleys.

Rankin, Stephen W. *Aiming at Maturity: The Goal of the Christian Life*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011. 180 pages. ISBN 978-1610972468.

Reviewed by Douglas R. Milne, Associate Pastor, Grace Church of the Nazarene, Rochester, NY; Adjunct Professor of Religion, Roberts Wesleyan College, Rochester, NY.

If for nothing else, Stephen W. Rankin's book is timely. Naturally, it has many great qualities besides timeliness, but this is an all-important factor with this text. With the current American church in decline, Rankin argues for a return to spiritual maturity—something to which God has called believers since the beginning of creation. However, the request is not a rant, nor is it the typical challenge that Christian pop-culture books offer to pastors, church leaders, and congregants. There can be no shallow Christianity; rather, believers need deep commitment and dedication in the Christian faith. In an age where people look for the quickest route, the fastest meal, and the most convenient outcome, Rankin declares that now is the time to recognize the need for solid growth in grace, and he outlines this growth in his text.

Rankin's thesis is clear: he wants to see a church where grown-up believers act grown-up because they are continually maturing in the faith. He has this desire because he, like many church leaders around him, are witnessing a mass exodus of people who say they believe in Jesus Christ, but it seems that this belief is no longer enough for them. Through experience, biblical and historical understanding, and belief, Rankin argues that spiritual maturity has always been the proper trajectory to a holy completeness and restoration of the image of God.

Because Rankin's background is pastoral ministry, and he currently serves as a college chaplain, his leanings are toward that end. However, the pastoral-layperson overtones do not negate this as an exercise in academia. There are three areas where the author demonstrates academic interest. First, Rankin spends time on the importance of the word "heart" in the Hebrew and Greek languages through a comprehensive word study. He establishes that "heart" consistently means the same thing through all of Scripture—that "heart" refers to all those items that formulate the totality of our very being. This fact is important because it illustrates God's desire to have the entirety of all human beings, not merely one aspect of their lives. How one works to this understanding is through spiritual maturity. Thus, he concludes, "It demands that to grow to maturity, we must pay attention to all the heart's dimensions" (39).

Additionally, he emphasizes the important communal aspect of the faith based on his conclusions about the heart. Spiritual maturity requires believers to think beyond themselves about the society around them. It would be easy for Rankin to slip on his preacher's hat, but he does not give into that temptation. Rather, he implores that thinking communally has always been part of the biblical understanding of spiritual maturity (e.g., the Apostle Paul).

Second, Rankin builds an academic foundation for spiritual maturity by looking at the Christian tradition and, obviously, John Wesley is emphasized with good reason. Our spiritual ancestors demonstrated a passion for spiritual growth. Irenaeus, Augustine, Martin Luther, and John Calvin are among those historical figures of the faith who provide for the contemporary reader a solid understanding of growing closer to God as the obvious act of any believer. Rankin uses Wesley's concept of growing in grace and his trajectory of spiritual development (prevenient grace, asleep, awake, new birth, growing in maturity) throughout the text, but he highlights it in the third chapter. Wesley sought to renew faith among church members through prayer, community sharing, Bible study, and service, which led to continual, active spiritual maturity.

The third area of interest for Rankin is church doctrine. He emphasizes that believers must formulate a consistent, foundational doctrine that promotes spiritual growth and health. He encourages readers to think theologically in concrete ways. For example, he uses the anecdotal "Happy Birthday, Jesus" during the Christmas season as a way of neglecting the power of the Incarnation. He does not mean to chide or be sarcastic, but offers the argument that with Christmas comes a theological concept that should advance our personal and communal spiritual maturity. He wants Christians to move past the anecdotes and move to a place of depth. In other words, the Christian life is lived in an on-going trajectory always aiming at maturity.

The most important piece of Rankin's argument is his understanding of doctrine. Unfortunately, many in this age do not want to hear the word "doctrine," let alone delve into the depths of theological belief. The problem with that, of course, is that our belief system—what we believe about this, that, and the other—is doctrine. Therefore, as people are pushing doctrine away, they are neglecting that which helps them understand what they believe. For Rankin, doctrine is the "overlooked dimension" of spiritual maturity (99-124). When people ignore doctrine, they negatively influence their own spiritual maturity—a trend that must cease. In

essence, Rankin suggests that those who do not acknowledge doctrine in their lives will never grow (109). Believers must think theologically about their existence and then teach and preach these concepts to those who are “weaker” in the faith. Here again, Rankin places emphasis on the communal aspect of the church that helps readers to recognize that faith and theology do not function in a vacuum, but in relationship to others.

There is one note of critique: the final chapter on assessment. In Rankin’s defense, the assessment speaks for itself, as American Christian churches are becoming smaller year after year. However, most if not all pastors are aware of the shortcomings, challenges, and problems of the church as a whole and their congregations specifically. The ever-present reprimanding found in texts such as this permeates the presentation of his assessment. In his effort to avoid the usual list of practical methods, those that work in some churches and not others (150), Rankin uses a tone that may fall flat on the ears of those who have “heard it all before.” An option that church leaders might appreciate more is Rankin’s perspectives on these practical methods. He could certainly give attention to specific examples for those areas of presumed weakness, such as small groups, worship services, Bible studies, and so on. Church leaders are not necessarily looking for another list of new things to try, but they are also not looking for another challenge. Rather, these leaders are looking for a fresh, positive perspective concerning assessment of congregations with further help and resourcing.

This does not, nor should it not, affect the author’s goals for the text. Christian maturity demonstrates the activity of a creative, moving God who desires that all of humanity seek to invest, wisely and passionately, in a relationship initiated by God in the first place. Rankin wants to see renewal in the church, and his call is clear, well-researched, well-written, well-argued, and well-received.

Rasmussen, Carl G. *Zondervan Atlas of the Bible*. Revised edition. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010. 304 pages. ISBN 9780310270508.

Reviewed by Mitchel Modine, Associate Professor of Old Testament, Asia-Pacific Nazarene Theological Seminary, Taytay, Rizal, Philippines.

Seminary students are often surprised at the importance geography and history hold for the understanding of the Bible. To take a simple example, without knowledge of the climate of Palestine, and in particular the fact that Palestinian livestock breeders mainly raise sheep and goats, one cannot understand the depth and richness of calling Jesus the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29). By contrast, had the Bible and Jesus originated in Egypt, where cattle are far more common than sheep, Jesus might well have been called the Calf of God who takes away the sin of the world!

In light of this, tools such as atlases are indispensable. They provide information not often available in other sources, particularly sources that study the Bible simply for its relevance for salvation, evangelism, and theological debates. Carl G. Rasmussen's *Zondervan Atlas of the Bible* provides just such information. In his preface, he writes, "An understanding of the geographical dimension of history opens up new vistas for students of all texts—both sacred and nonsacred" (11). Rasmussen divides his work into two major sections, followed by several appendices. The major sections deal with various aspects of geography (16-79) and history (80-262). Rasmussen attaches to these sections six appendices: a bibliography (263-64); a glossary of terms (265); a timeline of biblical history (266-67); and indices of Scripture references (268-70), persons (271-72), and geographical terms (273-303).

The geographical section begins with a wide-angle lens focused on the Middle East as a whole (16-20). Rasmussen writes, "The stage on which the major events of Old Testament history took place includes . . . [a] large land mass [that] is bounded on the west by the Nile River and the Mediterranean Sea, on the north by the Amanus and Ararat Mountains, and on the east by the Zagros Mountains and the Persian Gulf" (16). He gives no explanation for the adoption of the modern political term "Middle East" as opposed to the scholarly custom "Ancient Near East." A particularly helpful feature for beginning American students is found on page 19—a map comparing the relative sizes of various Middle Eastern countries (only Israel, Egypt, Greece, and Lebanon are given their

biblical names) to some U. S. states. This could easily be adapted for the use of students from other national contexts. After this introduction, Rasmussen devotes the bulk of his geography section to Israel and Jordan (21-64). He follows this by moving back outward to Egypt (65-71), Syria and Lebanon (72-75), and Mesopotamia (76-79). The book of Amos provides a biblical model for this method of presentation, along with Rasmussen's own historical section. The section on Mesopotamia could have been longer, particularly since Rasmussen gives it even shorter shrift in the historical section.

The historical section closely follows the Bible's historical record. For Rasmussen's likely audience, this is probably sufficient. He could have discussed the great empires of the ancient near East (Middle East) at greater length since these developments had indispensable import for the development of ancient Israel. By contrast, following the biblical record too closely may lead unsuspecting students to the mistaken impression that the Bible was produced in an historical vacuum, without answering to its historical, cultural, social, religious, and other contexts. In addition, an examination of the indices reveals no discussion of the development of language and writing, which much of scholarship regards as a principal feature of ancient near Eastern history. He excludes, in the immediate context, discussion of the respective climates of Israel and the other nations which affect the materials that could be used for the production and preservation of texts.

However, one should not come away with the impression that Rasmussen never departs from the biblical timeline. He does consider the so-called "Intertestamental" period with a short section (189-96) on the Maccabean Revolt and the Hasmonean Dynasty. After this, he moves to a discussion of New Testament history. Again, he follows the biblical record closely. Unfortunately, he also ignores some key features of the history of the other nations that impinge on the history of the early church. By the time he comes to the New Testament, of course, he has already exhausted much of the material related to the geography of Israel/Palestine, so his New Testament section is considerably shorter (197-239). He does describe early Roman rule in Palestine (197-204), but says little about Roman improvements of infrastructure in Palestine and other manipulation of the landscape to serve the empire's own ends.

Turning to the appendices, one thing in particular stands out. The "Timeline of Biblical History" (266-67) goes back as far as 3100 BC. It includes some comparative historiographical information, with charts for

Syria/Mesopotamia and Egypt alongside Canaan/Israel. Rasmussen does not suggest that the earth was created 6000 years ago at the beginning of "Biblical History." In the reviewer's opinion, this is a positive feature, although it may in fact be inconsistent with the overall program. In other words, Rasmussen's work had been confined to the history and geography of Israel and specifically during the biblical period.

In summary, the *Zondervan Atlas of the Bible* will serve some constituencies well but will leave others longing for more. Beginning students in Wesleyan-tradition Bible and liberal arts colleges will likely find it a useful tool that will help them place the Bible in a somewhat larger context. However, more advanced students, pastors, and professional scholars will likely find its presentation too truncated to be useful on its own. It gives adequate information on the subjects it treats. It just seems not to treat enough subjects.

Cockerill, Gareth Lee. *The Epistle to the Hebrews*. New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012. 792 pages. ISBN-13: 978-0802824929.

Reviewed by Amy L. B. Peeler, Postdoctoral Fellow, John Wesley Honors College, Indiana Wesleyan University, Marion, IN.

Contributing to the present renaissance in Hebrews studies, Gareth Lee Cockerill of Wesley Biblical Seminary draws from his seasoned expertise in this field to offer a commentary on Hebrews in the New International Commentary on the New Testament series. In view of the developments in rhetorical, structural, and intertextual studies, he and the editors of this series felt it was time to update the previous and classic commentary by F. F. Bruce which first appeared in 1963. Cockerill's *ethos* as a missionary, minister, teacher, and scholar infuses his text as he seeks to fulfill the mandate of the series to present a critical yet orthodox commentary. His more than seven-hundred-page contribution certainly equips pastor and academic alike with tools to explore the language, history, and interpretation of the text, yet he does more than bring Hebrews to his reader. He brings his reader into Hebrews where it will "transform the hearers' perspective and behavior" (xiii). A careful and attentive read of this commentary could achieve just that.

The introduction navigates the normal background questions by seeking not so much to solve the mysteries as to learn from the various proposals. Most valuably, Cockerill demonstrates why these questions satisfy not only academic trivia, but also make a difference for better understanding this letter's contribution to the church. For example, he reminds the reader that the most-asked question about authorship highlights the unique voice of Hebrews. The author integrates apocalyptic themes and neo-platonic language and imagery, but he is an "independent and creative theologian" (34). Moreover, the authorship question also helps to explain the story of Hebrews' acceptance into the canon. In another instance, when Cockerill reviews the options for Hebrews' genre, his conclusion that it is a sermon "whatever its historical origin" (14). This supports his argument that the author closely relates the sections of exposition and exhortation, making it a sermon that transforms both the mind and the heart.

Cockerill does not remain as agnostic about another background question, the identity of the recipients. Defined not by ethnicity but by practice, he concludes that the recipients are "Jewish Christians" who

have at least a “residual suspicion” that they can “take refuge in the synagogue or maintain vestigial Jewish religious practices” (22). The mysterious comment in 13:9–10 about those who serve the tent and the arguments for the superiority of Christ’s priesthood move Cockerill in this direction. The author of Hebrews, he argues, envisions no break in salvation history; he issues no polemic to leave Judaism and join Christianity. At the same time, because the author sees Christ as a fulfillment of God’s work among the Israelites, the religious practices cannot continue because Christ has brought them to an end. As Cockerill eloquently concludes, “To practice the old before Christ is to anticipate his fulfillment; to practice it after, however, is to deny his sufficiency” (40).

Moving past the introductory questions, Cockerill seeks to contribute fresh insight to the study of Hebrews in two respects. First, he emphasizes the author’s hermeneutic of “continuity and fulfillment” in his appeals to the Old Testament. “The work of the Son enables God’s people to grasp his previous revelation more clearly and obey it more diligently” (45). The author appeals to the various parts of Scripture in different ways. The conversational nature of the psalms and prophets give him the tools to proclaim God’s plan and urge obedience in light of it, while the Pentateuch provides the “context of the drama of salvation” and a typology of Christ’s work (48–49). The author of Hebrews may use some of the same techniques as his Jewish contemporaries, but he distinguishes his interpretation by virtue of his Christological interpretation. He reads the Old Testament as a “type and foreshadowing of the full sufficiency of Christ” (59).

Second, Cockerill offers a new structural analysis of Hebrews and intends to interpret each individual passage in light of this vision of the whole. The close correspondence between 4:14–16 and 10:19–25 encourages him to divide the sermon into three sections, focusing on the divine sonship, the high priesthood, and the perseverance of God’s people. From this clear and succinct general division, he presents a more detailed analysis of the letter. God’s speech bookends the letter: God has spoken in His Son (1:1–2:18) and God will speak in His Son (12:4–29). The author certainly focuses on God’s speech in these sections, but there is no clear indication that he speaks *through the Son* in 12:18–24, a common temptation to make a perceived chiasm more explicit.

The examples of previous generations form the next layer of the sermon leaving the reflections on Christ’s high priesthood in the center. Cockerill helpfully describes this section as “the pastor’s grand ‘sym-

phony' on the sacrifice of Christ" consisting of "three movements in each of which the pastor repeats the same three themes in the same order—sanctuary; sacrifice; and covenant" (71). His description clarifies the repetitive nature of the sermon, providing an answer for the readers' query, "Haven't I read this section before?"

One sounding provides a clear sense of this commentary's contributions and value. About the eloquent first sentence of Hebrews, Cockerill elucidates, better than many commentaries, the vital connection between sonship and inheritance. Christologically, inheritance functions as the fulfillment of Jesus' sonship, and rhetorically it "focuses the attention of the . . . hearers on . . . the great value of the inheritance that awaits the persevering people of God" (92). He also argues that the author depicts the personal preexistence of Christ in these verses. Although he downplays the similarities between Hebrews' language and the language about God's Wisdom and Word in Jewish literature, he arrives at the conclusion that the author of this letter "uses language drawn from the Hellenistic environment shared by the Wisdom literature" but "is not dependent on Wisdom speculation" (99).

Cockerill's commentary also gives opportunity for deeper reflection, particularly in sections where one might question his interpretation. For example, Cockerill argues for a comparison between Jesus and other high priests arranged chiastically in Hebrews 5:2–9. This chiasm climaxes in the comparison between the effectiveness of Christ's ministry versus that of other high priests. While they can only deal gently with those who are going astray, he is the source of eternal salvation to those who obey him (231). Cockerill concludes, "Those who are ignorant and going astray describes the tendency of the people of God under the old high priests' ministry. By contrast the successful obedience of those who obey him substantiates the effectiveness of his ministry" (234). What if, however, Christ's followers too are disobedient, as Cockerill argues represents a real worry for the author (Heb 6, 10)? Will that show Christ's ministry to be ineffective? To place the validation of Christ's ministry in the life of his followers shifts the weight of the author's argument too strongly on the anthropological side of the scale. The author of Hebrews was able to affirm both the effectiveness of Christ's priestly ministry and the possibility of human failure, even for those who initially obey him. Cockerill's comments here highlight that as Hebrews' interpreters we need to find a way to articulate the same.

While I remained unconvinced that Cockerill's structural analysis and interpretation of the citations significantly advanced other works in the field, I am very thankful to have a copy of Cockerill's commentary on my shelf. I plan to recommend it to students for its lucid summaries of major sections of the letter, helpful explanations of the Greek text for English readers, and pastoral passion and sensitivity. Wesleyan pastors and students will find his text an especially well-supported and gracious articulation of Arminian theology, particularly on the controversial question of apostasy. Though I will still need to utilize other resources for the cutting-edge studies in Hebrews scholarship, the fruition of years of scholarship made evident in clear and eloquent insights throughout the commentary provide a wise interpreter alongside all of us in the race of faith.

Ward, Kevin, and Emma Wild-Wood, eds. *The East African Revival: History and Legacies*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2012. 235 pages. ISBN: 978-1-4094-2674-5.

Reviewed by Andrew C. Russell, Ph.D. candidate, Saint Louis University, St. Louis, MO.

For readers of the *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, figures such as John Wesley and George Whitefield are household names. Indeed, it would be impossible to study the history of the evangelical tradition without reference to these Anglican ministers and the revivals they helped create in the eighteenth century. Far less familiar, however, are names such as Simeoni Nsibambi and Yosia Kinuka, Anglican leaders of another evangelical revival that occurred two centuries later in East Africa. Thanks to editors Kevin Ward and Emma Wild-Wood, accounts of this important revival are available in *The East African Revival: History and Legacies*. This book, which includes sixteen essays by fourteen different authors, originated from a conference at Westminster College, Cambridge, to celebrate the arrival of the Joe Church papers at the Henry Martyn Centre for the Study of Mission and World Christianity.

The first of five major sections begins with Ward's historical introduction to the revival that began in the late 1930s in southwest Uganda and subsequently spread throughout Burundi, Ruanda, Tanzania, and Kenya. Here readers are provided with a sufficient number of events, personalities, and developments to allow a digesting of the remainder of the book. The second section, titled "Testimony and Personal Perspectives," provides four different accounts of individuals personally affected by the revival. Significantly, both African and British perspectives are represented. In the third and longest section, "Historical and Cultural Perspectives," five different essayists explore how the revival affected and was affected by particular contexts such as Northwestern Tanzania, Western Kenya, and the Northern Congo-Uganda border. The fourth section of the book, "Socio-Theological Perspectives," offers additional accounts of how theological dimensions of the revival interacted with societal needs and structures, including an interesting comparison between the revivalist testimonies and the later survivalist narratives of those spared during the Rwandan Genocide of 1994. The final section, "Sources and Scholarship," begins with an overview of the extensive revival materials recently acquired by the Henry Martyn Centre and offers several areas of potentially fruitful scholarship within its contents. The editors conclude the book by contextualizing the revival within the larger African milieu and reviewing the relevant literature.

Although the number of Wesleyan/Methodist participants in the East African Revival was small, the book should not be hastily overlooked by those interested in thoroughly understanding the Wesleyan tradition and its global influence. The Revival originated within the Ruandan Mission, an auxiliary of the Church Missionary Society that was deeply influenced by the Keswick movement. In fact, the mission was explicitly intended to be run “along Protestant, Evangelical and Keswick lines.” Revival conventions held in cities such as Kabale and Kampala regularly followed the Keswick convention’s progression from sin and repentance to new birth and victorious Christian living. Even though “Keswick” is a contested term and is regularly labeled Reformed and Wesleyan, it should not be overlooked that the British involvement in the East African Revival was heavily indebted to a tradition with roots in the American Holiness movement. Holiness was part and parcel to the East African Revival.

The book also represents an important contribution to the vast body of literature associated with revivalism in general. Those familiar with the British and American revival traditions will appreciate not only the similarities, but especially the differences found when juxtaposing the Anglo-American revivals with an African counterpart. Highlighted throughout the book is the prominence of the public confession of sin among revival participants. The essay by John Karanja, for example, suggests that public confession became one of the revival’s hallmarks because it resonated with the Kikuyu ritual of *gutahikio*, the symbolic vomiting used to expel illness and evil spirits. As such, revivalists were able to adapt an African practice to mark “the transition from the old guild of sin to the new guild of God’s forgiveness and grace” (150). The essay by Esther Mombo provides a fascinating examination of how the revival prompted women in polygamous marriages to leave their husbands just as Hagar left Abraham in Genesis 21. In short, the book repeatedly underscores that a revival movement may generate radically different results depending on the context.

As with all edited volumes, the value of each particular essay is dependent on what interests the reader. Nevertheless, *The East African Revival* is the best available resource for understanding an important movement that has received relatively little scholarly attention. The editors have successfully converted a series of conference presentations into a set of thoughtful essays that address the revival with a critical eye to the salient political, social, cultural, theological, and historical issues. Although the book will certainly not be the last word on the East African Revival, there is no better first.

Montgomery, Brint, Thomas J. Oord, and Karen Strand Winslow, eds. *Relational Theology: A Contemporary Introduction*. San Diego: Point Loma Press, 2012. 115 pages. ISBN-13: 978-1-62032-744-9.

Reviewed by Hannah Souter, George Fox Evangelical Seminary, Portland, Oregon.

The contributors to *Relational Theology: A Contemporary Introduction* offer a much-needed spiritual and theological pilgrimage for the twenty-first century church. This work of love and scholarship creates a vision for that journey, serving as a guide for the pilgrim. Beginning with traditional church doctrines, *Relational Theology* reweaves an understanding of theology proper, anthropology, christology, pneumatology, ecclesiology, and eschatology. It re-imagines the foundational role of the Scriptures, how they came to be and their authority in both our individual and communal lives today. *Relational Theology* then suggests how this theological framework of relationality plays out in present Christian living. Finally, the contributors create vision for how a relational theology should inform the community of Christ about its ethics and pursuit of justice on earth. Thorough in its discussion of theology, this work practices what it preaches. At its core, it is a relational work—an offering of many seasoned, respected voices in the church who are seeking to communicate how together they see the Spirit of God moving to recapture the truth of God's heart and vision for God's creation.

Though *Relational Theology* is a prophetic work, it is also deeply historical and academic. One of the contributors, Barry Callen, explores the roots of this movement in the Pietist, Arminian, Wesleyan, Holiness, and Pentecostal traditions of Christianity. The focus of these roots lies “in the interactivity or mutuality of the God-human relationship” (7). In this stream of Christianity, the foundational belief is that “Christian spirituality is a cooperative enterprise” (10). Using evidence in both the Old and New Testaments, relational theologians see God as both transcendent and immanent. This relational God calls us to live in a dynamic relationship of love and fidelity with God in whom we “live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28). Contributor Charles J. Conniry, Jr., offers a way to understand this “participation in God” through exploring both Hebraic and Greek worldviews, helping the seeker navigate the intersection (not duality!) of our physical and spiritual realities (21-23). This historical, academic, and practical approach of communicating is a great strength in *Relational Theology*, making the spiritual and theological pilgrimage not only accessible but also sound.

Central is the theme of love. On the positive side, the theme of love cuts to the core of our existence and addresses one of the deep longings and needs of our world. In that sense, *Relational Theology* offers a new kind of freedom in the way one relates to God honestly and authentically. It paints a picture of a God who yearns for us. Brent Peterson suggests that this God wants persons to “offer themselves to God. This is to be their primary liturgy-work in worship (see Rom. 12:1-2; Hos. 6:6; Ps. 51:16-17). Worship that God desires is not empty or meaningless ritual. God finds it abominable when corpses go through the motions of praising and praying with a heart and mind closed off to love” (77).

On the negative side, some Christians may see issues of love as a slippery slope toward a flimsy faith. In its focus on God as love (1 Jn. 4:8, 16), some may argue that God’s righteousness and judgment are undermined. *Relational Theology* challenges the traditional, Reformed way of knowing God in judicial terms—a deeply rooted and partially true image of God in the tradition of the church. However, understanding God as love is not in direct opposition to understanding God as just. This, too, is a reality addressed by these contributors. However, one must loosen the grip on one’s presuppositions in order to receive a more complete and robust understanding of the Creator, oneself, and all of creation—a task that, perhaps unfortunately, not all will be able to do.

A work of passion and scholarship, *Relational Theology* equips seekers of a dynamic faith with historically rooted and presently applicable ways of being in relationship with their Creator. It begins to reconcile our traditionally Western way of knowing. Head and heart, once divorced, have here an opportunity to be in relationship again. As co-editor Thomas J. Oord puts it, “We know from our own experience that knowing another person well can be important for loving that person well. Well-informed relationships provide information for us when we consider how to be a blessing” (26).

The relationship between knowledge and love is inseparable. We cannot have one without the other and also have what is pure, true, and mutually life-giving. *Relational Theology* is an exciting voice within the church, one I believe the Spirit is using to breathe new life into the body to which we belong.

Schwanz, Keith and Joseph Coleson, eds. *Missio Dei: A Wesleyan Understanding*. Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 2011. 191 pages. ISBN: 9780834127173.

Reviewed by Gary L. Waller, Professor, Northwest Nazarene University, Nampa, Idaho.

For the past several years I have engaged in a discussion surrounding the issues presented in this interesting anthology. I once heard George Hunsberger of Western Seminary say that the “church of today has primarily become a vendor of religious goods and services.” His work on the missional church calls forth a deeper mission for the church than that often present reality. The church can become missional only by reflecting God’s missional nature. That is why this present volume is very helpful for pastors, superintendents, and church leaders of all stripes.

The church needs an awakening. It needs to be reminded of God’s ultimate intention to call forth the church. And so it can only truly find its reason for existence and motivation in theological reflection on God’s mission. In his preface to this anthology, Keith Schwanz makes the following statement: “A missional community comes to life when a theologically formed, gospel-centered, Spirit-empowered fellowship of Jesus followers embodies the redemptive mission of God” (13). I have often heard Alan Roxborough say that the “Spirit of God is among the people of God.” Thus, it is imperative that the “people of God” are able to think theologically as they reflect on God’s mission and then, through the power of the Holy Spirit, engage the world as redemptive agents of God’s mission.

A “missional community begins in the redemptive mission of God” (13). It is through God’s loving act of redemption that the church has anything truly good to say; it is because of God’s loving act of redemption that the church is called into action; so, it is in partnership with God’s loving act of redemption that the church embodies the gospel in both its proclamation and actions. And, therefore, it is God’s loving act of redemption that compels the church to be redemptive agents in the world. In his opening chapter, David Wesley reminds the reader that the church is a living organism whose source is God and who is called to be the people of God sent to proclaim hope, redemption and life. He says that being missional is “being desperate for an authentic relationship with God that results in participating in *God’s* passion—*God’s* mission-nature—reaching to ‘the nations’ in every activity of our lives” (27).

In this short volume, a distinguished list of scholars provides a virtual smorgasbord of topics for the reader to digest. The topics are divided

into three natural parts, the *Missio Dei* in Scripture, Wesleyan theology, and participation. Key themes of creation, covenant, and justice form a theological framework that springs forth from the Scriptures. And each of these reflects God's desire for relationship, which is the hallmark of the *Missio Dei*. This hallmark is centered around the key concept of "kingdom," a relational word exemplified in the life and teachings of Jesus. Luke 10:12ff. sets the stage for what it means to be the people of God "sent" on a mission. We share in God's nature of reconciliation by participating in the reconciling mission of God. This is not accomplished solely through human strength or will but in the power of the persons of the Trinity. According to Steve McCormick, this is not something that is solitary. As the Spirit connects God to us and us to God, "the people of God will have new access to one another" (105). Jesus knew this and sent the disciples out in pairs (Luke 10:12).

As members of the kingdom, we are called to participate with what God is doing in the world. As we are reminded by the likes of N. T. Wright and Ron Benefiel, the kingdom is both "already" and "not yet." This realization not only compels us to be the "sent" people of God but also to be the "gathered" people of God. Brent Peterson says that "participating in God's mission is always an act of worship and thanks for who God is and what God has done and is doing" (118).

As the people of God accept their place in the kingdom and pick up the call to "go," they rely on five important components of the *Missio Dei*. First is worship where the people of God live into God's story and respond to God's gracious act of love in Jesus. Second is discipleship, a "lifelong journey after Jesus" (142). Discipleship means to be formed spiritually as fully devoted followers of Christ who are then called to engage the world with the message of reconciliation and hope. Formation and engagement are two sides of that calling. The third is the wonderful promise that we are privileged to be church, to be community. According to Judith Schwan, community or fellowship (*koinonia*) helps shape us, provides healing and reconciliation, and reflects the nature and character of God (156-57). The responsibility and privilege of the church are to show the rest of the world what life looks like under the reign of God.

Fourth, we live as a community of compassion that is a significant part of God's work in the world. Compassion allows the people of God to be God's hands and feet reaching into a world that desperately needs mercy, hope, healing, redemption, and direction. The last is witness. "God calls the church to embody the gospel, to witness to God's reign through

an incarnational presence” (169). This witness is a “24/7 lifestyle.” It is not a specific program or technique but a lifestyle. As witnesses to Christ’s life-changing redemptive act, we anticipate and participate in the kingdom now. We do so in order that others may experience “the fullness of God’s life here and now” (76).

This volume is a provocative journey that challenges the follower of Christ to reflect on God’s mission in the world. The contributors remind the reader(s) that getting to heaven is not the primary plan or mission of God. Rather, as Keith Schwanz suggests, the redemptive mission of God “includes the community of Jesus followers being called and gathered, centered, and sent” (14). The missional community is more than a “vendor of religious goods and services,” but finds its identity in the mission of God. This community is called to embody the ministry of reconciliation that has been received by participating in the *Missio Dei*.

Pohl, Christine D. *Living into Community: Cultivating Practices That Sustain Us*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012. vi + 213 pages. ISBN 978-0802849854.

Reviewed by Nathan J. Willowby, Ph.D. candidate in Theology and Ethics, Marquette University, Milwaukee, WI.

Christine Pohl has added another excellent book to the growing corpus of theological texts that emphasize the role of Christian practices. In this book, Pohl extends her adroitly argued thesis, offered in *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* (Eerdmans, 1999), that hospitality is a crucial Christian practice. However, to see this book as a reiteration of *Making Room* would miss the important contribution she makes here by considering the long-term sustainability of hospitality and treating three more Christian practices with considerable depth.

*Living into Community* argues that the practices of gratitude, making and keeping promises, speaking the truth, and hospitality sustain communities through the ups and downs of life together. Pohl charts a balanced course that addresses practical challenges facing Christian communities by weaving together Scripture, traditional theological sources, and recent scholarship on these four practices. This enables her work to bridge the worlds of the classroom and church.

Pohl responds to the important challenge of conceiving spiritual formation as more than a marginalized, private and individual concern. She explains her emphasis on practices as an approach that “allows us to move beyond important but individually focused literature on spiritual formation so that we can also attend to the formation of good communities” (7). In this way, her book fits with the concerns of groups like the Ekklesia Project and movements like New Monasticism. Pohl identifies the book with the line of theology that focuses on practices (e.g., Alasdair MacIntyre, Craig Dykstra, and Dorothy Bass) (9). She draws on the work of a Lilly-funded project through the Sustaining Pastoral Excellence initiative that gathers pastors, intentional community leaders, and professors (9). While using the work of that project throughout, she provides more than a report on the project’s discoveries.

The book consists of three chapters on the practices of gratitude, making and keeping promises, and living truthfully; the fourth practice of hospitality receives one chapter and serves as the conclusion to her retrieval and proposal for sustaining community life. For the first three practices she proceeds in this order: (1) locating the practice with respect

to biblical and theological understandings from the past and present, (2) considering the complications facing communities that require the respective practice, and (3) addressing the deformations or misuses of the practice while highlighting the opportunities for communities appropriately embracing these practices. The hospitality section is framed to illustrate the intersection of the other three practices with lived experience.

As Pohl treats each practice, she emphasizes the way that they are interrelated and connected to our understanding of God's attributes. Along the way, she is honest enough to deal with the real challenges (e.g., pastoral manipulation of volunteers through gratitude) while also describing the way emphasizing gratitude with community volunteers enables them to serve and be hospitable without burning out or becoming themselves "a grumble" (48-50). Repeatedly, the abrasiveness of these practices with the dominant cultural values comes to the fore, and it is important to understand this book as cutting against the grain of approaches that seek the next tool or tactic to solve a problem. Each respective practice is seen as something of worth on its own within community rather than as a means to some other end.

This book is not a work about practical theology that should be viewed as irrelevant for the academy, nor should it be viewed as a naïve program of trite "how-to" advice. Each practice is considered in moderate depth, and Pohl importantly considers the influence of sin on these four practices. Although readers will be encouraged that, with careful cultivation of these practices the community can and will flourish, the challenges facing communities to sustain the practices are also given ample treatment. In this respect, Pohl has accomplished what she sets out to do in the introduction: she orients Christian practice in a way that ultimately leads to "strengthening communities" (13).

Yet, if one comes to this book expecting a purely historical genealogy of these practices or an exegetically centered justification for and prescription of these four practices to cure the church's ills, the reader will find the book thin. However, she provides a helpful bibliography that is grouped into categories so that those interested in either a deeper engagement with one of the respective practices or a more historical or scriptural account have a place to deepen the ground covered here. One of the strengths of this book is the balance of Scripture and the ways these practices have worked or been abused in the past and present within the Christian community.

This book is also accessible and suited for use within a congregational context; it lends itself to small-group study or a teaching series on the importance of sustaining Christian life together. Along these lines, discussion questions are included for use as a class assignment, congregational education, or small-group session guide. All relationships benefit when these four practices come full circle from their source in God's character and activity to orient communities and individuals toward God. Whether the relationships are marital, familial, congregational, or collegial, these practices serve to sustain a shared work and life together. Christine Pohl has produced a work that will help sustain those who labor and prepare for life in and service to spiritual communities.

Welker, Michael, ed. *The Spirit in Creation and New Creation: Science and Theology in Western and Orthodox Realms*. Grand Rapids and Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012. xvi + 204 pp. ISBN 0802866929.

Reviewed by Amos Yong, J. Rodman Williams Professor of Theology, Regent University School of Divinity, Virginia Beach, VA.

This book interfaces with two distinct trends in the theology and science conversation. One concerns the greater denominational and “traditioned” particularity introduced into the mix that has been long dominated by more generic Christian voices. At the vanguard here is the emergence of, for instance, specifically Lutheran or Wesleyan or even Pentecostal perspectives. This volume features a constellation of Orthodox (mostly Russian or Eastern European) voices that complement the more familiar body of work, including Christopher Knight and Alexei Nesteruk.

The other trend concerns the emergence of pneumatology in the theology and science arena. Whereas earlier theology and science engagements were more theistically focused in a general sense, more recent efforts by Christians have sought to develop the particularities of the discursive grammar of the Christian tradition, including trinitarian and christological approaches. The most recent arrival on the scene is the development of the pneumatological angle, toward which this volume makes an important contribution.

As with a number of prior Welker-edited and co-edited volumes on theology and science, this one also was derived from a colloquium—at the Internationales Wissenschaftsforum of the University of Heidelberg in the fall of 2009, funded by the John Templeton Foundation. Besides the editor’s introduction, there are fifteen chapters organized into four sections, with Orthodox authors appearing in each. The first and second sections are devoted to scientific and theological perspectives on the Spirit in creation. The four chapters of the first section discuss the hiddenness of the Spirit (John Polkinghorne/physics), the pneumatological features of evolutionary history (Denis Alexander/molecular biology) and the ordering and structuring of creation (Jeffrey Schloss/evolutionary biology), and the intersections between the mathematics of infinity and the Orthodox Name Worshipping tradition of spirituality (Vladimir Katasonov/philosophy and mathematics). The second section has only three chapters: on the Spirit of life (Jürgen Moltmann/theology), an Orthodox response to the (controversial) pneumatological themes introduced at the

Seventh Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Canberra in 1991 (Vladimir Shmaliy/theology), and on Hesychast spirituality and its reception of natural theology (Sergey Horujy/philosophy).

The title of section three—"Convergence between Theology and Science?"—includes the question mark to emphasize the open-ended character of the chapters gathered here. They begin with patterns of interaction during the early Christian era (Cyril Hovorun/ecclesiology) and move forward to elaborate on the opportunities and challenges of specifically pneumatological discourse for the theology and science dialogue (Friederike Nüssel/theology and ecumenics), explore parallels between the human and divine S/spirit mediated by Pauline categories (Welker/theology and philosophy), and provide analysis of the survivors of political violence from the perspective of social psychology (Renos Papadopoulos/psychology). The last set of chapters focuses on the Spirit in new creation: building of the Macarian writings (Marcus Plested/historical theology), the Byzantine Fathers (Andrew Louth/historical theology), and the Lutheran doctrine of justification (Frank Macchia/theology), and then also set in evolutionary perspective (José Casanova/sociology). As is clear from the above summary, there are some established names in the field of theology and science but also some newer contributors. The interdisciplinary nature of the volume is also a plus, indicating the fertility of engaging the pneumatological motif in theology and science and pointing to the necessity of further work.

In many ways, the whole does not live up to its billing (in the title). This reflects less the fact that any of the essays are substandard (they are by and large well-written and informative) and more that we are at the very beginning stages of wrestling with specifically pneumatological matters in theology and science. Those more familiar with the discipline of pneumatology will recognize the struggle of many of the authors to make viable connections regarding the breadth of what goes on under that rubric with science. Working scientists will be well aware of the exceeding challenges of engaging constructively with theological ideas in general, much less pneumatological ones in all of their Christian precision and also conceptual ambiguity. Further, the Orthodox perspectives tend to be a bit eclectic, no doubt reflecting the richness of Orthodox traditions of spirituality, but with the concomitant challenge of presenting a cohesive pneumatological vision for present or future endeavors in theology and science.

The result is that the cumulative product gestures toward more work that needs to be done than achieves any major breakthrough or estab-

lishes any consensus on either of the two (pneumatological and Orthodox) fronts that the volume traverses. That the volume lacks an index, which editor Welker does not seem to think is important, either here or in many of his other edited volumes, means that individual readers will probably make decisions to focus on their areas of interest based only on the chapter titles and what the brief biographies at the end tell about the authors of whom they may be unaware. What this volume inspires is the hope that many others will build on its meager (nothing pejorative intended) beginnings.

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